

SCHOOL OF MISSION AND THEOLOGY

**SAKALAVA PERSPECTIVE ON AFTERLIFE AS A CHALLENGE TO
THE CHRISTIAN MISSION IN THE NORTH WEST OF MADAGASCAR**

BY

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- Cf. : refer to, compare to
- FJKM: Fiangonan'I Jesoa Kristy eto Madagasikara.
- FLM: Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy
- SBL Bible Book Abbreviations
- SALT: Sekoly Ambony Loterana momba ny Teolojia.

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Chapter one

INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that the belief in life after death has existed in almost every country in the world since long ago. However, each country, each society and even each tribe have its own understanding about what this afterlife entails.

This thesis analyzes the Sakalava's perspective on afterlife in relation to the Christian eschatology. Sakalava tradition and Christianity are two different religious entities but they might have somewhat similar ideological perspectives on how they view the afterlife. Conversely, they might have totally different understandings of the eschatological views.

In this chapter I shall present the background, problems and motivation. In the following subchapters I will present the purpose, and delimitation, followed by the methodology and sources used along with an explanation concerning my research. Next, I will look at some previous research. The final subchapter is the outline of the paper.

1.1 Background, Problems and Motivation

The Sakalava is a large tribe living in western Madagascar who still follows a royal hierarchy system. For this tribe, the concept of afterlife is of predominant importance. Due to the lack of written accounts, the Sakalava people understand life and afterlife through oral tradition, transmitting both tradition and practical experience from generation to generation. According to Sakalava tradition, the visible world and the invisible world (spiritual world beyond death) are understood together. So, they acknowledge that there is another spiritual life or existence after death, which they believe is the community of the ancestors. Since the idea of life after death so meaningfully shapes the character and attitude of the present day Sakalava, the mission of the Church is rather difficult.

From the Christian point of view, the center and climax of the Christian doctrine is the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christians believe that, as a result of Jesus' death and resurrection, they have forgiveness, freedom, blessings, protection, peace, and eventually eternal life. So, Christians also believe that there is another existence beyond death. Knowing what

really happens in the intermediate state, the period between death and resurrection, is dependent on the idea of soul sleep or the immortality of the soul in this interim state.

In reality, although Christian missionaries have proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ for over 150 years, few Sakalava people in the western region of Madagascar have become Christians. Before 1971, the Reformed Church (FJKM) was engaged in evangelization in the north of the island. Therefore, it can be said that this is a new area for the Malagasy Lutheran Church (FLM) when compared with the Reformed Church as well as most of the Christians are not indigenous, the Sakalava. Being a Christian for 23 years and having worked as a theologian for 14 years in this region, I have noticed that it is not easy to preach the gospel or to convince this tribe due to their strong religious and cultural tradition. Therefore, the thesis is motivated by a desire for getting more Sakalava into the church.

The concept of afterlife is a relevant problem among the Malagasy, Christians and non-Christians alike. The two main questions are; how to understand the Sakalava belief of afterlife vis-à-vis Christian teaching in order to facilitate the mission of the Church, and how to approach the Sakalava and maintain the Sakalava converts.

1.2 Purpose and Delimitation

This thesis will not primarily aim to criticize the Sakalava tradition. Neither is the purpose of this thesis to promote forcing the Sakalava converts to totally refuse all their traditions. Indeed, the purpose of this thesis is threefold: Firstly, it is aimed at understanding the Sakalava tradition of afterlife in order to make it easier to proclaim the gospel. Secondly, this thesis' intention is to know how to approach the Sakalava people and to maintain the Sakalava converts. Finally, it is aimed at showing the goodness of Christianity, particularly highlighting the gift and the hope of the eternal life through Jesus' death and his resurrection. In other words, the objective of this thesis is to help the Sakalava people find peace, freedom, and eternal life in and through Jesus Christ, and to equip Christians in finding good ways of approaching and maintaining the Sakalava people in Christianity.

Both Christian doctrine and Sakalava tradition offer broad insights and explanations of the afterlife. Because of limited time and space, I plan to emphasize more the idea of the intermediate state related to every human's destiny and nature in God's plan in the creation and the afterlife. Therefore, I do not intend to say more about the final judgment, the second coming

of Jesus Christ. Rather, I will talk about the Sakalava and Christian understanding of God and death, as well as the importance of the Sakalava ancestors and the Christians' Lord, Jesus Christ.

Christianity is a religion with various understandings of some points such as the idea of baptism, the Lord's Supper, marriage, and the afterlife. In this paper, I will only use some theologians' ideas and pick from few specific denominations including the Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Reformed Church, the Anglican Church, and the Lutheran Church. I have used two criteria for choosing these denominations. Firstly, they can be found in Madagascar and that gives people the chance to discern them easily. Secondly, they are some of the older denominations in the history of the Church and still have strong theological basis.

Moreover, the Sakalava is one of biggest tribes in Madagascar as it has occupied most of the western part of the island from the south to the north. This big tribe has sub-kingdoms, which have some traditions in common as well as some practices that are different. This thesis will be based especially on the Sakalava in the North West, where I am used to living and working.

1.3 Methodology and sources

This thesis will be presented under the discipline of systematic theology. It will be based on the doctrine of salvation and eschatology. However, it will be mingled with socio-anthropological and historical attitudes in Chapter II to make the Sakalava tribe more understandable. Also, in order to make this thesis relevant to the Malagasy context; I will have practical and missiological lines in chapter IV.

On a theological basis, the Bible will be used as a primary source, supported by dogmatic texts such as *Christian Dogmatics* Volume I and II, *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics* Volume XIII, *Eschatology* by Johnson Stephenson and ideas from other theologians. Particularly, I have taken advantage of using the book entitled *Grave and Gospel* by Berentsen as it presents parallel research about ancestor worship and the Christian faith in Japan.

Data from my interviews will also serve as a primary source for understanding specifically the Sakalava tradition and Christians' opinions. The semi-structure interview was the most appropriate method to use in order to give an opportunity to both the interviewer and the interviewee to have a good interaction. Also, it gave me a chance to ask questions related to the topic in addition to the series of detailed questions used during the interviews. In fact, I had 5 main questionnaires which had two versions. One version was general question for all

interviewees where I only asked about the Sakalava understanding of supernatural beings (God, ancestors, and divinities); the Sakalava understanding of death and funeral rites; and the understanding of the afterlife (ancestral land, ancestor worship). Whereas if the interviewee was a Christian, I used an additional questionnaire concerning the Christian faith with questions about the weakness and strengths in the Church's strategy of approaching and maintaining the Sakalava, as well as the practical life of the Christian in relation to traditional beliefs.

Concerning the informants, I had an occasion to meet various people, men and women, from the Sakalava and other tribes, who were professional pastors or lay people, lived in the rural and urban, and poor and rich. I was very lucky to have an opportunity to talk with one Sakalava king, but no commoners from the Sakalava non-Christians could be interviewed because it is not easy for them to share their tradition with people outside their tribe. Two group interviews are included in my material.

The number of the interviewees is about 20 and all of them were over 40 years of age in order to get reliable facts. I tried to collect my data from different places, in towns and in the countryside; in the capital and on the coast, in the North and in the South of the Western part of the Island. I had time to go to Fianarantsoa to the Lutheran Graduated Seminary (SALT) and the Great Roman Catholic Seminary to collect data in their libraries. My short program with my interviewees is as follows:

Two Lutheran pastors (P1, 06 July 2012; P2, 09 July 2012), 3 Reformed pastors (R1, 23 June 2012; R2, 25 June 2012; R3, 18 July 2012), 2 Sakalava converted Catechists (C1, 20 June 2012; C2, 02 July 2012), 2 lay Sakalava converts (S1, 22 July 2012; S2, 04 August 2012), one lay Christian from another tribe (L, 14 July 2012), and one king (K1, 29 June 2012). I also interviewed one group of lay Christians (G1, 28 June 2012) and one group of pastors (G2, 23 July 2012).

Documents from some anthropological and socio-historical books are also useful supplements to the data gathered from my interviews. The book written by Robert Jaovelo-Dzao entitled *Rites et Transes à Madagascar: Angano, Joro et Tromba Sakalava* is very useful for providing a thorough account of the Sakalava tradition, including the notion of God, ancestors, spirit possession, cult of the king's relics, death and the afterlife. Similarly, the book by William Gardinier entitled *Witchcraft and Sorcery in a Pastoral Society: The Central Sakalava of West Madagascar* is very helpful in understanding the Sakalava tradition.

1.4 Previous Research

Some of the written sources about the Sakalava tribe have been mentioned above. It is obvious that most of the topics or the writings about the Sakalava are created by historians or the anthropologists, like Sophie Goedefroit's book, *A l'Ouest de Madagascar. Les Sakalava du Menabe*; and Lesley A. Sharp's book, *The Possessed and the Dispossessed: Spirits, Identity, and Power in a Madagascar Migrant Town*. In addition, Roman Catholic priests or theologians, such as Robert Jaovelo-Dzao, Razafitsalama, are more advanced in knowing the cultural themes than the Protestant theologians because they exceed at inculturation and contextualization. As a result, many people, including the Sakalava, are easily attracted to the Roman Catholic Church.

Concerning Protestant writings about the Sakalava tradition, only few theologians or pastors have tried to write about these. A few of these are presented here: Jaohindy is a Lutheran pastor who wrote the thesis entitled *Ny Sakalava Avaratra Andrefana eo anatrehan'ny Fitoriana Filazantsara* (The North Western Sakalava vis-à-vis the Proclamation of the Gospel) in 1994. He presents a threefold problem that is causing difficulties for the Protestant mission towards the Sakalava. The problem is related to the existence of the Roman Catholic Church and the Muslim, the impact of the colonization, and the weakness of the Church. As a result, the Sakalava do not receive Protestant messengers or the gospel that Christians bring.

Milavonjy Richardson, a Lutheran pastor, wrote the thesis concerning the Sakalava Menabe entitled *Ny Fiheveran'ny Sakalava momba an'Andriamanitra sy ny Razana sy ny Fampianaran'i Lotera sy ny Olona Masina* in 1993 (Sakalava Understanding of God and Ancestors and Luther's Teaching and the Saints). Milavonjy realized that the Sakalava converts are not satisfied with Christianity due to the lack of strong Christian training and lack of good Christian fellowship. As result, the converts easily return back to their former practices. For him, as a solution, it is imperative to start with contextualization to learn the Sakalava culture well, and to show that the Christian God is life and loves fellowship.

Fiadana Gabriel, a Reformed pastor in North West of Madagascar, wrote a book entitled *Ny Fanafahana ny Olona amin'ny Fanompoam-tsampy amin'ny Faritra Sakalava* (Liberation of people from idolatry in the Sakalava Region) in 1993. What Fiadana recognized was the fact that the Sakalava people were bound by Satan's hands. He tried to find solutions for liberating the Sakalava from that bondage. For him, it is not enough to promise people the life beyond without caring for the life on earth. So, it is necessary to show the Sakalava the goodness of Christianity

with visible and tangible things together with the promise of the eternal life. Also, due to the lack of pastors, the Church ought to train and to prepare many pastors, evangelists, and Christians to be ready for the evangelization.

1.5 Outline of the paper

To deal with this paper, I shall divide it into five chapters. The first chapter contains the backgrounds, problems and motivation; the purpose and delimitation, followed by the methodology, sources and the previous research.

In the second chapter I will explain the Sakalava understanding of the afterlife. It consists of the Sakalava background, the Sakalava supernatural beings, preparation and installation into the life in the hereafter, and the relationship between life and the afterlife.

In chapter III I will describe the Christian understanding of the afterlife. It includes God the creator and creation as well as the Christian understanding of the death.

In chapter IV I will analyze the Sakalava tradition and the Christian doctrine on the afterlife. Also, chapter IV will include the practical and missiological projects for the Sakalava which embrace the ways of approaching the Sakalava and the maintenance of the Sakalava converts.

