

# **KUMANDA: DEATH AND PASTORAL CARE – A CHRISTIAN ENGA PERSPECTIVE**

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## **Introduction**

Traditional Enga spirituality may be viewed as a struggle for life in the face of death. Life and death figure prominently in daily realities of this Papua New Guinea Highlands Province. The birth rate is high, *but so is the level of mortality. In workshops I have conducted in various parts of the Province, I sometimes asked the women participants how many children they have had and how many are still alive. I am struck by how many women have experienced the death of a child. For example, in Kandep, fifty-eight women at the workshop had bourn 280 children, of whom eighty-eight had died. In Kasap, of 548 children born alive to 141 women, 271 had died. One woman at Sikiro had experienced the death of ten of her children.*<sup>1</sup>

*What are the beliefs and practices associated with death and dying in Catholic faith communities in Enga at this time, fifty years after the first evangelisation? How can pastoral workers minister to people at this important moment in their lives? Are there possibilities for a deeper understanding and more appropriate responses on the part of the Church? I write as a priest-researcher, and these are questions motivating this article.*

## **Enga Beliefs: Life and Death**

Traditionally, Engans believe that a child's body is formed from the mother's blood, and the *waiyenge* (spirit) or life force comes from the father. The two together are responsible for bringing a new life into the world.

There are several legends explaining why people have to die. In one story a man found a baby in the hollow of a tree. He gave it to a woman to look after, but told her not to nurse the child as he was going to fetch water for the child to drink. He was away a long time and the child began to cry, so the woman - feeling sorry for the child - gave it her breast milk. The man returned with a gourd containing the "water of life", but when he saw the woman feeding the child

despite his command not to do so, he was angry and threw the container on the ground, upon which it broke and the water of life was lost. In another version of the story, the man returns and calls out "*katambi*" (life), but no one responds. When he calls out "*kumambi*" (death), people hear him and respond. That is why people must die.

If one lives a good life, then it is said that one will live long and eventually eat from the hand of one's children and grandchildren. A selfish, dishonest person can be expected to die quickly. Tribal fighting has been another significant factor in death. Anthropologist Mervyn Meggitt estimated that in the first half of the twentieth century, warfare accounted for twenty five percent of all male fatalities in Enga (Meggitt 1977:110). Warfare continues today, with spears and bows and arrows substituted by crude home-made shotguns and the latest high-powered assault rifles with telescopic sights.

When a person dies, someone will call out to inform the local community and people further afield. There is a saying in Enga: *Akali kumalamo lao wii mendai iki lenge* (A man's death is announced only once). When a person is alive his or her name is mentioned often, but when the death is announced it is like calling the person's name for the last time. The call is passed from valley to hillside, and then there is silence as people prepare to leave what they are doing and come to the funeral (*kumanda*). The term *kumanda* literally means, "house of the dead". It applies to both the house where people come to mourn, and the funeral rites in their entirety. *Kumanda* is a process with many activities, rituals and obligations.

After a person dies the family has a short meeting (*kambuingi*) to discuss upcoming activities for the funeral process. They will consider whether the death is a natural one or whether it is caused by some form of accident or malpractice, in which case they will look for ways to prove it and to claim compensation. They will also discuss how best to deal with the deceased's mother's clan (*wane tange*), who often express their sorrow in violent ways.

If a baby is born dead, close relatives from the mother's and father's clan will mourn quietly. The father or any of the immediate family members may find a pig or a chicken to host a small party for the immediate family to end the time of sorrow. When a baby dies soon after birth it is said: *Sambai tengesa katenge*, literally: "Being near

the undergrowth.” It is kept from the public eye as if hidden in the undergrowth.

If a young woman dies there will be a funeral, but it does not usually involve drawn out compensation payments as is often the case for men. If a married woman dies, the people who suffer most are her husband, her children and her own brothers and sisters. Such people will be remembered at the meal (*polenge*) that ends the formal time of mourning, but not so much distant relatives or entire clans as with the death of a man. The size and length of time spent mourning for a man will depend on his status in the community – the higher his status, the more complex the funerary process. The Enga have a saying: “*Wane lombapae daa*” (It is not like dropping a baby). In other words, it is not a child who has died but a fully-grown man whose death is a serious matter.

Funerals for very elderly persons are often low key. This is because the old person’s friends and trading partners have already gone and the relationships are lost or perhaps taken over by his or her children.

