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'Bury me wherever I die': A practical-theological inquiry into the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the dead

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The reinterment of deceased kin on ancestral grounds is a time-honoured custom in numerous African cultures, imposing considerable financial and logistical challenges on mourning families. This practice, grounded in beliefs regarding belonging, territory and ancestral rights, faces growing opposition from younger urban and diaspora African Christians who assert, 'bury me anywhere I die', demonstrating their confidence in bodily resurrection, though not without peril. This article presents a practical-theological analysis that synthesises biblical exegesis, systematic theology and empirical pastoral observation to explore the conflict between traditional burial practices and Christian resurrection beliefs. This study contends, through exegetical analysis of significant Old and New Testament passages, theological reflection and pastoral engagement in the African context, that Scripture does not consider the location of graves essential to resurrection or eternal status, viewing burial sites solely as tools for honouring the deceased. The faith in resurrection reinterprets death, the corporeal form and the afterlife, emancipating African Christians from culturally imposed duties that often contradict gospel principles. The article additionally suggests pastoral and liturgical resources to assist churches in addressing this tension in culturally sensitive and theologically sound manners.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The article offers a distinctive contribution to African practical theology by critically examining biblical exegesis, systematic theology and pastoral analysis of a specific cross-cultural pastoral issue: the theological significance of burial location in Christian resurrection doctrine. It engages with the emerging literature on African Christian eschatology, contextualisation and funeral ministry, advancing these discussions in a way that can yield tangible pastoral effects.

Keywords: resurrection of the dead; burial practices; African theology; practical theology; ancestral beliefs; funeral theology; pastoral care; Christian eschatology.

Introduction

All societies necessitate ritualised responses to mortality. Communities' methods of handling their deceased reveal their core beliefs regarding identity, community and human destiny (Davies 2017:320). In African contexts, burial customs possess significant cultural importance, reflecting beliefs regarding ancestral ties, the relationship between the living and the deceased and the sanctity of land. In certain African societies, regardless of the location of death, the deceased must be conveyed to their ancestral homeland for burial, a ritual that can place significant financial and logistical burdens on families (Komakech 2016:27).

A growing contingent of African Christians, especially younger followers in urban and diaspora settings, is contesting this convention. The statement 'bury me wherever I die' signifies a profound theological and cultural transformation: a public declaration of faith in the Christian assurance of resurrection that transcends geographical limitations. This declaration prompts numerous interconnected theological enquiries. Does the doctrine of Christian resurrection render the burial site theologically insignificant? Can faith in resurrection coexist with culturally ingrained death traditions? How can pastors support families in reconciling traditional obligations with resurrection theology?

These enquiries extend beyond basic intellectual considerations. They signify urgent pastoral challenges for African churches, where ministers frequently confront families torn between theological beliefs, ancestral obligations and the economic realities of repatriation. Some families

incur crippling debt to repatriate deceased relatives from distant continents, while others experience social ostracism for interring loved ones away from ancestral land (Quintero 2016:45). A suitable pastoral response necessitates the church to meticulously scrutinise both the theological underpinnings of its doctrine and the cultural presuppositions inherent in conventional practices.

This study is organised around the three central domains delineated in Osmer's (2008) practical-theological method, as modified for African contexts by Hendriks and Forster (2020): biblical exegesis, systematic theology and practical-pastoral analysis. The focal areas establish the framework for the investigation, guiding the argument from descriptive-empirical observation through theological interpretation to normative and pragmatic conclusions.

Background and problem statement

The traditional African burial customs are regulated by a complex cosmological framework predicated on the belief that the deceased coexist with the living (Okeke 2025:1072). In numerous African societies, some forefathers (ancestors) serve as intermediaries between the living and the divine. Becoming an ancestor and fulfilling an intermediary function depends on having lived a lengthy life, having established oneself as a 'moral paragon' with commendable traits deserving of emulation (Gyekye 1996:162), among other factors, and getting a proper burial on ancestral territory.

An improper burial may thus be viewed as a purposeful disruption of this mediating function, resulting in spiritual disquiet and a relational fracture between the deceased and their progeny (Smith 2021:246).

These convictions establish tangible and expensive liabilities. The obligation to 'return home' for burial is well documented in Southern and West African cultures. In South Africa, a significant proportion of fatalities transpire beyond the deceased's native province, prompting families to commonly transfer remains from Gauteng and other major centres to rural Eastern Cape, Limpopo or KwaZulu-Natal (Statistics South Africa 2022). Annually, several thousand Zimbabwean corpses are returned from South Africa over the Beitbridge crossing, funded by burial societies and collective 'death' funds (Conversation/Mpofu 2025). In Ghana's Kwahu community, deceased individuals are retained in mortuaries for prolonged durations as relatives gather the necessary money for a dignified funeral in their homeland (Van der Geest 2006). The diaspora perpetuates this trend worldwide, with specialised funeral establishments, immigrant associations and diplomatic networks repatriating migrant remains to their own land (Balkan 2023).

The obligation functions on two distinct levels that must be differentiated. The initial aspect is ontological and spiritual: in numerous traditions, interment away from ancestral land is perceived as a state of incompleteness, preventing the departed from assuming their rightful position among the ancestors and exposing them to the possibility of becoming a restless or – 'wandering' spirit (Magesa 2014; Whyte 2005). The second aspect is financial: professional preservation, international embalming and permits, long-distance transportation, lodging for extended family and prolonged rituals can equal or surpass a family's annual income, resulting in cycles of debt that disproportionately affect women and younger relatives (Setsiba 2012; Shimane 2018:2). The two are interconnected; it is exactly because of the perceived high spiritual stakes that families invest substantial financial costs.

This article examines a pertinent subject for Christians who believe in bodily resurrection: because God will resurrect the dead at Christ's return, does the burial location possess the theological significance attributed to it by ancestral cosmology? Does the location of their burial hold any significance upon Christ's return?

