

African Philosophy on the Concept of Time and Its Influence on the View of Death and Afterlife – A Zimbabwean Perspective

J. Moyounotsva Marava¹

Abstract

In general, the concept of Time in Africa has been researched on in a number of perspectives. The concept of *time* plays a pivotal role in the way a society derives its values, beliefs and conceptions. One of the areas where time is of importance is when analyzing people's perceptions on *death* and *afterlife*. The thrust of this paper was to investigate how Zimbabweans perceive time and how such conceptualizations affect their views on death and afterlife. The specific objectives for the current study were to determine and evaluate people's views on whether life terminates at the point of physical death and whether there is *communion* between the living and the dead. A research survey was conducted using semi-structured questionnaires and personal interviews to collect data for the study. The methodology employed in this paper can be summarized by the words of Plato that: "Thinking is characterized not only by treatment of visible objects as symbols but also by reasoning from hypothesis." The findings of the study revealed that the majority believe in life after death whilst a third of the respondents believed that there is communion between the living and the dead through dreams, spirit mediums and necromancy. In addition, some few respondents believed that they will meet their beloved dead one day. Lastly, few respondents believed that the dead do not understand present and future time whilst a small number of the respondents believed that ghosts are spirits of the deceased people. This reflects that death is another life *time zone* whereby a dead person can continue to live.

Keywords: time, values, death, afterlife, time zone, communion.

1. Introduction

Time in African traditional life is simply a composition of events which have occurred, those which are taking place now and those which are inevitably or immediately to occur. What is certain to occur, or what falls within the rhythm of natural phenomena, is in the category of inevitable or *potential time*. Actual time is therefore what is present and what is past. Time in the African sense evolves. Time moves backward rather than forward and it is against this background that the concept of life and death becomes problematic in trying to understand the time frames in which they fit in the African philosophical perspective of *potential time* and *actual time*. However, there are some contradictions by people of various religions in Zimbabwe on the concept of death as reflected by the use of the terms such as "*kuviga*" (to bury) and "*Kurasha*" (to throw away) "*kuradzika*" (to help someone to sleep, when it comes to burial (*Kuchengeta*)) (Banana, 1991: 27). This is the premise of this research.

2. Aims And Objectives

The aim of this paper is to study the understanding of death as the end of life or beginning of life among some groups of people in Zimbabwe.

¹ Christ University, Bangalore, India.

2.1 Research objectives

- To investigate whether life terminates at the point of death of an individual.
- To find out whether the dead communicate with the living.
- To evaluate whether death is another life time zone in a Zimbabwean perspective.

3. Methodology

An exploratory research methodology was used, which initializes the data and explores the possibilities of obtaining many relationships as possible between different variables without knowing their end applications. This means that a general study will be conducted without having any specific end-objective except to establish as many relationships as possible between the variables of the study. This research provides a basis for general findings. Researchers and practitioners can employ the possibilities of using such general findings in future. This type of research lay the foundation of formulation of different hypotheses of research problems (Panneerselvam, 2011).

Two main research instruments were used in the process namely the questionnaire and conducting interviews. These two are normally used when we are dealing with people's perceptions. Since this research is about people's perceptions of the influence of time on death and after life, it befits. The use of two research instruments helped to ensure reliability. Questionnaires were mainly distributed in situations whereby the respondents were of fixed abode, that is, those who would respond to the questionnaire from their places of residence. The questionnaires included both open ended questions and close ended questions to make room for a depth enquiry. Interviews were conducted in situations whereby respondents were randomly selected from the streets and also in situations where respondents were illiterate such that it was difficult to administer self completed questionnaires.

Whenever we argue about whether a thing can be proved, we should distinguish five different questions about that thing: The questionnaires were designed in a way that addresses the following questions on the proof of life after death.

- a) Does death really exist or not? "To be or not to be, that is the question."
- b) If it does exist, do we know that it exists? A thing can obviously exist without our knowing it.
- c) If we know that it exists, can we be certain of this knowledge? Our knowledge might be true but uncertain; it might be "right opinion."
- d) If it is certain, is there a logical proof, a demonstration of why we have a right to be certain? There may be some certainties that are not logically demonstrable (e.g. my own existence, or the law of non-contradiction).
- e) If there is a proof, is it a scientific one in the modern sense of 'scientific'? Is it publicly verifiable by formal logic and/or empirical observation? There may be other valid kinds of proof besides proofs by the scientific method.