## Reasons for Death

Very old people may be seen to have died because “their time is over”. For anyone else, including babies and young children, people believe there must be a reason, usually a sinister cause of death. A group of Enga people listed the causes as follows:<sup>2</sup>

- Tribal warfare. One may die during the fighting or many years later from “bad blood” as a result of old wounds.
- AIDS (known as *yaina enenge* - new sickness, or *yaina koo* - bad sickness).
- Killed (by police) during criminal (“*raskol*”) activities.
- Illness such as cancer or typhoid (*mee yaina* - “simple” sickness).
- Ghost attack (*yumbangeme nalamo* - “bitten by the spirit of a dead ancestor”). Feeling they are not being properly cared for, some old people will threaten, “After I die, I will come ...”).
- Ghostly attack of a dead spouse. Termed *yokee*, a widow or widower, child, or their new spouse are vulnerable to attack by the spirit of his deceased, if they marry again.
- Poison (*malakuli* – literally “concealed bones”).<sup>3</sup>

- Sorcery (*tomokai* – in which blood or body parts from a dead person are placed at a water source so as to bring misfortune to those drinking the water). Different parts of Enga have different forms of sorcery.
- Breaking taboos, such as going near a sacred grove where there are ancestral stones (*yainanda kuli*), or gardening when one should be at a funeral.
- Occult (*yama*), resulting from jealous or evil thoughts.
- A parent being unfaithful causing tension in the marriage (death of a child).
- A young man recently married is vulnerable to being injured or killed in warfare (a newly married man should not go into tribal fights – *kelyapae yanda napingi*. It is believed that he will be weakened by frequent sexual contact with his wife, and also he should not take the risk of being killed and leaving his new wife without a child).
- Discord and wrong in the community – *wapu palenge*. Christians today equate *wapu* with “sin”. Sinfulness (such as adultery within the community) may result in a series of deaths.
- God. Some people intentionally reject the Christian God. Respondents gave the example given of a man who angrily declared that: “If God uses a gun, I will use my bush knife.” Soon afterwards two children from his family were drowned.<sup>4</sup>

Rarely will people claim that a person has died naturally – for no reason. As can be seen from the list above, there are many possibilities. Very often a human cause will be seen behind the death and calls for compensation will be made.<sup>5</sup>

## Bringing Home the Spirit

The spirits of the dead are thought to roam around at the spot where they died. It could be in a hospital, in the bush or battlefield, at the road side death caused by a car accident or even at a river bank where one drowned while attempting to cross a flooded river.

It is no use burying a body if it is not accompanied by the *waiyenge* (spirit). If a person is found dead out of the village, male relatives will go to where the body has been concealed to check for signs of the spirit's presence – such as a sound like a whistle. If no signal is given, they will request that the spirit provide some kind of signal,

and if there is no response they will then go to the place where the person died.

A group of strong men (relatives or close friends of the deceased) will go with a bamboo vessel that is open at one end.<sup>6</sup> They will also take along with them some pig fat (sometimes today lamb flaps), a box of matches or a piece of burning wood. Having come to the place where the person died, two men sit back to back and whistle while someone from the group starts to burn the fat. The crackling sound and smell of the burning fat attracts the spirit. If a whistle replies, the eldest man in the group would say something like: "We are very sorry that you died, we have really missed you so now we have come to take you home with us. Forgive us if we have something against you. Please come with us." The man with the fat says: "This is yours," and puts the fat into the bamboo. The bamboo is said to become very heavy as the spirit follows the fat into the bamboo. The man holding the bamboo quickly covers the opening.

When they return to their village, the men will go to the graveyard or the place where the body lies and open the bamboo container. Someone from the group will say: "Now we have come home so you can come out and live with the community." The men return to their houses or to the funeral home and inform the immediate relatives that they have brought back the dead person's spirit.

Sometimes, the spirit will refuse to enter the bamboo container (indicated by the container not becoming heavier). This shows that the spirit is not happy with those who have come to fetch it, or that the group had arrived too late – the spirit having joined the company of other spirits and being reluctant to come.

Christians take part in this *waiyenge nyingi* ritual, however some note with concern that the ritual is only performed in darkness. They contend that it would not work in a lighted place, nor would it work if accompanied by a Christian symbol such as a cross, thus indicating doubts about the appropriateness of church members participating in such rituals.

## Sending Spirits Away

As noted above, one of the perceived causes of death is the ghostly attack of a dead spouse.