The Apostle Paul conveys this in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 stating, 'the dead in Christ will rise first', without of any geographical specification. The Christian tradition is rich with instances of individuals interred away from their native lands: early urban Christians entombed in Roman catacombs, missionaries who perished and were buried abroad, and various martyrs interred at their sites of martyrdom. The essence of this conflict must be articulated with precision, as it is prone to mischaracterisation. Traditional African religion lacks a theory of resurrection; its perspective on the hereafter focuses on the living-dead, or ancestors, and often emphasises rebirth within the lineage (Asante & Mazama 2009; Mbiti 1990). The demand for a departed relative to be restored to ancestral land is not driven by a desire for resurrection, a concept largely alien to primordial religion, but by the necessity of properly integrating the dead into the society of ancestors. Interment in an inappropriate location or without the necessary rituals jeopardises the deceased's connection to the community and their ability to fulfil the protective function of an ancestor; Mbiti (1990) characterises such exclusion as the closest African parallel to damnation. The concept of reincarnation, which is thought to rejuvenate the lineage, functions through descent rather than geography; thus, the necessity for home burial is based on belonging, land and ancestral honour, rather than the specific place of post-mortem fate.

The tension discussed in this piece is not a collective concern that diaspora burial compromises resurrection. It represents a conflict between two eschatological perspectives within African Christianity: a declared belief in physical resurrection and communion with Christ, which attributes no spiritual significance to burial sites, juxtaposed with an ancestral cosmology that ascribes considerable importance to them and continues to influence adherents. The resultant pastoral perplexity manifests in a believer who, despite articulating trust in resurrection, may yet have fears that a relative interred overseas has been spiritually forsaken, may confront communal reproach for rejecting repatriation and may incur debilitating debt to evade it (Setsiba 2012; Whyte 2005). The financial necessity of repatriation primarily stems from this

cosmological duty: it represents the expense of upholding a conviction regarding belonging, rather than a belief in resurrection.

These dynamics are also disproportionately allocated. Burial practices differ significantly throughout African societies and even within individual ethnic groups: some place great importance on burying in ancestral land, while others, as noted by Smith (2022), assert that all locations serve as burial grounds. The subsequent argument does not presuppose a uniform 'African' behaviour but examines the cosmology that underpins the location-specific form of the responsibility when it is effectively applicable.

This tension raises profound enquiries regarding contextualisation and the relationship between the gospel and culture. Should the gospel influence all aspects of culture, or are certain areas beyond the scope of Christianity? Is the obligation to traditional burial culture a genuine manifestation of covenantal belonging or a societal influence that resurrection faith could justifiably contextualise? How can churches uphold a tradition while if it appears to contradict the hope of resurrection? Such enquiries necessitate comprehensive theological examination and contemplation (exegetical, systematic and pastoral).

Research gap and scientific value

The correlation between African burial traditions and Christian resurrection beliefs is not a novel topic. Anthropological and sociological research has recorded the cultural rationale of African mortuary customs (Magesa 2014; Okoro & Nkama 2018; Setsiba 2012; Ugwuanyi 2025), whereas systematic theologians have focused extensively on the doctrine of bodily resurrection (Kelly 2021; Turner 2018; Wright 2003). African theologians, particularly Bediako (1995, 2004), Mbiti (1990) and Magesa (2014), together with recent contributions from Karani (2023) and Nwaezuoke et al. (2025) have analysed the interplay between ancestral tradition and Christian faith. These literatures have predominantly progressed concurrently. The issue of how Christian resurrection hope influences the duty to be interred on ancestral property has not been conceptualised as a cohesive exegetical, systematic, and pastoral challenge within modern African Christianity.

The issue must be accurately identified, as it is prone to misrepresentation. The concern is not that African traditional religion regards burial place as a prerequisite for resurrection. Primal religion typically lacks a theory of resurrection, and in instances of reincarnation, like among the Sokpoe-Eʋe of Ghana, it is associated with lineage rather than the grave. The emphasis on home burial is not a pursuit of future resurrection; rather, it signifies a sense of belonging. Being interred at home signifies remaining integrated within the familial and communal sphere of the living-dead, 'within reach' of one's relatives for commemoration and ongoing connection and appropriately situated among the ancestors. The authentic tension for the African Christian is thus as follows: an inherited duty rooted in a cosmology of belonging confronts a Christian eschatology that positions ultimate belonging and destiny in communion with Christ and the new creation, while attributing no spiritual significance to the burial site. In contexts where the obligation of home burial is pronounced, a believer convinced of resurrection hope remains vulnerable to familial and communal pressures, frequently incurring significant financial burdens while receiving less theological guidance on the continued applicability of that commitment.

This identifies the gap and prescribes the necessary approach to resolving it. A shortcoming in the African context cannot be addressed by importing a Western systematic theology, as its categories are constructed for and assume pastoral realities in which burial sites seldom provoke theological contention (cf. Gibson 2019; Hays 2024). The significance of home burial and the rationale for repatriation can only be understood through the lens of African contextual theology. This study does not impose external systematic conclusions on Africa. Building on Bediako's (1995, 2004) perspective regarding the translatability of the gospel and the 'Christ transforms culture' paradigm, and employing Osmer's (2008) practical-theological approach as modified for African contexts by Hendriks and Forster (2020), this framework facilitates a dialogue between biblical exegesis and systematic reflection with African cosmology, enabling the resurrection to engage with African enquiries concerning belonging in indigenous terms rather than substituting Exegesis and systematic theology function to support a contextual pastoral theology rather than replace it.

The study clearly delineates the specific locations where the tension in African burial practices, which are notably diverse, is manifest. This issue is pronounced in communities where burial on ancestral property entails significant cosmological and social responsibilities, and conversely diminished where such obligations are absent. Within the Sokpoe-Eʋe community, where 'everywhere is a burial ground', the inclination towards home burial signifies a sense of belonging devoid of aspirations for resurrection or reincarnation, hence resulting in minimal doctrinal disagreement with Christians. The subsequent argument addresses the obligation's context-specific nature rather than proposing a singular 'African' practice. The study contributes by: (1) providing an exegetical analysis of key resurrection texts; (2) formulating a systematic account of bodily resurrection and its implications for burial; (3) theologically engaging with African burial cosmology on its own terms; and (4) offering contextually relevant pastoral resources to address the ensuing tension.

Research methods and design

Theoretical framework and methodology

This research utilises the practical-theological methodology as delineated by Osmer (2008) and modified for African contexts by Hendriks and Forster (2020). Practical theology analyses actions and situations through four interconnected phases: descriptive-empirical (what is happening?), interpretive or explanatory (why is this

happening?), normative (what should happen?) and pragmatic (how should we respond?). This approach is especially appropriate for examining burial practices as it combines empirical observation of current customs with thorough theological analysis and pastoral implementation.