Chapter two

THE SAKALAVA UNDERSTANDING OF THE AFTERLIFE

In this chapter, I will present how the Sakalava views of the afterlife relate to the whole of their life. The concept of life after death plays a crucial role in Sakalava tradition, because life here on earth is not seen as the end of someone's existence. These beliefs shape their attitudes and their behaviors; life on earth is, in fact, a preparation for the afterlife. To understand these beliefs, it is necessary to examine their history, their religion and culture, their activities and their relationships in the society in all circumstances. So, first, I will explain the Sakalava background. Then, I am going to present the Sakalava supernatural beings. After that, I will describe how the Sakalava prepare for the life hereafter by installing the departed into the place of the living dead. Finally, I will explain the relationship between the life on earth and the life hereafter.

2.1 The Sakalava background

Like all other tribes in Madagascar, the history of the Sakalava tribe is very complex. Although the origin of the Malagasy people has been the subject of much academic dispute, and is only partially resolved, it is believed that all Malagasy people are a mixture of Indonesian and African ethnicity (Mervyn 1995, 10). It is confirmed that the entire west coast from the Ambongo to the Tsiribihina, was occupied, at some point, by the African Kaffir language-speaking peoples (Deschamps 1972, 45). Therefore, it is assumed that some of the traditions of the Malagasy, especially the west coastal Sakalava, must come from Africa. In my opinion, however, since culture is subject to change and because the Malagasy pass on their history only through oral tradition, these African traditions have certainly undergone change and are now mixed with other traditions. I believe the Sakalava culture can be considered unique although its traditions seem to be mixed with others. I am going to talk about the historical context of the Sakalava and its socio-political organization.

2.1.1 Historical contexts of the Sakalava people

As far as Sakalava origin is concerned, it is said that this tribe originates from the dynasty of Andriambolamena led by *mpanjaka* (King) Rabaratavokoko from the south of Madagascar. In the fifteenth century, a group of warriors from this dynasty, well-equipped with arms and Arabian tools of divination, conquered certain other groups (Mervyn 1995, 59). By gaining control of the region of Menabe-Bengy, Andriamandazoala), the successor of Rabaratavokoko, became the founder of the Maroserana dynasty, the kingdom of the Sakalava Menabe. He married two sisters from the indigenous *Hirijy* and had two children, one with each of them: Andriamandresy and Andriamisara (Estrade 1985, 164; Lombard 1973, 15). The Maroserana dynasty adopted some of the indigenous traditions into their own culture, specifically the cult of the relics of ancestors and spirit possession (Lombard 1973, 14-18).

The now ruling tribe of Sakalava Menabe contains the sub tribes including Sakalava Masikoro, Sakalava Vezo, and Sakalava Mikeha and so on. These sub-tribes are identified by the ecological characters of their environment and their production activities. For example, those who live near the coast and work as fishermen are called Sakalava Vezo, while those who live farther inland are farmers and are called Sakalava Masikoro (Goedefroit 1998, 82-83). My informant (S1, 22 July 2012) said that it is easier to preach the gospel to Sakalava Vezo than to the Sakalava Masikoro. He added that the Norwegian missionaries originally come into contact with the former but not the latter, since the Sakalava Vezo lived on the coast. The majority of the Sakalava converts in the region of Sakalava Menabe are from among the Sakalava Vezo.

The Sakalava tribe is divided into two kingdoms. The Sakalava Boeny, who will be the main focus of this thesis, branched off from the Sakalava Menabe. Andriamandisoarivo, the grandson of Andriamandazoala, split from the Sakalava Menabe, settling to the north and taking with him relics of his grandfather Andriamisara and his father Andriandahifotsy as proof of his descent from the Masorenana dynasty (Mervyn 1995, 59). In so doing, he became the founder of the Zafimbolamena dynasty and the kingdom of the Sakalava Boeny. As he was moving north, he conquered the places of Antanandro, Ambongo, Andranomavo, Mahavavy atsimo, crossed the river of Betsiboka, reached Mananadabo and finally arrived at the place of the Antalaotra tribe, Betomboka. He eventually settled in Trongay, which is not far from the town of Mahajanga (Randriamamonjy 2001, 130). Later when the majority of the indigenous Antalaotra tribe moved to live in another place, Mahajanga became the capital city of the kingdom of Sakalava Boeny.

It is worth mentioning already that almost all of the places conquered by Andriamandisoarivo, such as Mahajamba, Betsiboka, Andranomavo, etc., are part of the present day Mahajanga Synod (SPBM) in the Malagasy Lutheran Church and most of the people living in these places still follow the Sakalava traditions. The central identity of the Sakalava, both culturally and religiously, is characterized by their respect for the Sakalava royalty, both living and dead king. It leads me to describe how the Sakalava society is organized.

2.1.2 Socio-political organization

One of my main questions during my field work was asking my interviewees to give a reason for why so few Sakalava people have accepted Christianity in spite of the fact that the gospel of Jesus Christ has been preached among them for many years. More than a half of my informants (R1, R2, R3, G1, P1, P2, and K) gave almost the same answer, all indicating that the Sakalava is a special tribe with very strong traditions. Some added that no one can separate or discern the culture and the religion in their beliefs and practices to show that it is not easy for the Sakalava to leave their tradition and become Christian.

Basically, the Sakalava society is a well-organized royal system of small government with hierarchical authorities in place from the king down to the lowest slaves. This royal hierarchy has its focal point on the veneration to the royalty, both the living and the dead, but especially the worship of the dead, i.e., the ancestors.

As mentioned above, during the migration northwards, Andriamandisoarivo took with him the *dady* (relics) of his grandfather and his father to symbolize the legitimacy of his power. In so doing, he continued the ideological system of his lineage in his new kingdom, the Boeny. He believed that his kingdom and his authority were from God according to the royal succession and genealogical ideology. In the royal family, there is believed to be “a line of male ancestors who succeeded from father to son, the first is the heir of God and the last is the father of the reigning king” (Lombard 1973, 21). One of my informants (P2, 09 July 2012) told me that Sakalava Boeny are proud of being direct descendants from God, due to their ancestor Baratavokoko being a son of god. So, Andriamandisoarivo, his successors, and the Sakalava people believe the Sakalava kingdom has been established by God. Moreover, one Sakalava myth confirms that statement as follows:

“God (Ndrenanahary) and the chief (mpanjaka) shared the same place. When they were thus living together god saw that the chief had a good personality, so he said: ‘I will give you high honor but we will no longer share the same place. I want you go down, I want you have people, I want you have a following (fanjaka), you will be chief (mpanjaka; literally: He by virtue of whom a fanjaka exists), to be respected by people, to be obeyed by people, which will add to your esteem. You will be below there; I will be up here keeping an eye on you. The earth below there will be yours: You are the proprietor of the land (tompon-tany). I, god up here, who makes hands and feet, who makes everything, who gives life to everything I can give you life to, I will watch. I have given you honour, so do not entertain inappropriate thoughts because you will be the proprietor of the land. The earth will be yours, your following will be yours, everything will be yours” (Gardinier 1976, 114).

This myth shows, then, that the Sakalava people accepted all the situations in their society because Andriamandisoarivo himself was *mpanjaka vaovao* (the new king) at that time. His successors have followed the same ideology and they have led the people according to it since that time.

The *mpanjaka* (king or chief) is the first and foremost entity in the earthly hierarchy of the Sakalava. He is considered to be God’s representative on earth and even a *Zanahary*¹ (a God) himself, since his authority is given to him by God (Fiadana 1993, 70). *Ampanjaka*, the king, is called *Zanahary an-tany*, God on earth (Jaovelo-Dzao 1996, 247). He is, the owner of the land, or the earth, and is the protector of the kingdom (Gardinier 1976, 114-115). As a result, all people are required to honor and respect him. Those who do not want to admire him, it is believed, will receive punishment from ‘God and/or from the ancestors. (P1, 06 July 2012)

Aside from the royal descendants, all the *mpanjaka*’s followers are classified as the king’s servants or slaves. Among the non-royal peoples, there are two main classes: the *vohitsy* (commoners) and the *andevo* (slaves). These classes are again divided according to their chief responsibilities; the many tasks divided among the commoners and the slaves. For instance, from among the *vohitsy*, the *manantany* are assigned the most important duties and given positions immediately below the *mpanjaka*. A *manantany* might have the status of main ceremonial assistant and/or the minister of war or minister of the palace. A ceremonial assistant might even be given the special position of acting as the earthly representative of the ancestors of the chief (Lombard 1973, 138; Gardinier 1976, 119-127). An example of a position assigned to the slaves is the group named *jongoa* who are awarded the responsibility of fulfilling the funeral duties when the king is dead (P1, P2, K, R2...)

¹ *Zanahary*, which is a combination of “Zay” and “nahary”, means literally the one who creates.

In summary, the reasons for the people have to respect the king are these: Firstly, they are taught very early in life that the living king receives his authority from God, so to esteem him is a requirement. Secondly, they expect to receive blessings and peace in their lives through their allegiance to and their obedience to the king. Thirdly, people respect and fear the ancestors of the king. Indeed, they have real fear of a wide variety of threats and punishments such as loss of property, loss of family sicknesses, loss of themselves, and so on (C2, 02 July 2012). Finally, they accept their situation due to a lack of knowledge of any other choice.

So the each Sakalava has their place in society and knows his/her tasks and responsibilities in relation to each other. In addition, the Sakalava have four major practices that bind their lives together: *fanompoa mafana* (warm services) which are performed when the king is dead; *fanompoa manitsy* (cold services) which involve the cult of the ancestors, *dady* (relics of the king's ancestors); the veneration of commoner's ancestors; and the *tromba* (spirit possession). So, it is also necessary to discuss the supernatural beings in the Sakalava culture, particularly god(s) and ancestors.

2.2 The supernatural beings:

One thing that made me puzzled during my interviews was that I got different responses to my question about god(s) in the lives of the Sakalava people. I realized that the Sakalava people themselves are baffled and do not know exactly to whom they should pray or believe in. Fortunately, one well-known Catholic priest, Jaovelo-Dzao Robert, has written a book entitled *Mythes, Rites et Transes à Madagascar* which provides an explanation of the Sakalava thought about god(s). Gardinier William also wrote a book, *Witchcraft and Sorcery in a pastoral society: The Central Sakalava of the West Madagascar*, helping me to understand the ideology of god in the Sakalava tradition.

The Sakalava people have much to say about the ancestors. In fact, they have much more contact with the ancestors than with god(s). I am going to use the Estrade's Book, *Une Culte de Possession à Madagascar: Le Tromba* as a supplement to the information gained from my interviews. I shall explain first the Sakalava belief in God, then the concept of the ancestors.

2.2.1 God(s): Supreme Being and divinities:

I received different answers from my informants when I asked them about the existence of God and their belief in God. Before mentioning their ideas, I would like to mention different names

for God in the Malagasy language. Official Malagasy uses the word *Andriamanitra*² when referring to God, while the Sakalava dialects use *Ndrenanahary*³ or *Zanahary* or *Ndragnahary*. So, *Andriamanitra* is used in the Bible but Christians are free to use whatever dialect form they like. All the various terms for God can be found in the Christian hymn books or songs.

When talking about God, some of my informants said that the Sakalava God is the same as the Christian God (K, 29 June 2012; R1, 23 June 2012). This god is the one who created everything, including human beings: *Ndrenanahary nahary tongotra aman-tanana* (God who creates the feet and the hands). Other of my informants said that the Sakalava people believe in a single god but he is different from the God the Christians believe in. One Sakalava convert said the following:

“Sakalava people believe in the existence of the God creator but they still consider the spirit possession (*tromba*) and the temple (*doany*) as gods. They only have relationship with the tromba but not with God and the tromba do not allow them to have contacts with God. The tromba tells them: ‘You ask me and I will ask God for you’. Sakalava people speak to the ghost or the phantom (*angatra*), the four Andriamisara and small spirit possessions. They worship to Beelzebub- the leader of the demons- but not to Jehovah⁴ (C1, 20 June 2012)..