If a woman's husband dies she knows that the spirit may come back to haunt her, so that same night she performs a ritual (*kandapilyatena lao pingi* – literally: “lest he looks back”) at a river or stream. In the early evening, several older women will accompany her. She will look downstream and wait for the spirit of her husband to appear as a shadow or in some other sign such as a strange bird call. Then she will turn her back and cast an old underwear into the water saying: “*Embanya ongo pee kelyona tange nyoo soo puu*” (I am giving your thing back to you. Take it and go). She then returns to the house freed from her former husband.

If a man's wife dies, her spirit will follow him and if he marries again, she might be jealous and even cause him to be in danger. For example, she might affect his thoughts so that he finds himself at the front of a fight, or allow him to die in a car accident, when others survive. Men may perform one of two rituals. In the first, *itamai pambenge*, the man eats bespelled ginger. The strength of the ginger with the spell is thought to be enough to send away the spirit of the deceased. The second way is to drink bespelled water (*endaki kamuingi*).

These rituals, still widely practiced by Enga Catholics, indicate that people have a strong sense of the presence of the spirit of the deceased – a presence that may be malicious and cause harm to the living. Spirits of the dead are not always malicious and may bring assistance or *yombone* (good fortune) in time of need. Today some Christian men and women claim not to be afraid of the spirit of a dead spouse. Some refuse to participate in such rituals, but others take part due to group pressure, or just to eliminate any doubts.

## Funeral

Why go to a funeral? There are many reasons, the principal ones being the following:

- Because you feel sorry for the person who has died and you want to be there to grieve and to bury him or her.

- There is a saying: “*Katenge doko kondo kaeyao kumanda penge*” (People go to funerals to share sorrow with the deceased’s relatives). People go to avoid the shame and embarrassment they would face afterwards, if they did not attend.
- Reciprocity. If people come to the funeral of your relative, then you should reciprocate and attend the funeral when their relative dies.
- Some come with expectations of material gain in terms of money or pigs/pork.

Consider the following account:

*When a relative of a woman from a far distant place dies, you accompany her to the funeral. Perhaps you don’t know who the person who died was or what kind of person they were, but you go to the funeral because your friend’s relative has died. In this funeral you would not cry for the dead person, but you shed tears for the one whom you followed to the funeral. You accompanied her to share the sorrow with her. She would feel grateful for your presence. Most importantly, she will be thinking of doing good to you when you are in a similar situation.*

What do people do in the mourning house? Besides crying, people talk, and the main topics of discussion are two things: what the person was like when they were alive, and secondly, how many pigs and other wealth they should give the maternal relatives.

Often too people will talk about the last words (*kandi pii*) of the person who died. It is believed that the spirit of a person goes before the person actually dies (*onotena nee napae* – the spirit has gone to eat in the place of the dead). The person does not consciously know that they will die, but the *waiyenge* (spirit) does and this will influence the last words of the person.

People will also ask, did he or she die well? It might be a case of *suwi lamo pamo* (happy to go) with a person who has suffered a long time, or for others *waiyange kopeta pamo* (the dead spirit did not leave well). Such might be the case if a person died in an accident, or was burned alive in a house fire.

People will also look for and discuss signs on or around the body. If the body smells people may say that the person did not lead a healthy life and was most probably a thief. If a person dies with some fingers folded (*kingi lakatae*) that is taken as a sign that later two more people will die – either relatives or enemies. Rain in the morning shows that the deceased saw people crying and is crying along with them. During the *kumanda* people might roll up fresh leaves in the afternoon and unwrap them again in the morning. If the leaves are greasy, people will say that someone will be bringing pig meat to the *kumanda*. If the leaves are dry then they cannot expect any pork that day.

## **Contributions Brought to the Funeral**

When the relatives are mourning at a funeral, it is felt that they do not have enough strength to go out to look for their own food. Saying that they feel sorry, neighbours bring contributions such as sugarcane, rice, lamb flaps, Coca Cola, betel nut, tobacco, or money. Those bringing supplies like this are called *minali mandenge*. In fact, they expect some form of repayment (*minali pingi*) during the final funeral feast and this can place a heavy burden on the family of the deceased.

The custom has changed in recent years; some people now seem more interested in determining the wealth and status of the deceased, and if the family is wealthy or of high status they will expect a generous repayment. Moreover, some will come with a contribution, calling the name of the person they are presenting it to – thus leaving a strong impression that the person named is obliged to repay. Some will complain later, saying that the food they brought could have been sold for a large sum of money at the market and why should they be receiving only a small portion of meat at the final feast.