The study structures its normative analysis around three theological focal areas: biblical exegesis, systematic theology and practical theology. 'Theological assessment of ancestral burial cosmology' section of the exegetical analysis scrutinises the canonical testimony of both the Old and New Testaments regarding burial, the body and resurrection, with careful consideration of textual context, genre and authorial intent. 'Developing alternative memorial practices' section systematically synthesises these exegetical findings into a cohesive theological framework on corporeal resurrection and its implications for burial site. 'Proactive teaching and discipleship', 'Discussion' and 'Conclusion' sections of the practical-pastoral focus apply this framework to the African cultural setting and suggest specific resources for pastoral ministry.

The research also incorporates frameworks derived from missiology and contextual theology, especially the tradition of Christ-and-culture analysis. The study employs a 'Christ transforms culture' perspective, as articulated by Luka (2024) and Bediako (2004), which neither entirely rejects African culture nor uncritically embraces all traditional behaviours. It utilises resurrection faith as an interpretive framework to evaluate which burial traditions can be endorsed, which require modification, and which must be contextualised considering the gospel.

Focal area one: Biblical-exegetical analysis of burial and resurrection

The primary focus of this article is biblical exegesis. Exegesis necessitates more than mere text citation; it requires meticulous consideration of the literary, historical and canonical contexts of those texts, along with the assertions presented within them. This part examines pertinent Old and New Testament texts, focusing on authorial intent, genre and theological significance, but avoiding the inclination to utilise Scripture merely as a collection of proof texts to bolster preconceived conclusions.

Old Testament perspectives on burial and the body

The patriarchal burial traditions: Genesis 23 and 49

The Old Testament features a robust tradition about burial sites, particularly among the patriarchs. Abraham's acquisition of the cave of Machpelah as a familial sepulchre (Gn 23) is often referenced as a biblical precedent for ancestral interment. The narrative warrants meticulous exegetical scrutiny. The account is categorised as a legal narrative and operates within the overarching framework of the Abrahamic covenant. Abraham's determination to acquire the land by purchase rather than as a gift (Gn 23:9,13) indicates the legal permanence of the transaction and his desire to forge a lasting bond with the land. The interment of Sarah in Canaan represents, from a covenantal-typological viewpoint, an expression of faith in the divine promise: to inter in the land signifies establishing a claim to God's promised inheritance (Na'aman 2016).

Jacob's final request in Genesis 49:29–32 similarly demands burial in Machpelah, while the relocation of Joseph's bones from Egypt to Canaan (Ex 13:19; Jos 24:32) perpetuates this motif within the Exodus narrative. These narratives have occasionally been interpreted as setting a universal standard for ancestral interment. Nevertheless, various exegetical insights complicate this interpretation.

The significance of burial in Canaan is intricately linked to the land's value within Israel's faith. Brueggemann (2002) contends that land in the Old Testament is not merely passive territory; it represents a gift, a promise and the relational domain in which Israel is connected to God and to each other within the covenant. Being interred in the land signified a perpetual association with the community of God, land and people; it indicated a belief in belonging both in life and in death to those to whom the promise was bestowed. This interpretation suggests that the patriarchal emphasis on burial at Machpelah primarily signifies a claim of belonging rather than a geographical assertion.

The Old Testament theology of land directly engages with the African worldview rather than overlooking it. The African belief that the deceased continue to be part of the community, that there exists no impenetrable barrier between the living and the dead, and that appropriate burial maintains the deceased's connection with their relatives (Magesa 2014; Mbiti 1990) closely aligns with the relational framework of Israel's land theology. Both reject the notion of death as the disconnection of an individual from their community. An interpretation that concludes only that 'burial location is insignificant' overlooks this and fails to persuade; the pertinent inquiry is not whether place matters, but rather where, and within whose community, the deceased belong.

The critical interpretative insight is that Scripture does not eliminate this need for belonging but rather re-establishes it. The author of Hebrews observes that the patriarchs regarded the land as secondary; they were 'strangers and exiles on the earth' who 'yearned for a superior country, a heavenly one' (Heb 11:13, 16). Canaan was a prototype of the new creation, rather than the ultimate inheritance. The covenant community of the deceased therefore transcends any geographical boundaries and is ultimately established in Christ: those who die in Him remain integrated into the people of God and anticipate resurrection (1 Th 4:13–16; cf. 'Developing alternative memorial practices' section). The African understanding of continuous belonging beyond death is confirmed and realised; however, its foundation transitions from ancestral land to communion with the resurrected Christ, and its mediation transfers from the properly interred

ancestor to Christ exclusively. The believer's true belonging is not determined by the physical ground of their burial, but by their affiliation with the singular community of the living and the deceased who are 'in Christ'.

The variety of burial sites for other devout individuals in the Old Testament significantly undermines any claim that burial locations have intrinsic religious significance. God buried Moses in Moab, and the site of his grave was intentionally hidden (Dt 34:5–6). The prophet Samuel was interred at Ramah (1 Sm 25:1), whereas Elisha was laid to rest in Samaria (2 Ki 13:20). No narrative endorses these places, nor does any scripture imply that God's attitude towards these individuals was influenced by the conditions of their burial.

The body, death and hope in the wisdom literature

The wisdom literature complements, rather than opposes, the canonical testimony on the deceased. Ecclesiastes 9:5–6 states that the deceased 'know nothing', that 'their love, hate, and envy have ceased', and that they 'no longer partake in any activities under the 'sun'. Within its genre of reflective wisdom, the assertion is observational and this-worldly: its repeating theme is 'under the sun', and its objective is to contextualise earthly endeavours, rather than to negate the existence of the deceased. The text argues against the idea that the deceased actively engage in earthly matters, interacting with, intervening with or relying on the living, rather than opposing the belief in their continued existence.

This distinction is significant, as the canonical witness collectively does not refute the deceased's ongoing existence but rather endorses it. In a manner that perplexes the Sadducees, Jesus asserts that God 'is not the God of the dead, but of the living', as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob exist in God's presence (Mt 22:32; refer to the analysis of this passage in the 'Other New Testament voices' section). At this fundamental level, biblical and African traditions coincide rather than conflict: both assert that physical death does not obliterate the individual, that ancestors persist in existence, and that the society is not merely fragmented by death. The Israelite commemoration of 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' exemplifies a sort of ancestral awareness, rooted on the belief that these ancestors exist in relation to God.