This informant (C1) is trying to say that the God of the Sakalava is not the Christian God Jehovah. Also, he is trying to make clear that the Sakalava consider many things as gods and these latter gods are teams of demons with Beelzebub as their leader. He confessed that before his conversion to Christianity he did not know anything about God -Jehovah- and his beliefs were in line with the Sakalava beliefs about God and gods.

Other informants (P2, G1,..) stated that the Sakalava people do believe in the existence of an single God but they prefer to communicate with the ancestors instead of with God because: Firstly, like Africans and all Malagasy, they think that God is in a very remote place and he cannot be reached except through ancestral spirits and human mediums, which are the *tromba* in Sakalava tradition. Secondly, they do not want to disturb God often because he might be tired.

² Andriamanitra is a combination of two words: “*andriana*” which means king or master, and “*manitra*” which means good smell.

³ *Ndrenanahary* and *Ndranahary* are similar. “*Ndre*” and “*Ndra*” refer to the King or the master; and the word “*nahary*” is the verb to create in simple past.

⁴ Mino ny fisian’andriamanitra mpamorona ny Sakalava fa mbola heverin’izy ireo ho Andriamanitra koa ny tromba sy ny doany. Tsy tena mifandray amin’Andriamanitra mpamorona izay ambony indrindra ny Sakalava fa ireo tromba ireo no mifandray aminy. Izay tiana holazaina izany dia lazaina amin’ireto tromba ireto. Angatra ny olo maty no iresahandreo: ‘nareo mangataka aminaka de zaho managataka amin’azy (hoy ny tromba). Ny tromba no misakana ny olona tsy hiresaka amin’atra fa lazainy fa tsy hain’olona. Tsy mifandray mihitsy izany Andriamanitra sy ny olona. Andriamisara efa dahy sy ny tromba madinika ireny no ifandraisany. Lehiben’ny tromba: bezeboba no ataon-dreo Andriamanitra fa tsy Jehovah”

They think that when God is tired of them, he might punish them, make them sick and maybe even kill them. When someone dies, they say that *Zanahary disaka aminy or Zanahary disaka* (God is exhausted by him or her) (P2, 09 July 2012).

The written documents I used, say that, like all Malagasy, the Sakalava put *Zanaharibe* (the Great God) at the top of the hierarchy of divinities; in other words, he is the Supreme Being. *Zanaharibe* is the creator of the heavens and the earth, the hands and the feet, the animals and their respective partners, the stars and the moon, and so forth. He is also the provider, the sustainer and the supervisor of everything that exists (Jaovelo-Dzao 1985, 61, 231; Gardinier 1976, 33).

However, even though the Sakalava are basically monotheistic, they believe that *Zanaharibe* does not work alone; that there are a host of other divinities who fulfill the creation of human beings; for example, *Rampanohitaolana* is the maker of bones, *Rampanaohozatra* is the maker of muscles and nerves, *Rampanaonofa* is the maker of flesh, *Rampanaohoditra* is the maker of skin, *Rampanaora* is the maker of blood, the life-giver, and *Rampamelombelona* is the provider of breath and the mind (Jaovelo-Dzao 1985, 20, 61).

Moreover, they believe in many divinities relating to several perspectives in terms of cosmos, omnipresence, anthropomorphism, gender, attribute, transcendence and immanence, and trinity:

1. *Zanahary agnabo*, divinity(ies) of the superior region
2. *Zanahary ambany*, divinity(ies) of the inferior region
3. *Zanahary antigniana*, divinity(ies) of the East
4. *Zanahary andrefa*, divinity(ies) of the West
5. *Zanahary avaratra*, divinity(ies) of the North
6. *Zanahary atimo*, divinity(ies) of the South
7. *Zanahary lahy*, male divinity(ies)
8. *Zanahary vavy*, female divinity (ies)

and there is still *zanaka Zanahary*, son of god.

The Sakalava believe in the seven floors of creation, the place where different divinities reside: The highest place, on the 7th floor, is for *Zanahary anabo/ Zanahary malandy* (white)/ *Zanaharibe*. Then, the 6th floor to the 3rd floor is for different divinities according to the arrangement. After that, the 2nd floor is for human beings and animals, and the lowest floor and the depths are for *Zanabatrotroka* (Jaovelo-Dzao 1985, 20; 60-65).

Every tribe and country from around the world has concepts about god(s). In my opinion, the Sakalava have good concepts about God. However, I realize the Sakalava do not have a clear understanding about which God they worship and believe in because they have so many *Zanahary(s)*. In other words, Sakalava people are confused about the multiple use of the name of *Zanahary(-)*, given that they believe in only one God. This confusion and the fact that *Zanahary(s)* is/are far removed from them, the Sakalava usually depend on their ancestors to act as mediators. Gardinier (1976, 33) says that:

“God is only very remotely concerned with everyday life. He is often called ‘the one who makes hands and feet’, yet once he has made hands and feet he loses interest in the well-being of his creation. People never pray to him...”

How do the Sakalava understand the ancestors then?

2.2.2 Ancestors

The Malagasy term for the ancestor(s) is *raza* or *razana* and the Sakalava commoners have the same basic understanding and ideas concerning the ancestors as all tribes on the island. The role of the ancestors can be explained in the following ways: Firstly, he/she is the root of the tribe or family, the forefather, so to speak. Secondly, the dead body just after death, before interment, can be considered an ancestor. Thirdly, Malagasy consider the *raza* or *razana* as the ones who are already in the spirit world. Malagasy believe that those who are already in the place of the departed have access or contact with God because they are physically near him; they are also considered to be *Zanahary*, themselves. One clarifying definition of an ancestor is the one below:

“*Razana* is the one who has done various actions and who has reached the age of adulthood, old age, but more importantly, who is in another life. He/she is the one who sent the deposit of the life that has been entrusted by *Zanahary* to other beings. He/she can be recognized mainly through the intermediary of his descendants⁵” (Jaovelo-Dzao 1985, 208).

Therefore, according to the sentence, not everyone who has already died is considered an ancestor. Each tribe has their criteria for defining who can fall into that category. In general, the criteria required to elevate a dead person to the status of *razana*, are based on family, age, character, behavior, social class, and the activities he/she was involved in when alive. Secondly, the attainment of this status depends on the family fulfilling a complete and perfect funeral

⁵ Le *razana* est celui qui a accompli diverse actions et qui a atteint l’age adulte, la vieillesse, mais surtout, qui se trouve dans l’autre vie. Il est celui qui a transmis le dépôt de la vie, qui a été confié par *Zanahary* à d’autres êtres. On le reconnaît essentiellement par l’intermédiaire de sa descendance.

which will allow him/her to reach the community of the living dead. For example, children, prisoners, witches, and people who had an incorrect burial or have broken the community codes are not expected to become ancestors, while the old, famous or charitable persons who have had appropriate funeral rites performed for them will surely become ancestors (Jaovelo-Dzao 1996, 208).

It is believed that the ancestors are supernatural, and have been given an improved and supernatural power. So, they work as mediators between the living and *Zanahary*, God. The ancestors bless and protect the living, but also punish people. They are responsible to watch over the affairs of human beings. People expect to receive the blessings of offspring, wealth, and health, but live in fear of sicknesses, loss of richness, sterility, even death as punishment from the ancestors (R1, 23 June 2012). However among the Sakalava, only the commoners have this understanding of who becomes an ancestor and who does not (K, 29 June 2012).

Besides this concept of the ancestors which is shared generally by all Malagasy, the Sakalava Boeny have two particular practices and beliefs related to their concept of ancestors which are called the cult of the *dady* (relics of the ancestors) and the *tromba* (the spirit possession). In my opinion, these two particular practices strengthen the Sakalava's relationship to their traditions in a way that is stronger than that of other tribes; the Sakalava are considered to be conservative.

The *dady* are believed to be the relics of Andriamisara and Andriamandresy, the forefathers of Andriamandisoarivo. In earlier times, the relics of the ancestors were called *jiny* and they contained only the nails and hair of the dead ancestors. Jacques Lombard confirmed this from the statement of Louis Mariano concerning the aboriginal people of Menabe:

“They used to sew inside a belt, the hair and nails of their dead, which they religiously kept as relics. The eldest son of the noble family locked these remains into an ugly box they always wore, as adornment, in wartime and during the festival (Lombard 1973, 16-17).

And:

“...according to general custom, the eldest son cut the beard and nails of his father on the same day of his death, and he deposited these relics, which were very precious to him, inside of figurines...” (Estrade 1985, 165)

According to some researchers, the practice of the cult of the *dady* was initiated by Andriamisara (Lombard 1973, 16). This statement is assumed to indicate the use of the new name- *dady*- and

the adoption of new elements into the cult already in use by his brother Andriamandresy .Among the new elements introduced were a tuft of hair from above the forehead and the right kneecap of the royal corpse and crocodile teeth, to name a few (Estrade 1985, 165).

The need for *dady* implies that the Sakalava were not satisfied with worshipping the invisible ancestral spirits only, but they also needed tangible and visible signs to represent their ancestors. More explanation of the practice of the cult of the *dady* will come at a later point in this paper.

The *tromba*, or spirit possession, also existed and was widely practiced among the peoples conquered by the Sakalava kingdom of Menabe and then adopted into the tribe's traditions by the conqueror (Lombard 1973, 16-17). Simply, the *tromba* is a practice in which a spirit of the dead is reincarnated into a living person's body. The possessed person works as a tool and a mediator in order that the dead can transmit his/her message to the living. In the Sakalava Menabe, only the King can reappear through this medium- they call it *misazoka* (S1, 22 July 2012). They believe that by putting gold inside of the mouth of the king, at exactly the moment of death, the *tromba*- spirit possession- of the king will be made possible. Among the Sakalava Boeny, however, not only are the king and the nobles expected to come back through spirit possession, but this may be possible for some commoners also (C2, 02 July 2012; S2, 04 August 2012). Certainly, this practice must have been only for the royal family in the beginning as it has been in Menabe, but in Boeny, in the course of time, the practice has changed.

One informant from Menabe (S1, 22 July 2012) said that: "If the *tromba* is not from the king and happens here (in Menabe), it is always the *tromba* from the north, and it speaks a northern dialect". This follows the Menabe belief that only the king can be reincarnated into the body of the living. A Boeny informant, (K, 29 June 2012) said that: "Even people from other tribes, who want to see a spirit from one of their dead family members through *tromba*, can make it happen through special rites". This implies that the beliefs and the practices of spirit possession in Boeny are broader than those in Menabe. To some extent, this might be the reason why the practice of *tromba* is seen all over the island, although there is surely a bit difference from tribe to tribe.

The Sakalava understand the *tromba* to be both the product of an intervention from the world of the spirits to the living and the product of an intervention by the living to the world of spirits (Lombard 1973, 127). The role of the *saha* (medium) is to be a mediator par excellence

between the world of the living and the ancestors/ divinity (ies), between heaven and earth, between the secular and the religious. In fact, the *saha* (medium) wants to be the chief of humanity and a master of life. So, then, he/she works as a man of prayer, a therapist or a healer, a spiritual leader, a soothsayer and astrologer. He/she is believed to have the power to change the course of the world, to bestow either life or death, to control the forces of nature such as thunder and rain, to be able to make people crazy, sick, or even die, and much more. (Jaovelo-Dzao1996, 238-243). For all these reasons, the Sakalava people really expect life from the *tromba* and respect them as *Zanahary* also.