4. Sample frame

One place was selected for the study namely Bindura urban. This research area was chosen for this study because of the characteristics it possesses. Bindura was selected because it is associated with people from different rural background of Zimbabwe because of its status as a mining town. Mining areas draw people from various places and walks of life. As a result, the expected responses were more representative of majority views from differing Zimbabwean backgrounds. Furthermore, Bindura was purposefully selected for convenience since it is the researcher's permanent place of residence.

4.1 Sample size

In total, 150 questionnaires were distributed of which 30 were personally administered whilst 120 questionnaires were left to the respondents to fill for themselves.

4.2 Pilot testing

Before the actual questionnaire administration a pilot test was conducted using three questionnaires for each place or research area. This was done in order to help the researcher throw up some of the inevitable problems of converting the questionnaire design into reality.

4.3 Data analysis

Tables and graphs were used in the analysis to present the data extracted from the questionnaires.

5. Results and Discussion

This paper is going to present, analyse and discuss the findings from this research. This involves analyzing the responses from both the questionnaire and the datasheets used during the interviews. The themes underlying the scope of this study are based on the nature of the objectives. The discussion is mainly relating to the research findings to the documented literature on the same subject.

The table below shows the responses from the questionnaires based on key questions regarding death and afterlife.

Table 1: Responses from people concerning various questions?
(n = 150)

Question	No. of respondents	
	Yes	No
Do you believe in life after death?	89	61
Do the dead communicate with the living?	47	103
Do the dead help the living?	39	111
Do you believe in ghost influence?	45	105
Are the ghosts the spirits of the dead?	45	105
Do the dead communicate with the living through dreams?	42	108
Is death an instant process?	76	74
Do the dead understand the present time and the future time?	41	109
Do you think you will meet your loved ones after death?	57	93

People's perceptions on death and afterlife

The table below shows the meaning of death as reflected by various terminology used by Zimbabweans to refer to the dead.

Table 2: Responses regarding terminology of death and its meaning

Terminology	Meaning	No. of Respondents
Watsiya	Has left us for another world.	80
Watsakatika	Has disappeared, is somewhere.	67
Watumamira	Has gone in front of us, has proceeded.	98
Wapfuura	Has passed on to the next destination ahead of us.	123
Washaika	Has disappeared but will be recovered.	148
Wafa	Has died	143
Warova	Has vanished from the face of the earth.	45
Wazorora	Has rested.	112
Watsvedzva	Has accidentally moved out of position, cannot be seen.	34
Arara	Has slept, will rise again.	88

Figure 1: below shows the number of respondents the terminology used when referring to the dead.

(n = 150)