The divergence exists in a different location and must be accurately identified. The biblical tradition venerates the deceased by commemorating them, reciting their names and tending to their remains, while steadfastly rejecting the cult of the dead: it forbids necromancy (Dt 18:11; Is 8:19; 1 Sm 28), prohibits offerings to them (Dt 26:14) and disallows their treatment as supernatural entities to be appeased or depended upon. Schmidt (1996) contends that a robust ancestor cult was not observed in ancient Israel. The intersection with African cosmology is the assertion that the deceased continue to exist and have a place; the distinction lies in their designated roles, whether they are revered, consulted and relied upon as intermediaries, or whether, in their existence with God, they are entrusted to Him and await resurrection, with Christ as the exclusive mediator (cf. 'Developing alternative memorial practices' section). Interpreted in this manner, Ecclesiastes does not present an argument against the African belief in life after death; rather, it warns against attributing an active role to the deceased in the affairs of the living. The Old Testament does not provide a unified, systematic theology of burial; however, it conveys a consistent principle: appropriate burial reflects human dignity and communal responsibility, and the burial site holds substantial significance as an emblem of the deceased's connection to family and community, both physically and symbolically, without being essential to the deceased's status before God or the hope of resurrection. This study elaborates on the last distinction: while burial place may indicate belonging, it does not guarantee it; in Christ, belonging is established by different means.

New Testament teaching on death, burial and resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus as the hermeneutical key

The New Testament fundamentally reinterprets the Old Testament perspective on death and burial via the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection is not only one truth among others; it is, as Paul asserts in 1 Corinthians 15:17, the epistemological and theological cornerstone of the entire Christian faith. In its absence, faith is 'futile' [κενή, kene], and adherents persist in their transgressions. The resurrection of Jesus serves as the interpretive framework through which all previous and subsequent contemplation of death, the body and the afterlife must be examined.

Second Timothy 1:10 succinctly encapsulates this hermeneutical priority: Christ 'has abolished death and has illuminated life and immortality through the gospel'. The verb translated as 'destroyed' is καταργέω [katargeō], which signifies rendering something inoperative or depriving it of its power. Death has not merely been deferred; it has been stripped of its final dominion over those who are in Christ. This Pauline assertion pertains to Christian burial, although the inference must be made with caution. Paul does not assert that the conquest over death renders burial superfluous; Scripture consistently venerates the interment of the deceased as an expression of respect and affection. The assertion that the burial site is insignificant is erroneous, as it may still signify an individual's affiliation with family and community. The argument pertains to the theological significance attributed by the ancestral framework to the burial site.

The framework stipulates that the deceased's posthumous possessions and security rely on appropriate interment among relatives on ancestral territory. Paul's message eliminates the foundation upon which this dependence is established. For individuals who are 'in Christ', death has been rendered powerless, as the union with Christ remains

intact beyond death: nothing, 'neither death nor life', can detach the believer from the love of God in Christ (Rom 8:38–39), and to leave this life is to be 'with the Lord' (Phlp 1:23; cf. 1 Th 4:14). The believer's sense of belonging and security post-mortem is thus assured by a union that is non-spatial and independent of the body's location.

The location of burial neither enhances nor detracts from the deceased's status before God. The ancestral framework views proper burial as essential for absorption and belonging, whereas for the Christian, this is already fulfilled in Christ. The site of interment may retain genuine importance as an emblem of familial and communal affiliation; yet it diminishes in its foundational, redemptive significance when posthumous assurance is perceived to depend on the tomb. This is the specific way the prospect of resurrection contextualises the significance of burial: not by negating burial or diminishing its meaning, but by shifting the foundation of belonging from ancestral land to communion with the resurrected Christ.

First Corinthians 15: An exegetical analysis

The most comprehensive New Testament discourse on resurrection is found in 1 Corinthians 15. This event concerns Paul's reply to a faction within the Corinthian congregation that rejected the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:12). His extensive argument, comprising 58 verses, is the most thorough exegetical resource relevant to the question this study examines and merits meticulous consideration.

Paul bases the resurrection of believers on the resurrection of Christ, which he asserts as a verified event supported by several witnesses (1 Cor 15:3–8). The argument is organised around a sequence of conditional propositions: 'if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised' (1 Cor 15:13), and 'if Christ has not been raised, your faith is in vain' (1 Cor 15:17). This rigorous logical framework indicates that Paul considers the resurrection to be indispensable in Christian theology.

The fundamental exegetical inquiry for this study pertains to Paul's discourse on the characteristics of the resurrection body in 1 Corinthians 15:35–58. Paul presents a hypothetical interlocutor who enquires: 'How are the deceased resurrected?' In what manner of body will they arrive? (1 Cor 15:35). His response holds structural significance. He utilises the analogy of a seed [σπόρος, *sporos*] and its resultant plant (1 Cor 15:36–38): 'What you sow does not attain life unless it perishes'. When you sow, you do not plant the eventual body, but merely a seed. This analogy yields several exegetical insights.

The analogy delineates both continuity and discontinuity between the current body and the resurrected body. There exists authentic continuity; the same ego is elevated, hence preserving personal identity. However, there exists a profound discontinuity: the resurrection body is not a revived corpse but a transformed, glorified entity. The four antitheses in verses 42–44 elucidate this discontinuity: the body that is sown is φθαρτός [perishable, subject to decay], ἀτιμία [dishonourable], ἀσθένεια [weak], ψυχικός [natural, pertaining to the soul]; the resurrected body is ἀφθαρσία [imperishable], δόξα [glorious], δύναμις [powerful], πνευματικός [spiritual, pertaining to the Spirit].

Firstly, the analogy delineates both continuity and discontinuity between the current body and the resurrected body. Secondly, and crucially for this study, Paul establishes the resurrection body in divine agency: 'God gives it a body as he has determined' (1 Cor 15:38). The crux of the matter is that the resurrection does not hinge on the preservation or accurate identification of the corpse, an issue that Paul does not address and which the seed analogy explicitly negates, as what is sowed 'dies' prior to being raised (1 Cor 15:36–37). The continuity and identity of the resurrected individual depend entirely on God's creative action. This argument pertains not to physical preservation but to belonging: if God comprises the resurrected individual, then the deceased's inclusion in the people of God relies on Him, rather than on burial among relatives on ancestral soil. The believer's position within the indissoluble community is established through divine intervention, rather than by the grave. The crucial element in resurrection is not the corporeal state or position of the terrestrial body, but rather the divine creating power and covenantal fidelity of God. Wright (2003) notes that:

> Paul asserts that the resurrection body is not merely a reconfiguration of the corpse's molecules; it constitutes a new act of creation by the same God who originated the first human body. (p. 342)

This exegetical observation has direct implications for the burial location: if resurrection constitutes a novel creative act of God rather than a reconstitution of preserved corporeal material, then the location, condition or even existence of those remains are theologically inconsequential to the possibility or nature of resurrection.