When the dead spirit, either the nobles or the commoners, wants to be reincarnated into someone, the chosen one gets sick or has a dream or a problem. Since the Sakalava are used to asking the astrologer or the fortune teller about everything happens to them, they are usually told that the spirit of a dead ancestor wants to possess the body of the person concerned. After that, they are advised to prepare rooms (themselves) for this spirit to enter into his/her body (C2, 02 July 2012; Estrade 1985, 108). Following special rites, the chosen one becomes the medium and has to follow the rules of the *tromba*. Being a medium is complicated because taboos come into play affecting food intake, dress and relationships, among others. For instance, the medium is not allowed to eat pork or chicken. Not only must the medium follow lots of taboos, but also those who come to them to ask for help and advice in terms of health problems, need for wealth, protections and much more (C2, 02 July 2012). These taboos infer that the medium does not have personal freedom even though she/he plays a very significant role in the society performing the connection between the living and the ancestors and divinities. The medium actually is much more in bondage than the people who approach them.

Having explained the supernatural beings, mainly God, divinities, and ancestors, I shall describe now how the Sakalava prepare and install in the spirit world.

2.3 Preparation and installation into the life hereafter

Even though, it is commonly understood throughout the general population of Madagascar, including among the Sakalava, that people continue their existence in the world of the spirits or in the community of the ancestors after death, very few prepare for this spirit-life with enthusiasm in their daily thoughts or practices. In fact, people live in hope of protection and blessing from the ancestors, and live with great fear of incurring the ancestors' punishments that

they are usually extremely careful in everything they do to never give cause for offence. In particular, the performance of the correct funeral rites plays a crucial role for all Malagasy, including the Sakalava, as one of the required criteria for achieving both better lives here for those who are still alive and to provide a better place for the departed in the afterlife. There are generally three phases to be followed until the deceased reaches the community of the living dead. These are the rite of separation, the rite margin and the rite of aggregation (Jaovelo-Dzao 1996, 181). It is not possible to give all the details about these three different and successive phases of a correct funeral, but I will present some of the aspects of each passage that relate to beliefs about life after death. Before explaining these three passages, I shall explain the Sakalava concept of death.

2.3.1 Meaning and cause of death.

Like all tribes in Madagascar, the Sakalava accept that life comes from *Zanahary* as previously mentioned. When it comes to death the Sakalava are not satisfied with that idea that *Zanahary* also has the authority to end life, even though they know it to be true. Thus, they are always seeking answers for the reason for a person's death through divination, especially when it is an unexpected death such as an accident, or a premature death. People also believe that death is usually a punishment by the ancestors or gods(s) as the consequence for gross errors committed by the community of the living or by individuals (S1, 22 July 1974).

Moreover, there are generally strange and paradoxical understandings of death among the people. Death is an inevitable, yet threatening event. People try to find solutions in different ways in order to be healed or to avoid death. For example, the Sakalava not only use medical services provided by doctors and the hospitals, but they also ask for help from the ancestors or *tromba*, or diviners also (R1, 23 June 2012). These traditional ceremonies, however, are more common in remote areas. When there is no solution and someone dies, people are really sad and cry a lot due to the separation death causes. Nevertheless, it is believed that death is not the end of someone's existence. This is very apparent in the forms of speech used during burial which allows that the deceased will live in a new place. As such, then, death is considered to be a transition from life to an existence beyond life. How is it then that Sakalava people understand and engage in this threatening and inescapable death?

2.3.2 Funeral rites

Christianity and modernization have had an impact on the Malagasy traditions in general. Traditional funeral practices in almost in all tribes have either disappeared or have been modified. This is especially apparent in the cities. The burial of royalty follows a different protocol than the burial of a commoner.

I received a full explanation of the funeral ceremonies for Sakalava commoners from S1 (22 July 2012). When someone is seriously ill, the family does not leave him/her either by day or by night because death is a dreaded event for the Sakalava. After having done everything in their power to help the sick person to recover, the family has to be prepared to follow the proper rites when someone dies. The first thing people do is to ensure that the eyes and the mouth are securely closed, and they stretch the hands and feet of the cadaver. Then, the chief of the family or the oldest makes a short speech to those who are present at this time, beginning with these words: “*efa nanao izay natao isika ka tsy namantsika koa izy, menga antsika izy...*” (“We have tried to keep him/her alive but now he/she is no longer a part of our family, he/she has left us...”)

Then, the rite of separation begins with the washing of the corpse. Only water, soap, and a chisel are needed. The water is poured from the head to the feet while the corpse is laying on the bed or the mat. If it is a woman, teams of women prepare her corpse such as the tying of the jaw, braiding the hair, and dressing her in the clothes she liked best when she was alive or buying new clothes. Influenced by Christianity and modernization, people now usually use a nice white dress for the dead body. In the case of a man, it is similar to the woman, but the teams of men wash him, shave him and dress him, either in a nice suit or a white shirt and any color of pants.

The importance of this washing of the corpse relates to the preparation for the afterlife. It is believed that as one enters the place of the ancestors, one should be both clean and well-dressed. The family cannot make any decisions regarding the preparations and duties concerning the dead body without asking the diviners. It is the diviners who decide the time for preparing the coffin, the burial day, and so on.

It is worth noting that the Sakalava young people are welcome to attend and to assist in all the practices of a funeral because it is seen an opportunity for learning the traditions. The Sakalava do not special times or courses for learning but they follow the practice of “learning by practicing or knowing by doing”.

The next step is preparing a special room or a provisional abode, *trano raty*, where the corpse is deposited until the day of internment. From that time, the family and friends are allowed to cry. The family also organizes the manner in which to let people- relatives, neighbors, and the communities- know about this tragic event. Those who receive the news are not only expected to come, and they are supposed to bring a contribution such as money, rice, and blankets in which to wrap the corpse, and even cattle. A well-attended funeral requires more cattle to be killed, and more people.

Close relatives have to be present with the corpse, day and night, until the funeral takes place and they are not allowed to take a bath, to change their clothes, to comb their hair or to shave. What they are supposed to do is sing and dance, and they are allowed to drink alcohol. The motivation for the relatives and the neighbors to attend a funeral is closely related to their own future funeral. If they do not come to the funerals of others, no one will attend their funeral. The social pressure to participate is high, as well as the fear of punishment from the gods or the ancestors. Attendance at a funeral is essential in helping to facilitate the passage of the spirit of the departed into the land of the ancestors, as it is believed that correct funeral ceremonies are part of the requirement for achieving this. So, attending funerals, then, is considered to be an absolute obligation both for the good of the community and for personal advantage.

Another important part of providing a proper burial for the Sakalava is that the coffin must be made out of a strong type of wood such as *manary*, *nato*, or *hazo malagny*. This strong coffin is expected to provide a safe and good place for the deceased. The family also provides the departed with equipment they will need in the afterlife such as pans, spoons, a knife, needles, weapons, food, and much more, which they place inside the coffin.

Moreover, a ritual of great importance that marks the first phase- the rite of separation- is the speech, undertaken by a special person, directed to the dead body and the ancestors who are considered to be able to listen to what is being said. In fact, the content of the speech is to let the dead body know that he/she is no longer a part of his/her earthly family and the world anymore and to let the ancestors know that they will have a newcomer and should be ready to receive him/her. The cadaver is advised not to come to disturb the living anymore. One sample of the speech is as follows:

“...you are coming here... (Name of the departed), here are your grandfather, your father (depending on the list of the already older departed persons there)...some people watch their

cattle here, some are cutting wood here ...do not disturb them but just watch over them. (Also), O, grandfather! Your grandchildren is coming here, advise him/her, do the same as what you have done to those who have come earlier. From now, our relationship is finished, whoever he/she left behind is our responsibility but yours is here....” (C2, 02 July 2012)

So, the funerary ceremonies start with placing the cadaver in the provisory abode, but ends with burying it far away from the place of the living, to show that the living and the dead are physically separated.

The next phase, the rite margin, concerns the living, but it has to be done for the good of the departed to help him/her reach the community beyond. In doing so, the living beings hope that they will be blessed and protected when they fulfill these particular funeral rites. It is believed that, during this period of time, the spirit of the departed has not yet reached the final destination- the community of the ancestors. So, the bereaved families have a lot of taboos to follow such as isolating themselves from the normal, daily life and local society, and offering sacrifices to the ancestors to prepare the way for the spirit of the deceased. Actually, after the interment, many rites of purification are performed to erase all traces of contact with the dead body which is considered bad and dirty. In so doing, the family can prevent any consequences related to sickness and dying anything like this to happen anymore. Some families are required to burn the provisory abode of the dead, while others try to change the orientation of the house. There are two reasons for this: Firstly, if the spirit of the departed wants to come back, he/she will not recognize the house. Secondly, it is considered that since the original orientation of the house did not provide good luck for the family, maybe a new orientation will. The duration of this period of in-between depends on the decisions made by the family and the advice received from the diviners. (S1, 22 July 2012; Jaovelo-Dzao 1996, 181-184)

Finally, the rite of aggregation takes place, again with various preparations being done by the families. In the case of commoners, one or two years after the burial, the family organizes a time to clean the tomb, *asa lolo*, *zava lolo*, and/or for sharing or dividing the properties, *rasa hariana*, between the living and the departed through the sacrifice of a bullock. The rite of aggregation is meant to unite both the departed to his/her ancestors and the mourners to the community (other living beings) (Jaovelo-Dzao 1996, 184).

In the case of a king, all these funeral rites and ceremonies take more time than they do for the commoners. These are called *fanompoa mafana*, warm service. When the king is about to die, the *manantany*, the prime minister, and the *Ranitriampanjaka*, royal advisor, must be

present. There are at least two reasons why the *manantany* is not allowed to leave the king when he is suffering from a serious illness or is about to die. Firstly, the *manantany* is required to cut the throat of the king when there is no hope for his survival. I was told that the king must not die in the same manner as common human beings (P2, 09 July 2012). Gardinier (1976, 122) also explained that “the primary task of these ceremonial assistants is to be responsible for everything surrounding the death and burial of the chief. The male ceremonial assistant cut the throat of the chief when he is seriously ill and there is no hope for recovery”. Secondly, he also is responsible for following and supervising all that takes place with the king before his death (P2, 09 July 2012).

It is worth noting that all speech used regarding the dead king is carefully couched and all wording is given special consideration. For instance, when the king dies, it is not allowed to use common wording like *maty ny mpanjaka* (the king is dead). Instead, it should be a sentence like *folaka ny tany*, the earth is broken, or *nihilana ny tany*, the earth is tilted. Moreover, the bed for his corpse is called *kibany fanjava*, money bed; his pus is termed *ronono*, milk, to name just a few examples (Jaovelo-Dzao 1996, 175).

The king’s funeral toilet has to be done by specified classes in the society such as those who are of a pure slave race. The latter are responsible for putting the gold inside the mouth of the dead and for removing certain parts of the king to be kept as relics- hair, nails. They rub the corpse with the blood of a bullock enveloped in a special fabric entitled *sobahia* and *daholy*. Finally, they wrap the top of the corpse in the sewed skin of this bullock. When all the preparations are done, the wrapped corpse is deposited on the money bed and a pitcher is put under this bed for receiving the pus, *ronono*, milk. This pus has to be collected and thrown away carefully into the sea by special persons because it is considered to be sacred (Jaovelo-Dzao 1996, 174-175). These chosen servants are not allowed to leave the vicinity of the dead body until their duties are fulfilled. Also, they are not allowed to complain, or to be sad, or to wash their hands and so on (P2, 09 July 2012). Differently from the traditions for commoners, the interment of royalty does not take place until after full desiccation (Jaovelo-Dzao 1996, 175).

It is said, that the date of interment in Mahabo, where the royal tomb lies, takes place approximately 2 and 3 months after death. During that time, the people cannot do anything except undertaking the various responsibilities assigned to their class, such as preparing and serving food, dancing and singing, preparing a strong coffin from *sohihy* wood, and so forth. So,

everything that happens during a royal funeral is well distributed and controlled. Everyone must show up and contribute to the funeral's needs- rice, bull, alcohol, etc. - because the passage of the king into death requires a great effort on the part of the people (Estrade 1985, 200).