Some churches discourage the *minali* custom because of the burden it brings. Catholics have not been to the fore in this move. However, now many Catholic communities are making it a point of giving help freely (*nisepae*), without expectations, and even avoid being present at the final feast in case it appears that they have come to be repaid.

## **Maternal Relatives**

The relatives of the mother of the deceased are called *wane tange*. When a person dies, especially a male, the *wane tange* often come



shouting, weeping and damaging property belonging to the *akali tange* or the dead person's father's clan. They come to express their sorrow, but do it in a very demanding way. There is no replacement for their *wane* (boy), born from the blood of their daughter, so they demand pigs. In Enga there is a saying, *Wanakunya wane ongo ee makendainya penge* (When someone dies, the mother's clan feels sadder and cries more). People also liken the tears of the *wane tange* to the water that builds up in pandanus leaves and then pours out if the leaf is dislodged from the stem – *Anga petenge minao kulimbalamo*.

There are three times when the *wane tange* may receive pigs from the dead person's clan:

- At the *polenge* (funeral feast) before they depart from the funeral;
- At the *malu kakopenge* (fencing the grave) which takes place some weeks or months after the funeral; and
- When there is *laita pingi* (final death compensation) which completes the funeral process, months or even years after the person's death. Often the mother's clan will give a *panda pingi* (literally: preparing the place) of pigs or money to the deceased's clan in order to prepare the way for the larger *laita pingi* at some time in the future.

People question whether the *wane tange* need to express their grief in such a violent way. Previously they might break a fence or two, or remove some thatch from the roof of a house. However, today they come killing pigs, cutting down coffee trees and the like, to a degree that some clans feel they have to use guns to defend their property against their own relatives.<sup>7</sup> While the father's line might object, mothers of deceased children have said that deep down they take a hidden pleasure in witnessing the destruction around them as they mourn the loss of their child.

## Grief

People from Western countries are often surprised at the degree of grief shown at funerals in Papua New Guinea. People will weep and cry loudly, pull out their hair, and even cut off body parts like fingers or ear lobes. Men are generally less demonstrative in their grief,

though ripping out one's beard at the roots is a very painful process. When someone is genuinely crying loudly people will say that *Lenganya ee naipao makendainya ee epenge* (their tears do not come from the eyes, but from the back of the head). There is another saying: *Embanya ongo maso ee lenge* (Think of those dear to you who have died and cry). In other words, maybe you do not know the dead person well or you do not feel particularly sorry for them or their family, so think of someone close to you who has died – like your mother or grandfather, and then the tears will come welling up and you will cry. Going to a funeral is a chance to weep again for one's loved ones.

A mourning father will wear an old dry tanager leaf buttock covering or else old clothes. Close female relatives may smear white clay or pig fat mixed with ashes on their face, wear a long grass skirt and a net-bag and strings of grey *waku* beads around their neck. Previously women in mourning would wear rope for tying pigs around their waist until it rotted off, but now this is uncommon. Female relatives (particularly in the Laiapu region of Enga) might have a joint of their finger amputated (to be repaid later by presentation of pork), but this is rare now. Previously mourners would emerge from the funeral house for the *polenge* (funerary feast) and mothers would remove their mourning clothes once the *laita pingi* compensation was paid. Nowadays most of these customs are changing; women dress in black clothes and the mourning period is considerably shortened.

Nevertheless, funerals remain a time for expressing grief. For example, at the death of a parent, one might see a child go and fall weeping near the body, saying:

Papa is it true you are dead or are you only sleeping? Get up and let us go!

Papa, get up and say "hello" to me!

Papa, get up and tell me what I can do in my life!

Papa, wherever you go, come and take me with you!

Papa, don't leave me, you must take me too!<sup>8</sup>

The child might kiss the dead parent's face and the dead person's hand to try to make him or her sit up. When people see this they will feel upset and say something like, *Ee laanya pupi nalanya pupyapi*

*ongo pitaka ee laimi* (Some go to a funeral to cry, others to eat, but at the funeral house they all cry).