Thirdly, Paul's account of the resurrection event in 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 lacks any geographical reference. 'Not all of us will slumber, but we will all be transformed instantaneously, in the blink of an eye, at the final trumpet'. The corresponding passage in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17 also refers to 'the dead in Christ' being resurrected at the sound of the trumpet, without any stipulation regarding burial site. Paul's affirmative instruction, rather than any reticence, substantiates the claim. By firmly establishing resurrection in God's creative agency and in communion with Christ (1 Cor 15:38, 42–44; cf. Rm 8:38–39), he situates the believer's hope in an entity for which the physical location of the body is inconsequential; the seed that is sown 'dies' and undergoes transformation, rendering the location of its resting place insignificant (1 Cor 15:36–37). It is unsurprising that the burial place is absent from his comprehensive teachings on death and resurrection, as this aligns with his reasoning; yet, it is the essence of his argument, rather than the lack of commentary, that substantiates the assertion.

Other New Testament voices

Multiple additional New Testament passages corroborate similar exegetical results. The confrontation between Jesus and the Sadducees in Matthew 22:31–32 is enlightening. The Sadducees rejected the notion of resurrection (Mt 22:23) Jesus bases his argument for resurrection not on the preservation of bodies but on God's enduring covenantal relationship with the patriarchs: 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'. He is not the deity of the deceased but of the living. The patriarchs, despite being deceased and interred in various locations, are alive to God; their resurrection is contingent upon God's covenantal fidelity, rather than the state or site of their remains. This belief is distinctly aligned with fundamental African philosophy, wherein ancestors persist in existence and return as reincarnated beings inside the family, with reliance on the Supreme Being rather than on death. Both traditions therefore separate the fate of the deceased from the burial location and anchor it in divine intervention. They differ about destiny: not reincarnation within the lineage, but resurrection to new creation, mediated solely via Christ (see 'Developing alternative memorial practices' section). The common rationale is that post-mortem hope is anchored in God rather than location, notwithstanding variations in the substance of that hope. Jesus's assurance to the condemned sinner in Luke 23:43, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise', is equally enlightening. The criminal was not entitled to a dignified burial; as a condemned individual executed under Roman law, his remains were likely discarded without formal interment. Jesus unequivocally promises quick post-mortem communion. No arrangements are made for interment; none are necessary.

Paul's assertion in 2 Corinthians 5:8 that 'to be away from the body' equates to 'to be at home with the Lord' suggests that the believer's communion with Christ is entirely independent of the physical body during the interim period between death and resurrection. The book of Revelation depicts the gathered redeemed from 'every nation, tribe, people, and language' (Rv 7:9), representing a global and historically dispersed assembly, with no implication that their diverse burial conditions restricted their involvement in the life of the new creation (Bauckham 1993). The exegetical findings of this section can be stated as follows: (1) Scripture upholds the dignity of the body and regards respectful burial as a human obligation, but it does not deem the burial site theologically crucial to the deceased's status before God; (2) the variety of burial sites among the exemplary figures in Scripture refutes any assertion that the location of interment dictates post-mortem fate or resurrection. However, this does not render place devoid of significance, as for Africans it represents a connection to the eco-community of the living and the deceased, a connection that the gospel repositions rather than negates. (3) Paul's resurrection theology in 1 Corinthians 15 establishes that resurrection is solely based on God's creative power, making the physical condition and location of the body irrelevant to the hope of resurrection; and (4) the New Testament consistently bases the believer's hope on union with Christ rather than on any earthly circumstance, including the burial site.

Focal area two: Systematic theology of bodily resurrection and burial

The secondary focal area of this study is systematic theology. While exegesis focuses on the specific assertions of individual texts, systematic theology integrates those insights into a cohesive doctrinal structure and examines their consequences. This section formulates three systematic assertions derived from the exegetical findings.

Resurrection affirms the dignity of the body without sacralising burial location

The Christian doctrine of resurrection, articulated in Scripture and elaborated in theological tradition, regards the body with utmost concern, refuting the idea that a human being is merely a soul temporarily encased in a transient body. Salvation encompasses the entire individual, including the body, which is essential to human identity and to the redeemed future, rather than merely a vessel to be discarded. The incarnation of the Son of God and his corporeal resurrection collectively assert that material life is not a confinement to be evaded but a blessing to be salvaged. Evans (2025:51) contends that God's resurrection of Jesus exemplifies His dedication to the salvation of the entire individual, including the body. This indicates that Christian practice appropriately grants dignity to human remains, as they represent the terrestrial embodiment of individuals whom God will resurrect.

Nonetheless, upholding the dignity of the body does not necessitate sanctifying any specific burial site. A systematic distinction must be upheld between the intrinsic dignity of the body as a human entity and the extrinsic importance of any geographical location. Resurrection theology anchors the former in God's creative and redemptive intentions, offering no foundation for the latter. The Deity who formed humanity from dust (Gn 2:7) and who will establish new heavens and a new earth (Rv 21:1) is not limited by the location or state of a believer's remains. The theological tradition consistently asserts that the resurrection of the body does not necessitate the retention of biological matter, but rather the divine transformation of the individual through God's eschatological power (Turner 2018; Wright 2003).

Resurrection relocates eschatological hope from earth to new creation

The patriarchal aspiration for interment in Canaan, as the exegetical investigation revealed, was typologically directed towards the divine covenant of territory. Nevertheless, the New Testament consistently redirects that hope from the terrestrial promised land to the new creation. Hebrews 11 depicts the patriarchs as individuals who acknowledged this eschatological reorientation: they 'longed for a better country,

a heavenly one' (Heb 11:16), having recognised that they were 'strangers and exiles on the earth' (Heb 11:13). The new creation described in Revelation 21–22 is not a restoration of specific earthly territory but rather a transformation of all created reality through the presence and glory of God.