It is also believed that the death of the king is not the end of his authority and power. Rather, it is a starting point of a new existence and the king becomes more powerful and has a universal authority (Estrade 1985, 201). One thing that approves this statement is the ritual concerning the exaltation of the departed monarch done every Friday before the internment as follows: "You are dead, but you are still king, and though you do not reign any longer over us, you reign in other countries, over other peoples" (Estrade 1985, 202).

Furthermore, it is believed that the king enters into heaven after the desiccation of his body when the internment takes place. Due to this belief, burial is called "*mamaky lanitry*" (Opening of heaven) from the moment the digging of the grave begins, which will receive the king's dead body (Estrade 1985, 203).

Along with the funeral rites, the blessing of the king's the posthumous name takes place. The name the king used when he was alive can no longer be pronounced after his death and thus he gets a new name. This posthumous name consists of three parts. Names beginning with "*Andriana*" (King) or "*Ndre*" (master) and ending with "*arivo*" (thousand) are most common. In between these two names, they are given a name based upon their identity during life on earth. For example: *Andriamandisoarivo*, *Andrianamboniarivo*, *Ndretohaniarivo*, *Ndremahatantiarivo* (Gardinier 1976, 118, 133; Estrade 1985, 167).

Now I am going to explain the Sakalava beliefs about the land of the departed.

2.3.3 *The land of the departed*

It is clear that no one knows what really happens beyond this visible world. Maybe, those who have experienced near death have had a short vision of what it might be, or the medium *saha*, can illustrate portions of what it might be or just pretend to know about it. But most people only try to imagine what happens in the afterlife. Actually, Malagasy, including Sakalava commoners, frequently emphasize the existence of the spirit world where the ancestors' families can be together again. I realized that the idea of the land of departed and its components are virtually unspecified and undefined in terms of place, duration, quality of life, and the ancestor's authority and so on. In other words, the concept of the land of departed and what will happen there is very unclear and blurred.

However, there are some insights that the Sakalava people perceive in various ways: Firstly, with regard to place, Malagasy believe that the spirit of the dead goes to a specific place called Ambondrombe. It is a mountain in the south of Madagascar and it is believed to be the village of the dead (Molet 1979, 355). It is said that when someone passes this mountain, they hear the noises of daily life as though a crowd of people are living there. They hear music and people doing different daily chores such as grinding rice or corn with the traditional tool, the song of the cock and so forth. But, the amazing thing is nothing can be found as evidence of this activity, when people search this area. There is one testimony of a person passing this mountain alone one night, who met some people from this village. They welcomed him into the village telling him the environment was not safe at night. Not only did he see all his deceased relatives, but he, especially, saw his aunt who had died recently. She was suffering from many spirits. His aunt told him, not to mourn when someone dies because the spirits that live in this village will cause the new dead person to suffer if he is mourned at his funeral. (<http://manitra06.blaogy.com/post/471/2428>, 18 January, 2013)

To my way of thinking, that which is described here might be part of what is believed to be the in-between place where the ancestors go during the phase of margin when the spirit is still on the way to the world of the ancestors. Or, it might be where the spirits live of those who did not get correct funerals or for any other reason cannot attain the community of the ancestors.

Regarding the form of life the departed live in their new land, it is believed that the ancestors live similarly to the way they lived on earth. This is why people describe the spirits of Ambondrombe as doing the same types of daily tasks as was their habit while on earth, and it explains why, when they are buried, the deceased are equipped with the tools which they used to do their work on earth. It is also believed that their character is carried with them into the afterworld. Therefore, if the character of the departed was determined to be a bad or good, while he/she was alive; he/she is referred to as having the same character in the afterlife. This idea seems to contradict itself, because it is believed that only good and charitable persons who also received correctly performed funerals can attain the community of the ancestors. The Sakalava believe that children, sorcerers, those who have been prisoners, those who have broken the laws of society, bad and selfish people, and those who do not receive correctly performed burials cannot become members of the ancestor community. This means, in effect, that they do not have a determined place to stay, so some of them become wandering ghosts or animals. Their spirits,

then, might return back to the living with the intention of harming or disturbing the living (Jaovelo-Dzao 1996, 209). In this way then, one can understand that good people would act and behave in the same way in their afterlife and vice versa.

In terms of authority, it is believed that the ancestors meet and communicate with God because they are next to God and have God-given powers. They are also considered to be gods. Consequently, the ancestors have authority over the living: they can punish the living when they are unhappy with them or, they can protect and bless the living when they are happy with them (C1, 20 June 2012; Jaovelo-Dzao 1996, 213-214).

Some concepts which are not developed about the land of the ancestors are whether the ancestors have an emotional life, what the place they live in is like or how long the ancestors stay there. I mean, it is not imagined by the Sakalava whether the ancestors are happy or sad; whether the ancestors are crying or laughing, whether they live in peace or in passion and so on. It is clear that the living do not look forward to going to the land of departed. In other words, people prefer to live on earth rather than to go to the beyond. Also, the span of life in the beyond is undetermined or vague.

Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that in earlier times, some few people have expressed the wish to die, as it was the way he/she would get a better life. During those times, the slave volunteered to be killed when the king died. His blood was needed to put under the dead king in the coffin. Nowadays, instead of killing human beings, a bullock is killed and its blood is deposited under the dead king. It was believed that those who were killed and buried with the king would come to a better place with him. In short, the king and the *Jongoa* (slave) who is killed with him/her only are expected to have a better life after death (P2, 09 July 2012).

Having describing about the preparation and the installation into the hereafter, in what follows, I shall describe the relationship between the life and the afterlife.

2.4 The relationship between the life and the afterlife

I have mentioned that the Sakalava funeral rites are concerned about facilitating the passage of the deceased into the community of the ancestors which is absolutely dependent upon the willing help of the living; and that the motivation for the living for performing these funeral rites, is a reciprocal expectation of a better life on earth as well as in the hereafter through the help of the ancestors and God. It has also been mentioned that a proper funeral does not guarantee

membership into the family of the beyond, but that it is also needed for a good quality of life on earth. In other words, what people do on earth usually affect the result of their life after death. In addition, the status of the ancestor continually depends on the livings' faithfulness in practicing the various cults and sacrifices. If the family is quiet, or does not remember their departed through sacrifice and worship, their names are forgotten on earth and their identities among the ancestors totally disappear. Therefore, it can be ascertained that there is an absolute interdependence between the life on earth and the life hereafter. As usual, the customs concerning the royal families are different from those concerning the commoners. In the case of royalty, the following of custom affects whole communities including all casts, not just families, as in the case of commoners.

2.4.1 Prayer, Sacrifice and second funeral (Joro, Asa lolo, Rasa hariana)

In general, though the rite of separation and the rite of aggregation are completed, the relationship between the living and the living dead still continue. The community of the living and the community of the ancestors are considered to be one large interactive community. So, the living usually have contact with their ancestors and these latter are expected to interact in the affairs of their living families. My interviewee said that the Sakalava do not initiate anything in their lives until they have invoked their ancestors through prayer and/or sacrifice, *joro*. For instance, the Sakalava do not plant the rice or collect the harvest until they call on the ancestors and give them their portions. The ancestors are also called upon to be spiritually present in all activities such as the rites of passage after giving birth, circumcision, marriage and so on, in the Sakalava society (R1, 23 June 2013).

In addition, it is stated that: "the rites of the beyond can be divided into two parts: the rituals concern those beyond determined and those who reveal beyond the indeterminate" (Jaovelo-Dzao 1996, 159). Thus, the rituals of the beyond embrace the *rasa hariana*, sharing the property, and the *asa lolo* or *zava lolo*, cemetery maintenance (Jaovelo-Dzao 1996, 185). For the Sakalava, these rituals are considered to be mandatory for the family and must be accomplished one or two years after the interment. If the family does not fulfill these rites, something will happen within the family such as sicknesses, troubles, even death. In some cases, families are aware of the rituals required by the departed. Others go to the *ombiasy*, the diviners, to ask about the cause of the disaster in the family and the *ombiasy* divine what they have to do to undo the problem. Conversely, if the family completes all the rituals, namely the *asa lolo* and/or the *rasa*

hariana, and nothing happens, then they feel blessed and protected according to their beliefs (S1, 22 July 2012).

It is seen from these rituals that the living expect blessing from their ancestors when they fulfill their responsibilities to them, yet live in constant fear of not measuring up. On the other hand, the ancestors expect remembrance from the living which they reward with promises of protection, yet they retaliate with threats and warnings of various troubles and disasters if the living do not please them or fulfill their requirements. The Sakalava believe that the departed can control and guide their affairs. Consequently, whatever they do in life, is done with full of respect for the ancestors. Finally, they are careful to guard their behavior and their morality, because their hereafter depends on what they do on earth, both individually and collectively, even though it is seen that they apparently do not look forward to their afterlife.

2.4.2 *The royal funeral and spirit possession (Fanompoa mafana and tromba)*

The ritual of beyond the indeterminate is about the *tromba*, the spirit possession. Even if the *tromba* is not seen just within the royal family, what concerns the king has to be attended and accepted by all advocates of the Sakalava tradition. Here, I shall only present the *tromba* of the dead king.

Earlier, the rite of passage of a dead king, *fanompoa mafana*, was explained- which is more complex than that of a commoner. It can be said that through this rite the Sakalava consider the king to be a God, especially after his death. According to Sakalava beliefs, the king's authority and power does not stop when he dies. Rather, it is believed that his power and authority increase, giving him the authority to rule over all people and the right to give someone life or to cause someone to die (P2, 09 July 2012; Jaovelo-Dzao 1996, 248). Additionally, it is said to be the starting point of the king's new existence.

Actually, I was told that when the king dies, people wait in expectation that he will *hamaky hiboka* (the term used on the beginning of the spirit possession) begin to possess to someone, even before his internment. The first return of the dead king's spirit has to be directly related to what the king did just before his death. That is the reason why the role of the *manantany* is deemed to be especially important before the death of the king, as he knows exactly the king did (P2, 09 July 2012).

When the *mamaky hiboka* (first return of the spirit to someone) takes place, the possessed person will repeat what the king did just before his death. Sometimes, informant C2 (02 July

2012) said, people pretend to be possessed by the spirit of the newly dead king. The duty of the *manantany* is to recognize which of these supposedly possessed persons is behaving and acting exactly as the king did before his death. When the *manantany* recognizes the correct medium of the king, he follows and fulfills specific rites until the king is totally reincarnated into the medium. This is very important, because it is believed when the king successfully possesses a person; he gets the real and full kingdom from *Zanahary* as a God's response to the prayers and the sacrifices performed by his people. It is interpreted that the king attains eternal life and then gains the authority to rule over the world (P2, 09 July 2012). This is a Sakalava form of canonization. This thought relates to the prayer before the interment every Friday saying that "if you do not rule more about us, you will rule other countries, other peoples".

Therefore, the sequence of the funeral rites and spirit possession of the king is not simply a tradition among the Sakalava. It is religious. They consider the king to have a magnificent and majestic status not only during his life, but especially after he is reincarnated into living medium after his death. According to the Sakalava belief, his reincarnated spirit makes the *saha*, medium, powerful enough to fulfill his/her multipurpose functions as mentioned.

Similar to, yet more powerful than, the commoners' ancestors, the *tromba* spirit possession, plays an important role in Sakalava activities and lives. It is believed that it helps them in tough time and provides solutions to problems if they follow the *tromba*'s advice and taboos. However, it destroys their lives and kills them if they break the law or refuse to follow the rules.

The Sakalava are not satisfied, however, with only the *tromba*, but also subscribe to the exceptional tradition of *fanompoa manitsy*, the cult of the *dady*.

2.4.3 *The cult of the royal relics (Fanompoa manitsy)*

The status of the ancestors in their afterlife, as mentioned, relies on their active interaction with and remembrance by their living relatives. The *fanompoa manitsy* is practiced as a ceremony for the renewal of the spiritual power of a king through a bathing ceremony of his relics which takes place annually. It is a public show of his role as king, as *Zanahary an-tany* (Deschamps 1972, 144) and as a way to keep the Sakalava kingdom alive perpetually. This bathing ceremony keeps the remembrance of the *dady* alive year after year.