## Accusations and Tensions

The death of a child often brings great tension in a marriage. The mother will sit in a dark corner of the house. She will not normally leave the house during the daylight hours, and if she has to urinate, she may do so in the place for the pigs near the rear of the house. If she does go outside, she will cover her face so as not to see anyone. Mothers say that during that time they get bitter feelings towards their husband and his clan. They do not want to bear any more children, or look after pigs. Women describe it as time of fog or darkness. It is like a dark cloud descending to envelop everything (*mole soo piti pingi*). The mother of a dead child will accuse her husband, saying that he is sitting as if he has "eaten" the child (*Akalimi wane napala petele lenge*). The father is more free to leave the house if he wishes, but he has to be prepared to deal with the demands of her family – the *wane tange*.

A young man whose wife dies will probably marry again. However a young woman with children whose husband dies faces an uncertain future. Her husband's brother will normally care for her and the children, but then she may have to face the jealous feelings of her sister-in-law, and the possibility that she will be expected to marry the brother and become a co-wife. At the funeral she must be careful how and where she sits or her dead husband's relatives will say that she is a woman *Endame kaitini kandatae petenge* (looking out to the road). In other words she is not really sorry for her husband's death but rather is watching the door to see who will be her new husband!

A woman may refuse to marry again. Sometimes it is said that *Ipata maliso lao petenge* (she is waiting expectantly for her dear one to return). She looks after the house and children and if a man comes to ask her for marriage she will reply that she already has a husband. Perhaps, if she has a male child, she might point to him at this time.

## Burial

Traditionally, *malu pingi* (burial) was a fear-filled exercise that showed little respect for the dead body. Without modern steel spades, shallow

holes were scooped using digging sticks. Bodies would be tied with vines into a crouching position and often buried head down. Women might be buried in a hole scooped from a muddy river bank, possibly with thorns in the hole or with wooden stakes driven into their eye sockets to hamper their return. There were strict rules that women and children were not allowed to attend a burial or to go near a fresh grave. Those who went to bury the dead would avoid meeting people afterwards on the way back to the funeral house, lest those who saw them would die too.

Today dead bodies are usually buried in a prone position in a makeshift coffin or wrapped in a blanket. Still, all the loose soil will be washed from legs or spades, and no one is permitted to leave the place of burial until the grave is properly covered over. In the case of someone who has been killed, relatives will look for a suitable place along the roadside. Burying a person by the roadside normally means that the person was killed by someone and the deceased's clan want compensation or revenge for it. People believe that the spirit of the dead person is around to help them take revenge.

## **Funerary Feast**

The term for funerary feast – *Po-lenge* – literally means “fanning air”. Its actual meaning is to cool the current situation to a normal situation by killing pigs. The funeral party is a visible sign of the end of the mourning period. As one person said, it is like the referee blowing the whistle to start the playing after a foul in the game.

The funeral party is hosted by the clan of the deceased, led by the immediate relatives. The larger portion of the pork is given to the men who are the uncles of the deceased (men from the mother's clan). Other exchanges of valuable items with the clan of the deceased's mother happens at a later feast called the *laita pingi*. The funerary feast is also an opportunity to share food with all those who have done good to the mourning family.

## **Changes**

In recent years there have been many changes in the funeral process. The time of mourning or *kumanda* is shorter, lasting only a few days and not weeks as in the past. Today, one may see women and children

praying and singing religious songs near the gravesite. Green leaves in the past were forbidden but today flowers and leaves may be buried together with the coffin.

Members of some churches, particularly Pentecostal churches, oppose the *kumanda* because they see the whole process as part of a traditional way of life which they have rejected, and the funerary feast as meant to placate the spirit of the dead. Christians from such churches do not eat food from such feasts. These ideas have also influenced members of mainline churches like Catholics and Lutherans. Devout Catholic mothers are beginning to stop eating food from funeral parties. When asked why they are refusing to take or eat from parties for the dead, they say: "I am doing it on my own just to strengthen my faith." For these Catholics, they see it as a form of penance. Others intentionally absent themselves from the funerary feast so as not to appear to be expecting to be compensated for their help during the mourning period.

Some Pentecostal churches have developed the custom of the *saka kumanda* or *saka katao polenge* (funeral for the living). At such events the immediate relatives host the funeral feast while an elderly man or woman is still alive. Because the person who is the focus of attention is still alive it is like any ordinary party and thus church members can participate. The other reason is so that the person who will die can sit and eat with his or her own friends. Some liken it to the last supper Jesus had with His disciples.

## Experience

Before considering appropriate pastoral responses to death and dying in Enga, I include the personal account of a young Catholic Enga man when his parents died.