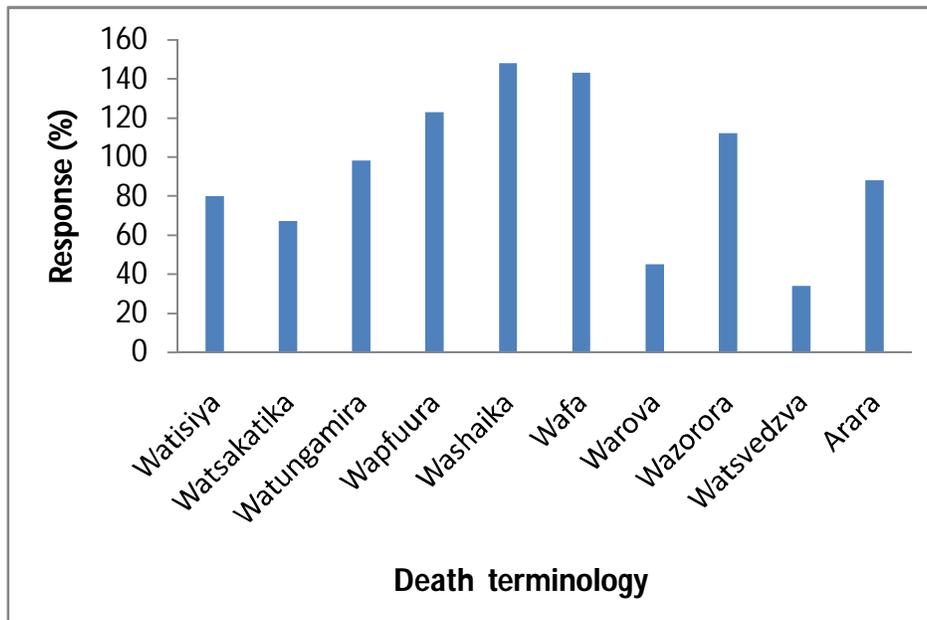


Figure 1: Terminology in describing the deceased

The graph below shows common religions found in Bindura in terms of their proportions as percentages.

(n = 150)

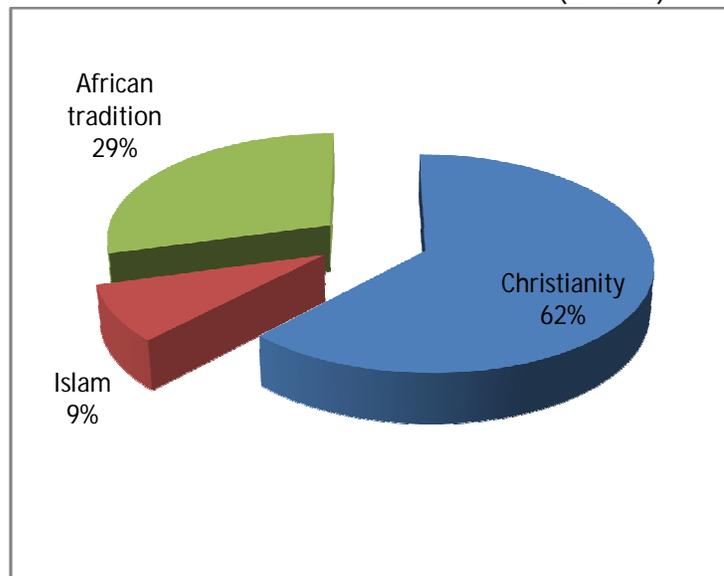


Figure 2: Different religious groups in Bindura

The graph reflects that Christians constitute the majority religious group in Bindura (62 %) followed by African Traditional Religion (A. T. R.) with 29% whilst Islam has the lowest percentage.

5.4: Discussion

5.4.1: Belief in life after death

The results from this study have shown that there are mixed conceptions surrounding death and afterlife by many Zimbabweans. Some believe that the spirit of the dead person continue to live while some are against the idea. A number of them argued that this is possible through Jesus Christ.

The general perception was that since Jesus Christ died, resurrected and is alive today, his followers too shall partake of his divine character and powers, especially the resurrection power. Some said that people do not die forever even though they had no valid reasons to support their claims. Thus, to the worshipers of God there is life after death as taught by the bible that they are asleep and awaiting the resurrection.

Since a number of respondents mentioned that they believe in the transition, it is also reasonable to include ideas of Aristotle on the relationships between the body and the soul. Aristotle accounted for the transition from inorganic to organic bodies by considering the nature of the soul. To him, all bodies are a combination of the primary elements of which some have life while others do not. He defined life as self nutrition and growth. On the other hand matter is not necessarily the principle of life since material substance is considered to be potentially alive. Thus, the body that is alive has its life from the source of actuality; that is the soul since the soul is considered the definitive formula of a thing's essence (Stumpf, 2003: 94). Furthermore, without the body, the soul could not exist, anymore than there could be vision without an eye. In short the idea of the dead communicating with the living becomes impossible.