The traditional Sakalava Boeny have 4 *dady* which are Andriandahifotsy, *Andriamisara*, *Andriamandisoarivo*, and *Andrianamboniarivo* (who is the son of *Andriamandisoarivo*). To be

brief, *Andriamisara efadahy*, the “four men *Andriamisara*”, is the term used to denote to the veneration of these kings (Estrade 1985, 167). Their relics are considered to be the actual presence of these dead kings in the people’s midst and the possessed mediums of the dead kings have important roles during this ceremony.

The bathing ceremony lasts a full week and it is a well-organized ceremony with different activities and tasks, examples of which are singing, dancing, selling and buying of food, cooking, praying, and most especially the sacrifice of a bull and ending in the royal bath on the last day (Estrade 1985, 59-62).

Thousands of advocates of the Sakalava traditions show up in full readiness to serve and worship *Andriamisara efadahy*. They voluntarily contribute with food and money, gold, silver, living animals- sheep and bulls. They are ready to pray and ask the medium for help with their needs for health, fortune, prosperity, protection, children, and in particular the blessing of *Andriamisara efadahy* (C1, 20 June 2012).

The *manantany*, the head ceremonial assistant, and the *fahatelo*, another ceremonial assistant, are primarily responsible for organizing the needs of the people because the people are not allowed to make direct requests to the ancestors. There is a definite chain of communication from the *fahatelo* to the *manantany* to the *saha* and finally to *Zanahary* (R2, 25 June 2012).

In summary, the Sakalava tribe is quite unique in its rich and varied cultural and religious traditions. This is particularly manifested in their reverence and worship of the royal lineage as an earthly deity and in their worship of those who are already dead and live in the beyond, namely the ancestors and the spirits of the royal ancestors through the spirit possession ritual of *tromba*. These possessive spirits are believed to have a dominant power over the living by providing them with either blessing and protection or judgment and retribution which are made manifest in different kinds of diseases and suffering or even death., This creates a society full of fear. On the one hand, a society structure based on fear can have the positive effect of ensuring peace and order among the living. On the other hand, it can have the negative effect of creating a fearful obedience among the people and this is, of course, apparent in the vigor with which taboo and tradition takes precedence over the law.

Chapter Three

CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE AFTERLIFE

In this chapter, I intend to explain what the Christian views of the afterlife are. Since Christianity began over 2000 years ago, various perspectives of the afterlife have been studied by theologians from different denominations such as Lutheran, Orthodox, Anglican, and Reformed. It has been a challenge for the Christians to answer questions such as: “What exactly happens between someone’s death and the Last Day or Resurrection? And “Does the soul go directly to heaven or to hell immediately after physical death?” To deal with these two questions, I will, first, clarify the Christian understanding of God, the creator and creation. Secondly, I will describe the Christian definition of death.

3.1 God, the creator and creation

First and foremost, it is important to identify who the God Christians worship is as seen throughout the Bible. The term “God” has been used by almost all religions the world over throughout the ages. The concept of God for some is the same as the Christian God, and for others, it is not. My intention is to show that the Christian God is the God who revealed himself to Moses and to Israel. He is the creator of everything, including human beings. He is also the One who sent His Son, Jesus Christ to rescue the fallen humans in order to restore them to eternal life. This Christian God has authority and is in control of everything, including both life and death of his creatures, mankind, life on earth and the life hereafter.

Thus, to understand God and His relationship to human beings, it is essential to focus on the Christian Scripture and how people reflect on it. So, I shall describe God’s revelation and His relationship to humans. Then, I will explain the human destiny in creation. After, I will explain the composition of the human being in creation.

3.1.1 God’s revelation and his relationship to humans

The Old Testament tells us that God revealed himself to Moses by His own decision and by His own will. He said to Moses that He is the God of Israel’s forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that He wanted to rescue Israel from their bondage by the Egyptians: “If you come to the

people of Israel and say to them ‘The God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you...’” (Exod 3:1-10, 15).

At this time of this self-revelation, God declared His proper name to Moses: “I am who I am”, or “I was what I was”, or “I will be what I will be” (Exod 3:14). Generally, this God who revealed himself to Moses has been identified by the name of Yahweh and this name distinguishes Him from other gods.

The exodus narrative of Israel was of predominant importance throughout their history and their life in terms of faith, creed, obedience, and advice. God himself and leaders of Israel remind the Israelites of this often, generation after generation (Exod 16: 6, 32; 29:46; 32:11; Lev 19:36; Deut 6:1; 7:18-19, 8:14; 1Kgs 9:9; Ezek 20:9, etc...). For example, the creed of Israel is as follows:

“And you shall make this response before (Yahweh) your God, ‘A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt...And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us... then we cried to (Yahweh)..., and Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand And he brought us into this land” (Deut 26: 5-9; see also Josh 24:2ff)” (Jenson 1984, 88-90)

After the deliverance of Israel from out of Egypt, Yahweh made a covenant with the Israelites commanding them not to have any other gods except Him. So, the first commandment from Yahweh is, “You shall have no other gods before me” Exod 20:3. Yahweh had just proven to Israel that He is the only God who can free and protect them. That is the reason why He introduces the Ten Commandments with a remembrance of the exodus: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Exod 20:2).

Although God was aware that Israel believed in the existence of many gods He showed them that He is different, and eventually He declared to them that there are no other gods besides Him (Isa 44:6; 45:5, 21). Oskar Skarsaune states this in this manner: “In early Judaism, affirming the unity of God was seen *mainly* in terms *monolatry* rather than theoretical monotheism” (Kaufman⁶ 2009, 90).

Even though Yahweh made a covenant with Israel and gave them the Ten Commandments, it was not easy for Israel to grasp the real meaning of the monotheistic message from Yahweh especially during tough times. There were times when Israel was tempted to

⁶ John Kaufmann is a contemporary Lutheran theologian who wanted to challenge the Christian’s interpretation of Irenaeus’ idea. He wrote a book entitled *Becoming Divine, Becoming Human: Deification themes in Irenaeus of Lyons*.

worship other gods because they sometimes felt the need to have physical gods like those the nations surrounding them had (Exod 32; 2 Kgs17:12, 2 Chr 33:7). Furthermore, they often complained to their leaders, like Moses, when they experienced difficulties, most of them due to their deceitfulness to God (Exod 16:2, 8; 17:3; Num 14:2-3, 17.6). As a result, Yahweh punished Israel through disasters, diseases, famine, captivity, and even death (Num 14:37, 17:14, 25:9, 2 Sam 24:15, Jer 14:12). Conversely, God was provided the Israel with protection, victory, and blessing, when they worshipped only Yahweh and respected their covenant with Him (Exod 17:13, 2 Sam 8). It shows, then, that Yahweh proved Himself to be both a merciful, loving God and a jealous, angry God (cf. Deut 7: 9-16).

Israel believed that Yahweh is the God who created the world and therefore the only One they should worship according to their tradition. Yahweh also made it clear to Israel that He is not far from them but close by. This means that He is a transcendent and concerned God through his continuous activity of sustaining His creation. The Old Testament testifies that God is both transcendent and personal, the Lord of heaven and earth (Berentsen⁷ 1985, 149-150)

Israel's history with Yahweh does not stop in the Old Testament but continues into the New Testament. That means, the God of the New Testament is the same as the God of the Old Testament, namely Yahweh. Jesus Christ referred to Yahweh as Father or Heavenly Father. For instance, when Jesus taught his disciples how to pray, He told the disciples to call out first to "Our Father in heaven" (Matt 6:13); in His passion, Jesus called Yahweh "my Father" (Matt 26:39, 42). Thus, the God who is known as a creator and a liberator in the Old Testament is the same God Father Jesus taught about or communicated with in the New Testament. Also Yahweh is as the one "who raised Jesus from the dead" (Rom 4:24). So, the God who raised Jesus from the dead is the same God who freed Israel (Jenson 1984, 91).

Although the name of Jesus is more familiar and more used than Yahweh in various practices such baptism, exorcism, prayer, healing, thanksgiving, preaching the gospel, etc. throughout the New Testament, it does not mean Yahweh has been replaced by Jesus or is less powerful than Jesus. Rather, it is through Jesus that people can attain the best possible relationship to Yahweh (cf. John 14:6). We pray to God in the name of Jesus because of his

⁷ Jan-Martin Berentsen is a Lutheran Theologian in Norway. He was a Professor of Theology of Mission at Misjonshøgskolen in Stavanger, Norway.

intervening death and resurrection for our salvation. Yahweh is still the God of the Christians through Jesus Christ.

Having explained that the God who revealed to human beings is the creator of the world and has relationship to humans, in what follows, I shall present the destiny of the human beings in that creation.

3.1.2 *Human destiny*

According to Hefner⁸ (1984, 324), “the human being is created with a destiny”. The first key point to understand in human destiny is that he/she is created in the image of God (*imago Dei*). In Genesis 1, it is seen that human beings are created differently than any of the other creatures, because he/she is created in *imago Dei*. God himself decided to create humans in His image and His likeness (Gen 1: 26). This fact alone makes humans unique in comparison to the rest of creation (Berentsen 1985, 154). However, it cannot be said that by being created in God’s image means that human beings are destined to become God, or gods.

Theologians can have different understandings of what the idea of being created in God’s image means, but most of them admit that it defines the uniqueness being human. Some interpret the *imago Dei* to be freedom of will, capacity for goodness, moral responsibility, love, wisdom, possession of the word and reason. In other words, the *imago Dei* focuses on human attributes. Others say that the image of God allows and entails humans to be God’s representatives on earth and to have authority over other living things (Gen 1:28). John Gerhard⁹ explains five ways of understanding the image of God referring firstly, to the very essence of the human soul; secondly, to the general similarities to divinity, intelligence, etc.; thirdly, to human dominion over other creatures; fourthly, to some principles; and to righteousness and holiness (Hefner 1984, 336). Others, again, consider the *imago* as a fundamental relationship between God and humans (Hefner 1984, 330-331). When God created human beings in His image, he did so out of His desire for a personal relationship with them. He wanted to communicate with them, being able to address them and receive a response from them (Berentsen 1985, 154).

God did not intend to create human beings with the thought that they, themselves, should become divine, even though he created them in His image. Rather, his intention was to

⁸ Philip Hefner is a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and used to teach in Lutheran seminaries in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Chicago. He contributed two essays -"Creation" and "Church"- to the two-volume work, *Christian Dogmatics*.

⁹ Johann Gerhard (1582 - 1637) is a German Lutheran theologian during the period of Orthodoxy.

communicate with them. Thus, the concept of *imago Dei* is not a concept which refers to an innate divinity in man (Berentsen 1985, 155). Augustine also said that “The first immortality, which Adam lost by sinning, was the ability not to die (*posse non mori*) (McGrath 1996, 417).

Martin Luther might have followed this Augustine’s idea arguing that:

“‘Man was created in the image of God, in the image of righteousness, of course, of divine holiness and truth, but in such way that he could lose it’. The advantage of humans over the beasts was their capacity or possibility for immortality: following his earthly life, Adam was to lead an eternal, spiritual life with God. He was “capable of immortality” (*capax immortalitatis*) (Spitz 1960, 177; Lohse 1999, 244)

So, according to Luther, when God created human beings in the beginning, this human being had the capacity or the possibility of immortality. However, it does not mean that mankind- a created being - would be equal to the God creator who created in the image of God.

Unfortunately, this changed due to the fall of man which is recorded in Genesis 3. In short, the fall of man is the result of the human beings’ disobedience to God creator. Hefner says, “The *imago Dei* is partially intact but seriously damaged so restoration is necessary” (Hefner 1984, 335), and, for John Gerhard, not only is the image of God in human being damaged but it is lost especially in terms of righteousness and holiness (John Gerhard’s the fifth way of understanding the image of God as mentioned above) (Hefner 1984, 336).