*My father died in August 1998, my mother died two months later, on a Thursday, while we were having our Diocesan Plan evaluation meeting. It was a quarter before six o'clock in the morning when I heard someone calling me. I sat up in the bed to listen. I heard someone saying that my mother was dead. I pretended that I had not heard clearly and called back for clarification. The call once again confirmed her death.*

*I could hardly believe my ears. I sat up and asked myself, "Is my mum really dead?" "No!" I said to myself, "She can't do this to me." My head was filled all kinds of thoughts. How will I look after my pigs, house, gardens and my two small brothers? Who is going to feed us? How will I survive without her? I paused for a moment and said. "It can't be true, my mother was not sick and she couldn't have died. She can't leave us like this. Does she know that there is no one to care for us?"*

*I decided to go closer to the house and see for myself. On the way I heard the calls about her death and cries coming from my house. My heart sank, torn in pieces. My legs trembled and I could hardly walk up a small hill.*

*When I reached my house I saw her dead body being placed on a mattress. I went on my knees to hug her and say goodbye, but I felt faint and lay close to her. I knew that this was the end of everything.*

*I felt that half of my life was gone. Without my parents I could not succeed in anything. The light has just being blown out and I felt that I was in total darkness. Would I be able to see light on the other side? How? How am I going to manage my life in the long run without her? I felt too weak to talk or to do anything. I went away from my relatives to cry and to think of my mother.*

*After a while several church workers came to the funeral house. I felt strengthened. I was accompanied by prayer groups and youths from my community. That gave me the strength to get over my mother's death.*

*When the funeral party was over I stopped thinking of her death. But I still think of her when I see my gardens covered with bush, and the empty house, and when there is no food in the house.*

The above true story helps us understand the feelings that go through someone's mind when a parent dies. It also expresses the gratitude the person feels for the intervention of the parish priest and pastoral workers. What are some of the possibilities for priests or pastoral workers to minister to people at this important moment in their lives?

## Pastoral Responses

1. Sickness and death is the concern, not only of a person's relatives, but of the whole Christian community into which they have been baptised. As can be seen in the experience in the section above, people appreciate the visit of a pastoral worker, or other church workers including pastors, priests or sisters. Expatriates find it difficult to express grief in very demonstrative ways, but the people understand this. Church workers can help stress that donations of food brought to a *kumanda* do not need to be repaid. They have come to share their sympathy and faith freely with the family of the deceased. In Chimbu the church encourages a pastoral presence at funerals to help quell talk about *sanguma* or witchcraft. In Enga such a presence can help discourage talk about payback and fighting.

2. Prayer is appropriate and expected at funerals. Some times are more appropriate than others. During the day people will be busy with mourning, meeting visitors, and organising food and water, but the long nights in the funeral house are a good time to lead prayers. We could do more to develop prayers in Pidgin and the local language which are not simply translations of Western prayers, but which use images familiar to the people. For example at the time of a funeral people often use images of *kame ita yukuo pamo* (a broken fence) or of *anda lakyo pamo* (a collapsed house).

3. Pastoral care does not begin with the funeral. Someone commented that coming only to a funeral is like asking someone who is already wet to share your umbrella. People welcome the visit of a church representative when they are ill. There is a common saying in Enga, *Kumatatopa ee late ongo nambame nakandato?* (How would I know/see that you are crying for me because I will be already dead?). In other words, a person needs care while they are still alive. Having someone speak openly about what is worrying them, or the laying on of hands, are helpful pastoral practices in such situations.

4. Pastoral workers need to be particularly sensitive to the strain on marriages at the time of the death of a child. They can talk and pray about putting the dead child and the parents and family into God's hands, and for them eventually to find the gift of peace. The family will gradually come to the realisation that the child is dead and will

not return (*kumalamo kumo pyomo*). Yet, for the rest of their lives, when they see children playing who would be the same age as the one they lost, they will feel a sense of loss. It would be helpful if some of the *wane tange* (mother's clan) would be present during the discussion and prayer.

5. The pastor may also find it opportune to keep the focus on the dead person and their family, rather than on issues such as compensation, which only impose an additional burden. The *wane tange* could be encouraged to find less violent ways of expressing their grief. To end the funeral, both father's and mother's clans could meet for an appropriate liturgy followed by a simple meal to celebrate the beginning of normal life for both the family and the clan. The funeral meal should be aimed at ending the mourning period and the beginning of ordinary activities like going out to gardens, speaking in public, washing and dressing in clean clothes to go church and other places.