This eschatological aspect directly pertains to African burial cosmology, which must initially be articulated on its own terms (refer to the comprehensive discussion above). In that cosmology, the universe is an integrated whole of three interconnected spatial dimensions: the sky, the earth's surface and the ancestral realm below, through which life cyclically transitions from the terrestrial to the ancestral world and, in reincarnation, returns once more. Interment in one's birthplace is not merely a means of ensuring resurrection; it signifies and affirms the deceased's affiliation with the continuous community of the living and the ancestral spirits. The emphasis on home burial is not a mistake to be rectified but, in Mbiti's perspective, a *praeparatio evangelica*: a divinely bestowed sense of belonging and citizenship that the gospel does not negate but rather fulfils.

The Christian hope identifies citizenship within the new creation. In Scripture, 'new creation' does not imply the substitution of the material realm with an immaterial one; the 'new heavens and new earth' referenced in Revelation 21 signify the regeneration and transformation of existing creation, rather than its eradication new in quality, not in substance. The believer is therefore a citizen of heaven (Phlp 3:20), with their homeland being this restored world. Arko (2025:233–234) interprets 'bury me wherever I die' as an affirmation rather than a rejection of body or community, suggesting that the sense of belonging sought by the African is, in Christ, no longer confined to a specific location. The African conception of citizenship beyond death is revered and expanded, its foundation transitioning from ancestral territory to the forthcoming Kingdom.

The mediatorial exclusivity of Christ and its implications for ancestral cosmology

A third implication of resurrection theology pertains to mediation. Traditional African burial cosmologies often depict ancestors as intermediaries between the living and the divine, a role intricately linked to appropriate interment in ancestral territory. For the African contextual theologian, this is not primarily a concept to be rejected but rather a *praeparatio evangelica*: the profound recognition that mankind requires a mediator is a divine endowment, and 'God has not left himself without witness' in any culture (Ac 14:17). Rather than hindering the gospel, it has elucidated the mediatorial function of Christ for Africans, probably contributing to his widespread acceptance as Lord throughout the continent.

The gospel both venerates and reorganises this intuition. The New Testament asserts a singular mediator: 'there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus' (1 Tm 2:5), and the believer's access to God is founded solely on Christ's high-priestly service (Heb 10:19–22). The fulfilment is thus a transposition: the mediatorial yearning that the predecessors were believed to address is ultimately and completely realised in Christ. Consequently, departed Christians do not serve as mediators, and their posthumous status is not contingent upon the location of their remains; people who die in Christ are 'with the Lord' (2 Cor 5:8; Phlp 1:23), their condition defined by their relationship with Him.

This does not negate the authentic elements inherent in ancestral traditions, such as continuation beyond death, lasting social connections and the spiritual aspect of human existence, which have significant similarities to Christian eschatology (Danquah 2023:561; Mbiti 1990). It shifts their foundation from ancestral cosmology to the person and activity of Christ (Wolfe & Wolfe 2022), fulfilling rather than rejecting them. This has a direct contextual-theological and pastoral implication for mission in Africa: the believer is not required to reject the intuition that the deceased live, belong and are mediated to God, but to identify its true object in Christ, which is also why home burial need not be mandated to obtain what is already his to bestow.

The systematic theology of bodily resurrection presents three interrelated assertions: the body possesses dignity due to its creation and resurrection, regardless of burial location; eschatological hope is anchored in the new creation rather than any terrestrial domain; and the believer's post-mortem condition is contingent upon union with Christ, rather than the intercession of appropriately interred forebears. Collectively, these form the basis for the practical-pastoral discourse.

Traditional African burial practices: A theological-critical analysis

The significance of ancestral land

Traditional African burial practices reflect a perspective in which land, community and spirituality are deeply interconnected. In many African communities, ancestral land transcends ordinary property; it is a sacred realm that connects generations and binds the living to their deceased ancestors (Mbiti 1990). Interment on ancestral land signifies integration into the family's ongoing communal existence, granting the deceased a recognised status among those whose influence and guardianship persist for the living.

This comprehension embodies the African perspective of a vast collective existence that transcends the divide between the living and the deceased. Mbiti (1990) noted that in numerous African religious systems, the living and the deceased coexist without an insurmountable divide; the two domains intermingle, with ancestors actively involved in family matters. Interment on ancestral land is perceived to preserve this connection and to allow the deceased to perform the protective and intercessory functions anticipated of ancestors (Clark & Coe 2021:281).

Conversely, interment beyond ancestral lands is perceived by certain communities as jeopardising continuity: an individual buried away from their homeland, or lacking appropriate rites, may be regarded as incapable of reuniting with the ancestral community or assuming a protective role, and in some narratives, may transform into a restless or wandering spirit. This idea is evidenced among the Igbo of Nigeria, where interment in one's ancestral compound is intricately linked to the transition into ancestorhood, and among the Shona of Zimbabwe, whose *kurova guva* [bringing home the spirit] ritual reintegrates the deceased and assumes appropriate burial at home. Nonetheless, it is not universally applicable among the Sokpoe-Eʋe, as previously mentioned, 'everywhere is a burial ground', which is precisely why this study delineates the communities where the requirement is spoken rather than asserting a singular African practice (Magesa 2014). These convictions create strong motivations to repatriate remains to their original location, despite the financial and logistical challenges encountered. In certain contexts, burial sites are also associated with inheritance and land rights, intertwining theological beliefs with tangible legal implications (Setsiba 2012:11).

Theological assessment of ancestral burial cosmology

From the standpoint of the systematic theology articulated in 'Developing alternative memorial practices' section, traditional African ancestral burial cosmologies reveal both authentic continuities and notable discontinuities with Christian eschatology. Discontinuities must be identified clearly, not polemically, but with the theological precision mandated by pastoral accountability.

The continuities are genuine. Numerous African ancestral traditions assert the continued existence of individuals post-mortem, reject the simplification of humanity to mere physicality and acknowledge a spiritual aspect of community existence that surpasses corporeal mortality. These affirmations align with Christian beliefs regarding the soul's immortality and the existence of the spiritual realm (Bediako 2004; Danquah 2023:561).

The discontinuities are, nonetheless, equally tangible and theologically pertinent. The Christian doctrine of mediation asserts that access to God is solely through Christ (1 Tm 2:5; Heb 10:19–22); the ancestral cosmology's attribution of a mediating role to the properly interred deceased directly contradicts this assertion. The New Testament does not depict deceased believers as concerned with terrestrial familial issues or reliant on burial sites for their well-being; they reside with Christ and anticipate the resurrection (2 Cor 5:8; 1 Th 4:13–14). The assertion that a burial site influences the spiritual state of the deceased or their ability to engage in communal life contradicts the resurrection hope expressed in the section on 'Developing alternative memorial practices'. The resurrection of believers at Christ's return is dictated not by their burial location but by their covenantal connection with Christ (Wolfe & Wolfe 2022).