5.4.2 Meaning of death

The results show that 61 of the 150 (41%) respondents revealed that they are of the opinion that the dead have left us for good in this physical life and spiritually will be in another world. The common term used to refer to the dead person is 'the deceased' which literally means 'the recently dead'. Some common terms which emerged were *wafa* meaning to say 'there is no more spirit in him or her'; *warova* which means 'to disappear from this present life'; *watungamira*, that is to say, '(s) he has gone ahead of us. To say that someone has gone ahead of us is a clue that there is hope for that person where he or she has gone. Some reported that they use the term *azorora* meaning to say that there is a possibility for reunion since the deceased will be just resting for a while and will come back to life again. The response that death is a transition to another life was very common. Death therefore, is the termination of the biological functions that define a living organism. It refers to both a particular event and to the condition or state of the deceased.

The major question then could be why people cry when in actual fact the departed are starting another life? Answers given by respondents reflect that it is because people are separated from their loved ones physically. So it is this longing or waiting period that troubles those who are left. Crying by relatives of the deceased showed their concern over the welfare of the dead person especially whether they will go to heaven or not since the dead would have no further room to correct their misdeeds as the destination would have been decided. Some respondents, even though they believe that the dead will one day live, their main fear which makes them cry is the fact that there is no clear evidence that it shall actually happen. Despite the general consensus that death is just like a pose whereby people would be asleep waiting for resurrection and judgment, only a few believed that death is an end to life. Death is thus, viewed as the center of many African traditions and organizations, and is a feature of every culture around the world. Much of this revolves around the care of the dead, as well as the afterlife and the disposal of bodies upon the onset of death. The disposal of human corpses does, in general, begin with the last offices before significant time has passed, and ritualistic ceremonies often occur, most commonly interment or cremation. According to Tempels (1959: 98), human existence is a dynamic process involving the increase or decrease of "power" or "life force," of "living" and "dying," and there are different levels of life and death.

Considering that there are different levels of life and death, there is need to look into reincarnation and the so called reintroduction by Banana. The research has shown that Zimbabweans believe in the reincarnation of the dead. The definition of reincarnation is the rebirth of a soul in a new body or a person in whom a soul is believed to have been reborn in the flesh to be specific. In the African setting reincarnation is associated with the bringing back of the dead and the deceased is transferred onto an animal such as a bull. This is not in any way the original person. It is actually a negative development. For instance, let us say someone has been married and suddenly dies, it defies logic to put him onto an animal which can neither talk nor provides solutions except to be taken care of. Moreover, the major question could be; "Is there any continuity of life when a person who is probably supposed to come back and rejoin his family will join the animal kingdom, - a transfer from the bedroom to the kraal." Again, in reincarnation the deceased person is supposed to have the same feelings as before just like Jesus when he resurrected.

This view is supported by other scholars like Robinson (2006) who reasoned normally thought, even by people who believe in life after death, that dead bodies are no longer able to show that they are associated with any kinds of mental states etc. But whether that is true or not, it is at least true that the dead bodies show no association with mental activity or mental states. Dead bodies give no hint or sign of being able to think, make decisions, see, hear, feel, or smell anything, have emotions, do algebra, or have any other mental experience, whether they can in fact have such experiences or not (Robinson, 2006). In essence it can be concluded that the body completely dies but the soul continues to live.

Seemingly, there is no perfect answer to the meaning of death as no eyewitness died and come back to life and painted a clear picture of what death really is. From the Christian or religious perspective, death is not the end of life, but rather a transformation. This is probably why Paul in his letter to the *Thessalonians* (4:13) referred death is a kind of sleep: "We want you to be quite certain, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep. To make sure that you do not grieve for them, as others do who have no hope."

5.4.3 People's views on after life

30 respondents (20%) do believe in ghost appearance phenomenon and they acknowledged that the ghost are there and have a negative influence on the life of the living. There is however disagreements on the definition of a ghost by Zimbabweans. Some believe that the ghost is the spirit of the deceased which, when not brought home will torment the living relatives. The Oxford dictionary defined a ghost as an apparition of a dead person which is believed to appear to the living, typically as a nebulous image. However, their line of argument seems to be that ghosts are actually evil spirits whose main role is to confuse and disturb the living and that the ghosts are usually associated with people who died as sinners such that their spirits will be the wondering spirits who have no resting place. These ghosts, as reflected by this study are familiar spirits which associate themselves with a particular family in a way to destroy it. Once someone is dead, his or her body will rot in grave and his spirit is believed to be somewhere waiting for the final trumpet when all the dead in Christ would be raised.