6. Church representatives need to be very careful about the terminology used. People often translate the vernacular term for the spirit of the dead as "Satan" or "Devil". Even the term for "ghost" has negative connotations. The original translation of the Creed in Enga had Jesus, after his death, descending into the *timongo andaka pea-pyaa* (house of the ghosts). Now thinking people change the wording to the *kumapae andaka pea-pyaa* (place of the dead). We can give Christian teaching about the fate of the Christian spirit and our belief in the resurrection with Christ. Spirits of the dead are not lonely and roaming around, but are with God. If a feast is hosted while a person is still alive, pastoral workers can talk about healing, reconciliation and thanksgiving in the Last Supper which Jesus invited his disciples to share with him before his death.

7. The Church can encourage faithful people to develop appropriate functional substitutes for practices such as *waiyenge nyingi* (bringing home the spirit) and *kandapilyetalano lao pingi* (sending the spirit away).<sup>9</sup>

Such functional substitutes might involve the use of Christian symbols such as the cross, the Bible, or blessed water, but would also take seriously cultural symbols and beliefs. For example in a Christian ceremony the priest or pastor could refer to the words of Jesus at the



tomb of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44), and then ask the deceased's spirit to accompany them in the hope of one day rising with Christ. The Catholic tradition believes in the communion of saints; as an alternative to "sending the spirit away", a Catholic woman with prayer and using blessed water could speak directly to her deceased husband, asking in the name of Jesus that his spirit be with them only for doing God's will and never for harm. Evangelical Christians who do not pray to or for the dead could well develop their own functional substitutes that do not completely oppose Melanesian beliefs in life after death. Such functional substitutes would no doubt help people feel less attracted to employing the services of a *nee pingi akali* or village doctor.

## Conclusion

Churches in Enga have not dealt adequately with the spiritual and emotional experiences associated with death and dying. The event of serious illness and death is the least evangelised dimension of people's lives. The same might be said in many other cultural groups in Papua New Guinea. Traditional beliefs associated with cosmic spirituality are "in the blood" and even if suppressed or denied continue to influence people's lives (Gibbs 2004:137). For many Christians it means living a double life trying to integrate cultural beliefs and values with Christian faith – particularly the Easter message of the resurrection.

By delving into the current beliefs and practices associated with death and funerals, this paper opens the way for a deeper understanding of the human and spiritual need on such occasions. The faith community will surely benefit from further study and reflection on what people are trying to accomplish through ritual practices associated with death and dying. The outcome of such reflection will allow us to see more clearly possible pastoral responses.

## ENDNOTES

1 I wish to acknowledge the help of many Enga people who shared their stories and their ideas on this topic. In particular I thank Ms Regina Tanda and Mr Philip Maso.

- 2 Many of the opinions in this paper come from a five day workshop conducted by the writer with eighteen people – men and women from various parts of the Enga Province. The workshop was at Holi Spirit Senta Par, 14-18 March 2005.
- 3 *Malakulimi pingi* is to aim a concealed human bone at an enemy in order to kill.
- 4 Workshop participants from Par gave the example of a man who stole the statue of Our Lady from a shrine near the church, damaging the head of the statue. He was killed shortly afterwards in a tribal fight by a bullet through the head.
- 5 Sometimes a person will appear to be waiting to die. People say that this is because normally a person dies at the same hour that they were born (*Mandenge gii malisalamo*). So if one was born early in the morning, one will die early in the morning also; a dying person will wait for that time.
- 6 Today the container might be a glass bottle, or even a handbag.
- 7 In March 2005 members of the Potealini clan used guns to defend their property from the Lanekep clan who were the *wane tange* coming for a funeral. Several people were injured by shotgun pellets.
- 8 “*Papa, em tru yu dai o yu giaman slip stap, kirap na mitupels ken go!*  
*Papa yu kirap na tok helo long mi!*  
*Papa yu kirap na tokim mi long hau bai mi stap long laip tiam bilong mi!*  
*Papa wanem kain rot yu go long en yu kam na kisim mi na bai mitupela go wantaim!*  
*Papa yu noken lusim mi, yu mas kisim mi!”*
- 9 Oscar Chipungco refers to the “assumption of rituals and traditions as substitutes or illustrations” of ritual elements in Church rites. This means “substituting Roman elements with the people’s ritual ingredients that possess a similar, if not equivalent meaning” (Chipungco p.83).

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