This theological evaluation proposes a nuanced conclusion: Christians may respectfully bury their deceased, sustain familial ties through cemetery visits and honour the departed, all without accepting the metaphysical assertions that render burial sites spiritually significant. Resurrection faith offers a framework that can integrate genuine cultural values such as reverence for the deceased, maintenance of communal ties and respect for familial heritage, without necessitating adherence to beliefs that conflict with Christian eschatology (Aderibigbe 2019).

The practical costs of traditional burial obligations

The theological analysis should be accompanied by a candid evaluation of the practical expenses incurred by conventional burial responsibilities. Urban migration, international diaspora and current economic conditions have significantly transformed the logistics and costs of ancestral repatriation. The accompanying expenses of expert body preservation, overseas transportation, accommodation for extended family, prolonged funeral rites and cultural duties can financially destroy families (Setsiba 2012). In certain African contexts, particularly South Africa, studies indicate that families may expend the equivalent of an entire year's income or more on funerals. These expenses can equal or surpass a household's annual earnings; perpetuating cycles of debt and exhausting resources intended for education or entrepreneurship (Power 2020:67; cf. Case et al. 2013 on funeral expenditures in South Africa). These constraints disproportionately affect women and younger family members, who often incur costs without corresponding decision-making power.

Extended delays in burial, caused by transportation constraints, impair the grieving process and may impede psychological closure, while causing occupational challenges for persons experiencing prolonged bereavement (Shimane 2018:2). Environmental and public health factors complicate traditional methods: the chemical preservation necessary for international shipping poses ecological issues, while postponed interment in warm regions presents public health hazards (Schmidt 2021). These pragmatic dimensions do not, in themselves, resolve the theological inquiry, yet they represent a substantial pastoral reality that theology must address rather than overlook.

Focal area three: Practical-pastoral implications

Navigating family and community expectations

When Christians select a burial site that diverges from familial expectations, pastors may encounter significant challenges, particularly in societies where home burial holds substantial cosmological and social significance, but this is not uniformly applicable. In certain contexts, a believer who

intellectually accepts resurrection theology may experience significant pressure to conform due to fears of familial ostracism, communal disapproval, or the perception of having neglected a filial obligation (Pruitt 2022). This pressure is seldom expressed as a fear of losing resurrection; rather, it is perceived as a danger to belonging and communal duty. A variety of principles might direct pastoral engagement.

Firstly, pastors must elucidate, with clarity and empathy, that the burial site does not influence resurrection: the believer's assurance is founded on God's omnipotence and covenantal fidelity, rather than geographical placement. This alleviates Christians from unnecessary guilt or anxiety regarding loved ones interred away from ancestral grounds, and the liberty of the gospel (Gl 5:1) encompasses burial options, acknowledging that when such anxiety is absent, this reassurance is superfluous.

Secondly, pastors should acknowledge that funeral traditions fulfil legitimate functions outside doctrine: structuring grief, commemorating the deceased, reinforcing community and articulating identity. Reconceptualising the spiritual significance of burial sites does not necessitate the abandonment of conventional funeral customs. The objective is not cultural obliteration but religious reorientation, assisting adherents in preserving embodied rituals that respect the body, console the mourning, and sustain communal connections, while anchoring them in resurrection optimism instead of ancestral cosmology (Madden 2025).

Thirdly, pastors can assist Christians in articulating their decisions to extended family with theological precision and relational sensitivity. Alternative methods of commemoration, such as memorial plaques at notable locations, family memory books or dual ceremonies held in both the dwelling and ancestral house, might honour the prospect of resurrection and the intrinsic human necessity for collective recall (Thabede 2020:16).

Fourthly, pastors must confront the tangible personal repercussions that such decisions may entail: familial turmoil, social condemnation and personal sorrow. Osmer's (2008) pragmatic duty necessitates consideration of both theological imperatives and the relational and pastoral opportunities inherent in each context. Christians across communities, as well as within the same community, may reach divergent conclusions; pastoral wisdom maintains a productive tension between theological conviction and contextual reality.

Developing alternative memorial practices

Churches should support Christians seeking resurrection freedom in burial choices by promoting alternative memorial customs that respect genuine cultural values within a resurrection context. Such practices can consolidate communities, safeguard familial memory and facilitate organised mourning without necessitating the relocation of remains to ancestral territory.

Memorial services may be conducted in both the community of residence and the ancestral homeland, allowing both groups to fully engage in commemorating the departed (Thabede 2020:16). Ancestral markers or memorial plaques at historic family places can preserve lineage connections without requiring interment at those locations. Memorial gardens, scholarship funds in tribute to the deceased, and family history projects can function as alternate methods of honouring legacy. These methods preserve memories and reinforce social ties without the economic strain of conventional repatriation (eds. Spinelli & Lacy 2025).

Churches ought to invest in creating comprehensive funeral liturgies that convey resurrection hope with theological precision and emotional resonance. Liturgical practices can satisfy the need for structure and significance that traditional burial customs offered, providing solace not in the burial site but in Christ's victory over death (Hays 2024). Liturgies that testify to God's fidelity, the actuality of resurrection and the persistent hope of the Christian community can support families throughout bereavement while reaffirming the theological principles outlined in 'Theological assessment of ancestral burial cosmology' and 'Developing alternative memorial practices' sections.

Proactive teaching and discipleship

The most efficacious pastoral approach to the conflict between conventional burial customs and resurrection theology is proactive rather than reactive. Churches ought to instruct consistently and explicitly on the theology of resurrection and its practical ramifications for burial, allowing members to establish theological convictions prior to the necessity of decision-making in a crisis. This guidance should commence well in advance of end-of-life decisions, enabling the consolidation of beliefs and fostering dialogue with family members in non-crisis situations (Osmer 2008).

Educational initiatives may encompass sermon series on resurrection and Christian hope, Bible studies scrutinising the pivotal exegetical texts as analysed in the section 'Theological assessment of ancestral burial cosmology', discussion forums tackling the cultural and theological tensions explored in this study, and testimonies from believers who have faithfully navigated these issues. Churches ought to promote the preparation of advance directives among believers, detailing their burial preferences and the theological principles that underlie them, thereby significantly alleviating familial confusion and conflict during the time of death (Elliott 2024:9).