On the other hand, Mbiti contends that if future events are certain to occur, or if they fall within the inevitable rhythm of nature, they best constitute only potential time (Mbiti, 1969: 25). Banana supported this idea by reiterating that time is conceived by Africans as moving backwards and not forwards as in the Western conception. For instance, the 'departed' re-enter the realm of the living and continue to influence the lives of the living. Thus, for Africans, the present is in the future and vice versa and since future time or life can best be described as an extension of the present (Banana, 1991: 25). Basing on Banana's conclusions and that of Mbiti, it seems as if that there is no future for the dead since these will come back to the living. In other words, there is no life after death but continuation of the same life in the present time.

The dead knows nothing and have no role to play in the present life. This is in line with what is written in Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 that the dead knows not anything and as a result cannot help by protecting the living. The above perception about after life share a common footing with religious circles / Christian beliefs as other respondents believed that the righteous dead will go to heaven whilst the unrighteous dead will go to hell or Hades. It can be seen that it is the way we live while here on earth that would determine our final destination or our afterlife. Only a few respondents agreed that ghost influence phenomenon is real and that they have a protective role to the living.

Mbiti contends that the 'departed' re-enter the realm of the living and continue to influence the lives of the living. Thus, for Africans, the present is in the future and vice versa and since future time or life can best be described as an extension of the present, life cannot be complete without children as they represent assurance for the future (Banana, 1991: 25). According to Jeremias (1972) death has always been understood in terms of bodily death -- in terms of a permanently non-functioning body, or at least a non-functioning body for which there is no reason to believe functioning will ever return, particularly the mental functioning (previously) associated (or in the case of a baby, expected to be associated) with the body. However, death should never be conceived from one perspective.

5.4.4 Communication with the dead

There was also a mixed feeling on the question of communion between the living and the dead with 31% saying that there is no communion although others believed that the dead can communicate with the living. The idea that there is no communion between the dead and the living is probably a follow up to the idea highlighted above that the dead knows nothing.

According to Banana during the burial of the dead, the elder of the family of the deceased goes and marks the place where the grave is to be dug and some solemn words are uttered;

“we have decided to lay you here, so you can rest along your founding fathers...”

There will be sniffing of snuff and sprinkling it down on the ground. The snuff is sprinkled on the ground as a sign of sharing with the living-timeless. The stage after the grave has been dug is done ritually. Before the dead is put into the grave some solemn words are uttered. According to custom, the dead is buried facing a particular direction. For instance, the people who belong to the Shoko totem are buried looking in the sky and the head facing the East (Banana, 1991:28). Moreover, there is a belief that a person who has been married becomes thirsty after death and hence after three days a ceremony (*Doro remvura / rokuchenura*) is conducted to quench the thirsty of the deceased. This beer is used for cleansing the grave diggers. A special act is that of pouring beer on the ground as a sign of communing with the dead (Chabudapasi, 1985: 63). The problem with this philosophy is that the communion is initiated by the living hence can be criticized for being one directional.

Taylor (1963: 98) also talks of a certain form of immortality and resurrection and continuation of life after death which is seen in continuation of the individual through procreation, in which case children bear the traits of their progenitors. On the same vein Banana also talks of reincarnation and this is a form of transition. This is also believed to be true by some respondents in this study. This however, is believed to occur only if the deceased is the head of the family, thus the son's life is a prolongation of the father or a grandfather's life. This seems to defy logic since that son is somehow deprived of his life since he is believed to perpetuate the life of another person. The first question could be: how many lives are involved when one is prolonging the life of *sekuru* while at the same time he will be living? Secondly, if this happens only to the male family heads, how will we explain this reincarnation to non family head members who die? How about the females? Will they reincarnate/resurrect or not? Basing on facts above Banana can be criticized for his shortsightedness in proposing some kind of a restrictive reincarnation.