Collins’¹⁰ explanation of “in the image of God” after the Fall is this: Firstly, he said that “many earlier Christian have taken ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ as separate components of created human nature- often with the idea that one was lost in the Fall of Genesis 3, while the other remains.” But he added that, after reformation, scholars realized that this explanation does not suit the text. So, from his point of view, “the best explanation is to say that ‘in the image’ and ‘after the likenesses’ refer to the same thing”. Secondly, he stated also that after the Reformation, the theologians had two interpretations of the idea of *imago Dei*: “In the wider sense, man has reason, will, and relationship, as God does. In the narrower sense, man’s abilities are completely in harmony with God’s own purity and wisdom.” In The Fall, he said, “the image-in-the-wider-sense was badly damaged but still remains in every human being. The-image-in-narrower-sense was lost, and the process of sanctification is the restoring of that image” (Collins 2006, 62).

¹⁰ C. John Collins is an American Presbyterian and Professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary. One of his books is entitled *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Theological, and Literary Commentary*.

Therefore, although “the image of God” in the human being is either damaged or lost, restoration is needed. The Fall has seriously affected the relationship between God and mankind.

Nevertheless, the Fall of Man does not stop human destiny. There are at least two views of interpreting human destiny apart from being created in God’s image. These are deification and adoption.

The second key point in understanding human destiny is the idea of deification. Using 2 Pet 1:4 “Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires”, the Orthodox Church adheres to the thought that the purpose of creation is deification. The explanation for participation in the divine nature is to become a God or deification, which is the final goal (Ware¹¹ 1964, 236). The Fall of Man is not an obstacle in God’s plan to fulfill human deification but God had, from the beginning, purposed to reach the climax of creation through Jesus’ incarnation. In other words, deification is part of the human destiny and it is the fulfillment of creation (Louth¹² 2007, 34-36). That is, the incarnation is not the result of The Fall, rather, it is considered as an essential part of God’s original plan.

In support of the idea of deification, the eastern Orthodox Christians use the Athanasius creed “The Word of God became human that we might become God” (Louth 2007, 34). In my opinion, this expression of Athanasius is just an interpretation or a hypothetical implication because: Firstly, it is not proved in the Scriptures that the reason for incarnation is deification. Secondly, the logic behind this statement might be as follows: whether man sinned or not, Christ had to become flesh (human) and to die on the cross and to be resurrected from death. That creates the idea that God created humans imperfectly with the propensity to sin. And this idea is not convincing, because God was satisfied with His work of creation: “It was very good” (Gen 1:31). And finally, from the very beginning, a jealous Satan wanted to be God; and it was he who tempted the human beings to consider his idea, of attaining the likeness of the creator God. It led the first human beings to disobey God’s instructions and to make the independent choice of following Satan in Genesis 3. Even Satan also reveals his efforts to be God in front of Jesus Christ at the time of His temptation: “Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and

¹¹ Timothy Ware is one of the best-known Eastern Orthodox theologians. He was a bishop and a lecturer at the University of Oxford. He wrote many books about the Orthodox like *The Orthodox Way* and *The Orthodox Church*.

¹² Andrew Louth is a priest of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchal and Professor of Patristic and Byzantine Studies at Durham University. He contributed on writing on the book entitled *Partakers of the Divine nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*.

showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ‘All this I will give you,’ he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” (Matt 4:8-9). Even now, Satan seeks, in all manners, to deceive and to promise people the ability and right to be like God. I do not support the Orthodox perspective of arguing that the reason for incarnation is deification and this is the fulfillment of creation.

Even Honorius of Autun, a Catholic theologian from the twelfth century, explained the reason for the incarnation as follows: “the cause of Christ’s incarnation was the predestination of human deification (*causa autem Christi incarnationis fuit predestinatio humanae deificationis*). It was indeed predestined by God from all eternity that humanity would be deified...” (McGrath 2007, 288). This statement shows that there was a time when not only the Orthodox Church believed in deification as God’s purpose for humankind but also the Catholic Church believed this.

From about the twelfth century, the Protestant and the Catholic churches in the West have come to other understandings of the incarnation and the idea of deification or *theosis*. It is worth knowing that there was a time when the western Church did not approve of the use of the term of deification, specifically in terms of becoming God ontologically (Christensen 2007, 28; Louth 2007, 33).

The third key point in understanding human destiny and the restoration of the God’s relationship to humans is adoption through salvation. The key point in understanding the third point is that the work of salvation could not occur without incarnation. However, incarnation is considered to be a contingent factor but not a necessary one. The reason for Christ’s incarnation is to save fallen humankind. Jesus himself said that He came to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Augustine used this one verse of Luke 19:10 “For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost” to comment that “If humanity had not sinned, the son of Man would not have to come” (McGrath 1996, 290). Apostle Paul highlighted in his epistle to the Galatians that the reason for the incarnation is for salvation when he said that “...God sent his son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under the law that we might receive the full right of sons” (Gal 4:4-5).

I am convinced that, “when God sent his Son to earth, born of a woman, became flesh,” does not mean that salvation provides humans with the ability to become gods, in the way the eastern Orthodox hope for through God becoming flesh. Jesus only became flesh in order to save

fallen men and to restore the original relationship between God and human beings which was broken during to The Fall. Thus, the destiny of humans is restored unity with God in and through Jesus Christ. In explaining the view of Church Father Irenaeus, Kaufman said this union with God in this way:

“By being restored to communion with God, man becomes a son of God and receives eternal, incorruptible life. A man is complete and perfect only when he receives and participates in the Spirit of God” and “the *telos* of man is therefore not that he should become a God or become “divine” , but that he should become a mature, complete, perfect, and spiritual human being, as God intended all along...Being a “God”, being “ according to the image and likeness of God” and “participating in God” and in divine attributes are always tied to being a whole and complete human of flesh and blood” (Kaufman 2009, 244; 252).

The reformer Martin Luther did not totally deny the idea of deification, but he used this term in a different sense. He emphasized the notion of *theosis* in his doctrine of salvation and justification by faith. Puera¹³, a Finnish scholar, explained Luther’s teaching about the *theosis* in this manner:

“Luther’s view of salvation includes ideas of participation in God and divinization that are usually better known from the writings of the first centuries of the Church or from the orthodox tradition. The Reformer argues quite often for a notion of *theosis* and underlines it as a central part of his doctrine of justification. Both aspects of justification, imputed righteousness as well as effective, transforming righteousness are based on the indwelling of Christ and on our participation in him” ((Puera 1998, 92)

It is clear that because of Jesus death and resurrection, human beings can have a close relationship with him. Luther used the analogy of a wedding to explain this relationship and to illustrate the union with Christ. There is a happy exchange between Christ and mankind, in which Christ accepts what human beings have and humans get what Jesus has through faith. That is the work of justification through faith in order to be united with Christ (McGrath 1996, 441). The new school of thought from Finland about Luther’s interpretation explains it this way: “Union with Christ is made possible by faith, such that justification by faith is no longer understood simply as the forgiveness of sins but also as the means for our participation in the divine life”. That means “justifying faith means participation in God in Christ’s person”. Besides, it is believed that through the proclamation of the Word and administration of the

¹³ Simo Puera is a scholar at the new school of Luther interpretation in Finland. In this new school, the interpretation of the essence of Luther’s doctrine of salvation is not just in forensic justification but also is understood as a participation in divine life (*theosis*), namely union with Christ.

sacraments (baptism and Eucharist) in the church, faith unites believers to Christ (Linman 2007, 190- 199).

Having explained the destiny of human beings from the concept of being created in image of God, and the restoration of creation in and through Jesus Christ, with the understanding that human beings are not destined to become God but are destined to have a relationship with God and to be united with Him, I shall now explain the composition of the human being.

3.1.3 The composition of a human being

The creation of man in the image of God is not only about the destiny of humanity but it also concerns human nature. God does not belong to the earth and He is without bodily parts. Humans must have been created with bodily parts in image of God (Jewett 1996, 30-31). Different perspectives have been developed about human nature. On the one hand, human beings are understood to be highly evolved animals, a concept also proposed by Darwin (Hefner 2001, 229). On the other hand, it is seen that humans are not the same as the animals, not only in degree, but in kind (Jewett 1996, 27). The Christian doctrine is against or rejects the Darwinian theory of evolutionism when it refers to the understanding of creation in Genesis 1-2. It is correct that both human beings and animals are created from dust but the former have not evolved from the latter. Some people say that humans are partially animal because they were created from the dust. However, humans are far greater than animals because God breathed the breath of life into the nostrils of the human (Gen 2:7). Thus, a human being is made up of both the earth and divine breath (Schmidt 1999, 70).

Many early theologians, like Gregory of Nyssa, believed humans to be a factor between the earthly animal realm and the spiritual realm of God (Hefner 1984, 333). Yet, humans cannot be categorized into a being with two (body and soul; dichotomous) or three (body, soul, and spirit; trichotomous) or many parts (body, soul, spirit, heart, mind, and so on) although they are made up of earth and divine breath. According to Greek thought, especially the ideas of Plato, Socrates and Aristotle, humans are assumed to have separate bodies and souls. In this dualism, the body is considered to be a prison or a tomb for the soul (Hefner 1984, 333).

Human beings, therefore, are considered to be living beings made up of both body and soul (Gen 2:7) while the animals are considered to be living creatures (Gen 1: 20, 24), but without both body and soul. It is said that “When using such terms as “soul”, “spirit”, “heart”, and “body”, the Old Testament denotes not specific human parts but the whole person”(Schmidt

1999,70). According to Schwarz¹⁴, though influenced by or even having adopted Greek tradition concerning the distinction between body, soul and mind, the New Testament is clear that the human being is a unified unit (Schwarz 1984, 565).

In summary, God had a good purpose and plan for human beings when He decided to create man differently from animals and other creatures. From the beginning God intended to have a relationship with mankind in which he could communicate with man and He could expect man to respond. However, God's plan was not fulfilled due to the sin and disobedience of man. It leads us to the next explanation, which is the Christian understanding of death.

3.2 Christian understanding of death

Concepts about death and the afterlife are quite controversial, something on which it is difficult to agree on. It has not been easy for churches and theologians to understand why humans must die and what happens after their death. Many questions are asked concerning the concept of death such as: Is death part of man's existence or were human beings created mortal from the beginning? What does happen when someone dies? Is there hope for coming back to life again or for entering into another life after death? Also, does the human become a God after death; or are the dead similar to or equal to God? In trying to find answers to these questions, I will first explore the meaning of death, and secondly, the intermediate state.

3.2.1 The meaning of death

It is understood that all human beings are subject to death. It is easiest to accept that death comes to people who have grown old. It is written in the Scriptures that one of God's promises and blessings is to have a long lifespan on this earth (Exod 20:12; Prov 3: 2, 16; Eph 6:2-3). Abraham was a person who was given the chance to grow old; and it is said that he "died at a good old age, an old man and full of years (Gen 25: 8). Unfortunately, death does not depend on a person's age; many people die a premature or sudden death, some people are even born dead or are stillborn babies (Num 12:12; Job 3: 11, 13; Judg 8:10, 16:24). In the Old Testament, many soldiers died in battle, most of them still very young.

¹⁴ Hans Schwarz is a Lutheran theologian and Professor of Systematic Theology and Contemporary Issues and Director of the Institute of Protestant Theology at the University of Regensburg, Germany. He wrote many books and contributed on the Lutheran book: *Christian Dogmatics*, Volume II ("Eschatology").

For centuries, both those practicing with traditional medicines and scientists have looked for solutions to handling the problem of death through various treatments, or avoiding premature, sudden, or stillborn death in order for people of all ages to live a long life. In some cases, scientific or traditional solutions may have found ways to give people a better life, a successful treatment for sickness, and good health, or, even, ways to extend their lives, but in the end everyone dies, sooner or later. Thus, physical death is understood to be the end of our worldly life in which all our vital bodily functions stop. At this point the dead person is separated from his/her family, society, and the world. In the awareness of the reality of death, many reflect on the reason for death and the authenticity of the various understandings of death. Many questions come to mind about whether mankind was created mortal or not.