Youth and young adult ministry offers a distinct opportunity in this context. Younger believers, distinguished by increased

mobility and a more globally interconnected identity than prior generations, may be particularly receptive to challenging traditional burial conventions. Preparing youth to engage in theological reflection on these issues before they emerge in familial settings can facilitate a generational shift in comprehension, mitigating crisis-induced decision-making and promoting intergenerational theological discourse within families (Bengtson 2017).

Discussion

Synthesis of findings

This work has traversed three theological domains: exegesis, systematic theology and practical theology, to examine whether the notion of Christian resurrection renders burial location theologically insignificant. The results of each focal region align with a uniform conclusion.

No biblical text explicitly designates a particular burial site as theologically essential for resurrection or eternal status. The patriarchal burial customs in Canaan were uniquely tied to Israel's national covenant and should not be generalised as a universal standard. Paul's theology of resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 bases resurrection only on divine creative action, with no exegetical support for the assertion that burial location influences the possibility or nature of resurrection. Numerous New Testament authors consistently position the believer's hope in communion with Christ rather than in any terrestrial condition.

The doctrine of bodily resurrection systematically affirms the body's dignity without sanctifying burial sites; eschatological hope is redirected from terrestrial geography to the new creation; and the mediatorial exclusivity of Christ supplants the theological role attributed to properly interred ancestors in traditional African cosmology. These systematic assertions do not necessitate the complete rejection of African cultural norms but do require their contextual theology.

Churches are tasked with proactive theological instruction, alternative memorial traditions and empathetic pastoral support for Christians managing the conflict between resurrection freedom and conventional burial duties. The financial, logistical and environmental expenses of conventional repatriation highlight the pressing necessity of this spiritual endeavour.

Contribution to existing scholarship

This research enhances current academic discourse in multiple distinct ways. This work integrates the anthropological and sociological literature on African burial practices (Magesa 2014; Okoro & Nkama 2018; Setsiba 2012; Ugwuanyi 2025) with systematic theology and biblical exegesis, a synthesis not previously explored in existing scholarship. It advances the discourse on African Christian theology initiated by Bediako (1995, 2004), Mbiti (1990), and others by applying their insights regarding gospel-culture interaction to the specific practical issue of burial sites. It engages with the practical-theological literature on funeral ministry (Gibson 2019; Hays 2024) and extends it beyond its mostly Western perspective. It offers a systematic, practical-theological approach to addressing a persistent pastoral issue in African Christianity, equipping pastors with cohesive theological resources rather than cultural adaptation or theological dismissal.

Limitations and directions for further research

This study operates at a level of generality that obscures the genuine diversity among African ethnic groups, regions, and Christian traditions. This article attempts to mitigate this limitation by specifying the communities where the home-burial obligation is pronounced, although only focused ethnographic research can comprehensively address this issue. The conflict analysed below is pronounced in certain contexts (e.g. among the Shona and the Igbo) and subdued or non-existent in others (e.g. the Sokpoe-Ewe), with specific circumstances potentially necessitating more theological and pastoral sophistication than this study can offer. Future research should investigate how certain communities navigate this issue and identify which pastoral strategies are effective or ineffective.

This study is both theological and pastoral; empirical research into the burial decisions of African Christian families and their long-term ramifications would provide significant data. What experiences do families selecting alternate burial places undergo over time? What practices maintain familial connections when repatriation is abandoned? A systematic examination of these enquiries might enhance the pastoral recommendations provided above.

The concepts of stewardship, simplicity, ecological responsibility and the body as an integral part of God's creation are pertinent to burial practices and warrant further exploration. African cosmology serves as a resource rather than merely a challenge; its cohesive perspective of a cosmos where the sky, earth and ancestral realm are interconnected provides a framework for an ecological theology of death and burial that is indigenous rather than derived from external sources. A comparative analysis of how Christians in Asian, Latin American and other non-Western countries navigate analogous tensions could enhance this cross-cultural dialogue.

Conclusion

The statement 'bury me wherever I die' is not, from a religious perspective, an indication of cultural indifference or just a personal desire. It asserts that the African's need for membership and integration into a community undisturbed by death is, for the Christian, guaranteed by a God unconfined by geography, therefore no longer linked to

a specific burial site. This paper contends that a robust comprehension of Christian resurrection theory both allows and justifies this confession, drawing upon biblical exegesis, systematic theology and practical-pastoral analysis.

The exegetical analysis of significant Old and New Testament texts reveals that Scripture continually anchors resurrection hope in God's creative and covenantal fidelity, rather than in the state or position of the body. No source establishes the burial site definitively; Paul bases the resurrection solely on divine intervention (1 Cor 15). Systematic theology affirms and elaborates that the body possesses dignity grounded in creation and resurrection, eschatological hope is anchored in the new creation rather than any terrestrial domain, and the believer's post-mortem condition is characterised by unity with Christ rather than ancestral intercession.

These conclusions do not necessitate the abolition of African burial traditions. Many aspects of those traditions, such as respect for the deceased, affirmation of life after death and preservation of social relationships, closely align with Christian faith and, in Mbiti's view, serve as *praeparatio evangelica*. Bediako (1995, 2004) contends that contextualisation redirects culture towards Christ instead of rejecting it; the gospel undergoes transformation from within rather than annihilation.

The practical ramifications are significant. Churches ought to impart resurrection theology with sufficient depth and clarity so that believers comprehend its implications for burial prior to a crisis necessitating the inquiry; foster memorial practices that respect authentic cultural values within a resurrection context; assist families in navigating the relational ramifications of alternative decisions; and guide believers to make intentional choices based on conviction rather than mere tradition.

Ultimately, 'bury me wherever I die' attests to the sufficiency of Christ. It asserts that the God who resurrected Jesus transcends geographical limitations, that authentic belonging surpasses earthly domains in anticipation of the forthcoming Kingdom, and that the liberation of the gospel encompasses even the site of one's interment, not by negating the African yearning for connection, but by actualising it. As African Christianity reconciles cultural history with biblical faith, resurrection theology provides both a critical perspective and an emancipating message: neither death nor the grave possesses ultimate authority.

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Ndidzulafhi Mudau: Conceptualisation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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