Furthermore, Banana assumes that resurrection of ancestors is the same as that of Jesus. To him, ancestors are resurrected by the living relatives through conducting a ceremony called *doro remvura*. If one compares this kind of resurrection, there is a big difference between the two because the Jesus' resurrection had no formality and it was supernatural without human intervention as in the Zimbabwean setting whereby the living initiate the reintroduction of the dead person. Still, Jesus' resurrection occurred in just three days whilst in the Zimbabwean belief, resurrection happens after a year. The major problem with this kind of fake philosophy is that it becomes difficult logically to determine who can support who; the dead supporting the living or vice versa. Plausibly, the whole idea of having the ancestors protecting the living is rendered invalid. The major question here is; who will be protecting the family during that one year before the ancestor is raised?

Lastly, Banana together with Mbiti, believe in the immortality and reincarnation. Mbiti based his ideas on the study of the Yoruba people where the Yoruba often consult the oracles to determine which one of the ancestors has returned in a newly born baby (Taylor, 1963: 98). However, on the concept of resurrection, Banana argues that the ancestors can be reintroduced back into the family in the form of beasts which will be provided with food and water, in the same manner that food and water would be given to a respected parent or grandfather. Banana (1991: 32). The bull can no longer be used for ploughing, neither can it be beaten, as this would constitute disrespect to the person of the one now resides in the bull, namely the revered ancestor or grandfather. This resurrection is prone to criticism in that the types of resurrection which he calls reintroduction not only involve humans but also animals too. Just imagine an intelligible someone like Banana, who was once a professor being reintroduced in life in the form of a bull which even talk or even reason and people cannot still look forward to get advice! Where is the knowledge here? It is a hard conception to imagine father of philosophy such as Aristotle and Plato being reintroduced in bulls! What type of a bull will they be? Moreover, if the ancestors are provided with food the question of who keeps who will surface? Furthermore, the same ancestor who is given food and water is deprived of shelter, even umbrellas during the rains. This defeats logic and it dismisses the conceptualization of reincarnation by Banana and Mbiti among others who share similar shallow rooted ideologies. This kind of communion between the living and the dead is temporal since the bull will die and be transferred onto another bull when it becomes available.

Lastly, Banana's assertion of reincarnation is difficult to prove scientifically hence his authentication automatically fails. Knowledge is knowledge if it is progressive. In such situations, it is important to distinguish between belief, thinking and imagination.

On the idea of the living communicating with the dead (69 %) did not agree that the dead can talk to the living through dreams. Others argued further by saying that there is a great chasm between the living and the dead hence to claim that the two interact is unreasonable. This is no wonder they use terms such as *atisiya* meaning to say he has left us and has gone to the other world which we cannot go and which we have no knowledge of. Respondents stated that the deceased will go to the underworld (*nyikadzimu*) and will come back to the land of the living through ancestral worship. The dead male relatives are the ones who can come back as ancestors to protect their families since the dead are considered to have transcended onto higher life. They argued that this is why people cry at funerals, they cry partly because they are not sure about how the deceased will be surviving. Furthermore man are gregarious animals and they love to socialize hence anything that reduces the holistic force will provoke them into tears as human beings are emotionally connected.

Communion between the state of the dead and the living is linked to the state or condition of the dead. Various terms used suggest different meanings but the problem emerges in interpreting the state of the dead since man is believed to be a triune being, made up of the spirit, soul and the physical body. From a religious perspective, this is supported by quite a number of scriptures such as 1 Thessalonians 5: 23; Mathew 10: 38 and also John 11: 11. These verses portrays the picture that it is only the body that assumes the semblance of sleep, thus people see the body sleep and not the soul. The soul then leaves the body at death and remains conscious. Jesus at one point pointed that: "Today you shall be with me in paradise" (Luke 23: 43). In another situation Paul expressed his desire to be absent from the body (death) and be present with the Lord (II Corinthians 5: 6). However, this is contradictory to the Seventh day Adventists who assert that the intermediate state after death is one of complete unconsciousness and that at death the soul dies and will remain completely unconscious until the resurrection.

5.4.5 The eschatological view of death

The interviewed people revealed that they believe in the afterlife which classifies all people into two groups namely the believers in God and the non believers. The believers in God especially those who believe in Christ will be with the Lord whilst the non believers will not and will be in another world after this present time. The people believed that it is only after judgment that the final destiny of man will go to heaven or hell. Thus the general trend here is that the way we live here on earth has a bearing on the afterlife. Unlike Mbiti and Banana who do not believe in the future time, the eschatological view support the Zimbabwean views as highlighted above that reflects a future for the dead. These views agrees with Sinclair and Ferguson (1989: 230) who argues that there is a resurrection and transformation for the people belonging to Christ and these will be with Christ forever as highlighted in 1Thessaloneans 4:16-17 that:

"For the Lord himself, with an assembling shout, with archangel's voice and with trump of God, shall descend from heaven; and the dead in Christ shall rise first;17. Then 'we', the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we shall be always with the Lord." This biblical view is unlike Platonism man and his soul is naturally immortal. The two scholars already quoted also talks about judgment, heaven and hell. To them heaven is where God will be as recorded by Mathew 6: 9 and where Christ is ascended (Hebrews 4: 14), and therefore by implication, heaven is the ultimate destination where God's believers go at death.

If one considers Mbiti's ideas it can be seen that he tried to justify his claim that the Old and the New Testament is contrary to the Western concept of linear time, which calls for a climactic end of history in the future (Byang : 65). He justified his claim by indicating that the Old Testament has a cyclic view of time in Ecclesiastes 1:4-11 and 3: 1-8. He quoted Marsh who also shares the same opinion that Jews were more concerned with the content than the chronology of time thus he concluded that African notions of time put emphasis on the actual event than on the chronology (Mbiti: 32). However, this is not absolutely so and the evidence for his claim is not conclusive since the same book goes on to exhorts man to fear God and do right because God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12: 14). According to Elwell (1984: 363), the biblical concept of time is not cyclical in which case Eschatology could refer only to the completion of a cycle or purely linear, in which eschatology could refer only to the terminal point of the line.

Thus, in other words, we live to die and join the dead. Eschatology, envisions a recurring pattern in which divine judgment and redemption interact this pattern attains its definitive manifestation. According to Ferguson and Wright (1989: 230) death marks a discontinuity between this life and the next but in Christianity there is eternal life which means the life of the age to come. Thus, the term implies not only everlastingness but a quality of life derived from the relationship with Christ even through death (Romans 6: 23 and John 17: 3).

5.4.6 The process of death

Death is a process which attracts a lot of criticism as the concept is difficult to define. Varied views have been exposed on whether death is an instant process or not. 76 respondents (51 %) Some responded that death start once breathing stops thus death is viewed as an instant process. In support of the above some people argued that one can get to the land of the dead anytime meaning to say once the body and the spirit are separated the spirit will start to exist in another world. Moreover, some believe that the actual separation of the body and the spirit occurs just like in the twinkling of an eye. A few believed that death is a process which takes a long time even though they failed to come up with evidence for their claims. To many people death is like a dreamless sleep from which we will never awake, our consciousness snuffed out forever. If this life is all there is, then the question of existence is nothing if it is so short-lived. During interviews some argued that if we are all going to be dead in the end anyway, what difference does it make what we do with our lives? We may influence the lives of others, but they too are doomed to death. In a few generations most of our accomplishments will be totally forgotten, the memories of our lives reduced to a mere name etched on a tombstone. In essence people are opposed to the so seemingly temporary life.

Interviews also revealed deeper thoughts concerning death. Death is believed to have emerged so as to render life meaningless for many people because they feel that there is no point in developing character or increasing knowledge if their progress is ultimately going to be thwarted by death. However, there is a point in developing character and increasing knowledge before death overtakes us: to provide peace of mind and intellectual satisfaction to our lives and to the lives of those we care about for their own sake because pursuing these goals enriches our lives. Some argued that from the fact that death is inevitable it does not follow that nothing we do matters now. On the contrary, our lives matter a great deal to us. If they did not, we would not find the idea of our own death so distressing---it wouldn't matter that our lives will come to an end. The fact that we're all eventually going to die has no relevance to whether our activities are worthwhile in the here and now.

Each of us lives once and faces the judgment. There are no second chances to come back. 2 Corinthians 5:8 tells us at death the believer immediately goes into the presence of the Lord to rest from his labors. I think if one were to chose either of these alternatives, even if reincarnation were true, certainly, only once is enough and to be accepted into paradise with the architect of the universe is a grander offer than the enlightenment that false Hinduism offers. Why try to perfect yourself through your own handiwork when the truth is, Christ did it all? The incarnation of the God/man is better than trusting the reincarnation of man. Christ died for our faults, our shortcomings, our sins. It works because it's the truth and it's the truth that will set you free. It's by God's grace and mercy, a gift given to us freely, not by our own hands. As for me, I'll choose mercy, I need it and I certainly appreciate God's free gift.

5.5 Summary

The section has outlined the basic themes underpinning the concept of time and its influence on the people's views concerning life and after death. These are; the meaning of death, the idea of communing with the dead and the eschatological views.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study has explored the views of Zimbabweans on the concept of time and its influence on people's views on death and afterlife. The outcome of this study has revealed a number of varied philosophical issues which needs further investigation. These are the belief in the afterlife, communion with the dead, eschatological views and the conceptualization of death itself. The research was based on three localised areas which were purposefully chosen in order to have a reliable coverage study that integrates views of people from different backgrounds. Resultantly, Bindura town has been purposefully selected for this study. Since the research is a qualitative one, qualitative research designs which involve the questionnaire and interview survey methods were employed.

Generally, the outcome of this research shows that people have mixed conceptions about death and afterlife. However, there emerged two major groups of people as reflected by the answers they gave. Their responses exposed generalizations by Mbiti, Banana and other philosophers who share similar thoughts. Their views have been scrutinized and some shortfalls have been noted. Lastly, the research touched also on major world religions from which three themes have emerged; these are resurrection, reincarnation and immortality.

Basing on the outcome of this study, a number of conclusions can be drawn. The major outcome is that time is an important factor in analyzing people's perceptions about death and afterlife. It has been seen that the cyclical time model of John Mbiti is not thoroughly conclusive and well substantiated from the Zimbabwean perspective. The idea of the future came out very clear that to the Zimbabwean people; there is a future waiting for them after death. This is in contrast to the notion of J. Mbiti and C. Banana who believe in the cyclic time model. The linear time model is well supported by many people in Zimbabwe and has a three dimensionality based on past, present and the future. For all the three objectives, no one directional answer has emerged. However, this study has revealed that people believe that the soul continues to live after the death of a person but does not necessarily come back to stay with the living. On the other hand, there is a less supported view that familiar spirits can also masquerade as the spirit of the deceased.

While Banana does not believe in resurrection, he coined the term 'reintroduction' to refer to the bringing back the spirit of the deceased person into the family. Banana has also been criticised for comparing Jesus' resurrection with the resurrection of the dead as these have been seen to be two different experiences. This is because when Jesus resurrected he came in his own body yet in the Zimbabwean situation it is only the spirit which is resurrected and will later be transferred onto a body, say of an animal but the body will never resurrect. As such, his propositions fall short of proper symmetry and therefore do not hold water. However, their views need to be reconsidered for them to be formulated into a purely African philosophy with a Zimbabwean flavour.

Recommendations

- Zimbabwe is a multi religious community hence there is need to carry out a separate study on time and its influence on people's view on death and after life by conducting studies based on various religious groups so that comprehensive and more reliable conclusions can be made to make a purely Zimbabwean philosophy.
- Extension and or the enlargement of the research areas should be conducted and this will bring more views on the issues under consideration. Ideally, it would be reasonable if remote areas which are highly inaccessible be studied separately so that comparisons can be made for different social groups in Zimbabwe. This will reduce possibilities of falling in the same trap of Mbiti and Banana who made hasty conclusions after studying small communities. Besides, it will reduce the so called "urban bias" which many researches have been accused of.
- Since the outcome of this study reflected mixed conceptions about death and afterlife in relation to time, there is need for further study on identified themes such as resurrection, reintroduction and immortality if we are to build a Zimbabwean philosophy.

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