Some theologians, like Pelagius and his followers, stress the idea that being mortal is part of man's existence. Under the influence of Greek philosophy, it is believed that "Adam was from the beginning made a mortal creature, and death was a natural process which man inevitably had to go through as a human being. Death was part of man's material existence...belongs to God's order of creation" (Berentsen 1985, 175). Accompanied with this idea, it is believed also that the soul is released from the body at the time of death and that this release is the starting point of the idea of the immortality of the soul. Human beings are considered to be mortal the physical part of the body is created from dust, but the soul, created from the breath of God is considered to be immortal.

There are others who reject the idea that human beings were created mortal from the beginning. Augustine said that "The first immortality, which was lost by sinning, was the ability not to die [*posse non mori*]" (McGrath 2007, 417). God created Adam to be immortal, if he did not choose to sin. Thus, biological death is a result of Adam's sin. It is proven in Scripture that death is not a biological destiny but comes from man's fall and God's, subsequent, judgment and punishment: "Death entered the world 'through sin, and spread to all men because all men sinned'" (Rom 5:12) (Berentsen 1985, 176). It is written also that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). All of these scriptures references refer to the story in the Garden of Eden in which Adam and Eve, the first human beings, committed the original sin (Genesis 3). It is clearly stated that human nature was blameless and without fault before the story in Genesis 3, the Fall of Man (McGrath 2007, 416). That is why, the council of Carthage condemned Pelagius' idea which

states “That Adam, the first human being, was created mortal, so that, whether he sinned or not, he would have died from natural causes, and not from the wages of sin” (McGrath 2007, 421).

In other words, the disobedience of the first human beings introduced death into the world despite the fact that God created human beings with the ability to not die. Kaufman used passages from *Sifre Deut.* as follows:

“Immortality as the result of obedience, and lack of obedience resulting in death, applies to all men, not only to Adam and Israel. ‘Both the soul and the body of creatures created from heaven are from heaven; both the soul and body of those creatures from the earth are from earth, except that one creature, man, whose soul is from heaven and his body is from earth. Therefore, if man lives the Torah and performs the will of his Father in heaven, he is like the heavenly creatures...’” (Kaufman 2009, 136)

It says that heavenly creatures are created to be immortal. Humans were originally created to be immortal in a way that the other creatures of earth were not, since they are from only earthly materials.

It is accepted that God created the first human beings with both the choice of either immortality or mortality from the beginning. God did not create Adam and Eve with the intent that they should die, as some people think. It is written: “And the Lord God commanded the man. ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die’” (Gen 2:16-17). In the case of disobedience, mankind had the ability to choose mortality. Another good explanation of this dichotomy between mortality and immortality is as follows:

“Theophilus poses the question of whether God created man mortal or immortal by nature, and answers that God created man neither mortal nor immortal, but capable of both. If God had created man immortal by nature, then He would have made him “a god”, but if He had made man mortal, then God would be responsible for man’s death. ..God cannot have made man a *Theos* from the beginning, nor can God be responsible for man’s death. Rather, God created man capable of both. Thus man can win immortality ... or conversely, man will be responsible for his own death if he disobeys...” (Kaufmann 2009, 142)

In short, humans became subject to death only after the Fall of Man which was the punishment and judgment for the sin, but which was not part of God’s plan from the beginning of creation. So, it is worth noting that only God is immortal (1Tim 6:16). Moreover, it infers that mortal human beings differ from the immortal God and all mankind must die except for those who are still physically alive when Jesus returns at the Second Coming (1 Cor 15: 51; 1Tess 4: 15-17).

So, no matter the differentiation in status on earth, in terms of power, country, authority, social class, etc..., everyone has to face the experience of death.

Because it is a given that everyone must die, and because the subsequent separation causes sorrow, it is not forbidden in the Bible to practice some kinds of mourning such as washing the dead body, wrapping it with cloth, using a coffin or not, crying or weeping, fasting, or otherwise (Gen 23:2, 38:14; 2 Sam 14:2; Matt 5:4; etc.).

It is almost universally accepted that death is not the final existence for human beings. Each country and each religion have some concepts about the continuation of life after physical death although it is explained and understood in different ways. So, the idea of immortality has a widespread reality throughout nearly the entire world (Schwarz 1984, 563). For Christians, the concept of immortality is understood in light of resurrection which is explained in different ways as well. I mean, even among Christian teachings, the idea of the resurrection is explained differently.

Nevertheless, there was time when people did not think about the afterlife and immortality. According to Stephenson¹⁵, in the Old Testament, in the time of the patriarchs through the period of Kings David and Solomon, death was not considered to be annihilation, but simply a transition from one place to another (Stephenson 1993, 51). Accordingly the understanding was that upon death only a burial had to take place. Dead people were simply buried and gathered into one place called *Sheol*, which was neither a hell, nor a heaven, nor a paradise. *Sheol* was only a shadowy place in which there was no life at all (Schwarz 1984, 565). So, the repeated sentences in the Old Testament that say, “gathered to his people” or “to go to his fathers” refer to the idea that the dead within the family will be together in the same grave; this was also a part of the Israel’s identity (Gen 25:8, 35:29, 49: 29, 33, Num 20: 24, 36, 1 Chr 17:11, 2 Kgs 22:20).

The belief in life after death was gradually accepted in the Old Testament, and it became prominent in the book of Daniel, especially Dan 12:2 “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt”. By this point, the hope of afterlife mentioned in the late Old Testament was a deliverance from *Sheol* with a bodily resurrection from the dead (Stephenson 1993, 51). But in the New Testament, the

¹⁵ John R. Stephenson is a Professor of Historical Theology at Concordia Lutheran Theological seminary, St Catharines, Ontario. He wrote and contributed on *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics* Volume XIII about «Eschatology».

notion of afterlife is much clearer in light of the concept of the resurrection as presented in the Pauline and Johannine versions. In other words, the concept of afterlife cannot be fully known, we gather only a few insights grasped from the different texts in which the resurrection is mentioned of in the New Testament.

To be precise, the Christian understanding of death is directly related to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ died and was buried, but He conquered death and the tomb could not hold him, so He was raised on the third day. Jesus was victorious over death, and those who believe in Him and who are united with Him will also overcome death. Because of God's redemptive work through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, death has become a gain, a benefit, for Christians. Paul said "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life." (Rom 6: 4). Because Christ took onto himself the sin and death (wages of sin) of man, humans are now given a new life. Schwarz stated that "Christian death means dying in our sinful self, taking over the death of Christ, and rising into a new life (Schwarz 1984, 562-563). It implies that the fear of death becomes transformed into the hope of a new life through Christian baptism. Luther underlined the continuous need for dying—i.e. that "we must die 'daily' to our old Adam and be 'daily' resurrected in the newness life" (Schwarz 1984, 563). In some measure, the Christian's afterlife starts already at the time of baptism even though they are still physically alive on earth, but this afterlife will be consummated on the day of resurrection. Schwarz (1984, 563) explained it in this way:

"Daily death, in the light of gospel, is reaching out to the eschatological fulfillment, and manifesting something of this new life already today. Yet our daily dying reminds us also of the fragmentary character of all anticipation and points us to the final resolution of the discrepancy between the intentionality and actuality of our life. Death, therefore, is the precondition for new life and the other side of the resurrection"

Therefore, death can be understood through the Christological view and be extended into the eschatological term as a benefit for those who have been baptized in Jesus Christ (Berentsen 1985, 177). That is why Paul said that "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21)

Scholars still debate the anthropological perspectives of death. Concerning the connection between the body and the soul, those who follow the Greek tradition, such as the Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church, believe that the body is annihilated in death, while the soul is released from the body so it can go on to its eternal abode. It is believed that the soul

leaves the body when a person dies and is reunited with the body on the resurrection day. This belief is based on the concept that divides human nature into two elements, the physical body as the mortal part of man but the soul as the immortal part of man (Berentsen 1985, 182).

Pointing back to the discussion on human creation mentioned at the beginning of this chapter (section 3.1.3), human beings were created from both dust and divine breath, and they cannot be separated into a mortal body and an immortal soul, because God did not create human beings in this way. In contrast to the Orthodox view, the Lutheran doctrine adheres to the belief that man is the totality of his being as described in Genesis 2:7, “living being” (Stephenson 1993, 41). In the Bible, human beings are considered in the wholeness of their entities, not being distinctly divided into body and soul (Schwarz 1985, 563). So when someone dies, the soul is not considered to leave the body. Instead, it is assumed that the body and soul rest together, or metaphorically, they go to “sleep”, and wait for the resurrection day. I support the idea of the unity of soul and body at rest because it is written in Scripture that the whole body will be resurrected--not the body alone or the soul alone “resurrection of body” (1 Cor 15, Apostolic Creed). According to Christian Scripture, Christ was the first fruit of this resurrection of body when he has been raised from the dead (1 Cor 15:20) showing that it was indeed the resurrection of the whole person but not partially flesh or soul or spirit alone. Pannenberg¹⁶ refused the Greek idea of immortality arguing that a part of man continues beyond death in an unbroken way. Instead, he stated that “resurrection can only be hoped for as a completely new becoming, as a radical transformation, if not as a new creation” (Pannenberg 1970, 49-50). Stephenson interprets Pannenberg’s idea in this manner: “Scripture obliges us to conceive of the afterlife exclusively in terms of the resurrection of the whole person and not at all in the sense of the soul’s survival of bodily death” (Stephenson 1993, 42).

It is worth noting Karl Rahner, though he was a Catholic theologian of the 20th century, states that the whole body dies and he denies the idea that “the soul leaves this world and takes flight into a spiritual realm” (Maloney 1982, 47). Maloney also says that:

An authentic Christian view of death should stress that the whole person undergoes death. Jesus, not merely His body, died. We shall totally undergo, as a complete entity, as a person, the experience of death.” (Maloney 1982, 48)

¹⁶ Wolfhart Pannenberg is a Lutheran Theologian from German. He has published many books and one of these books is entitled *What Is Man?*

It is not written in the Bible that the body returns to dust as a result of sin, while the soul is not affected by the wages of sin due to its immortal quality. In death the soul should not be conceived as being released from the body according to the Greek tradition. Instead, the whole person, body and soul, is released from sin and the judgment (Berentsen 1984, 177, 183).

In summary, death can be understood to have a threefold meaning: spiritual death, physical or temporal death, and eternal death. Spiritual death is the fact that man is spiritually separated from God due to sin. Physical death is the cessation of life on earth; it can be called temporal death, as well. Eternal death is the second death after the final judgment day (Stephenson 1993, 37).

Having presented that the result of the Fall of Man is that human beings must suffer death, and the resurrection day will take place at the second coming of Jesus Christ, I will now explain what Christians think about the intermediate state.

3.2.2 Intermediate state

The definition of the intermediate state (an interim state) is the state between an individual's death and the day of resurrection, when Jesus comes back again to judge the living and the dead (Apostolic creed). There are many questions about this interim state: "Does the Christian go to heaven immediately, while the non-Christian goes directly to hell?", "Do the dead sleep until the resurrection?", and "Can the dead have contact with or have any other type of relationship with the living and vice versa?" To be honest, these kinds of questions are not easy to answer and have caused controversy amongst various scholars.

The Bible does not talk much about what happens between death and resurrection, thus, Christians cannot be certain of their ideas concerning this in-between state. The Bible does, however, give a few glimpses of information about what will happen at the end of time at the second coming of Christ (*Parousia*), the judgment and the resurrection. So, the intermediate state can be only explained and understood through imagination and speculation, based on the little that the Scriptures say about the afterlife. The two main questions asked above have at least three main answers: One group adheres to the idea that the soul goes directly to heaven (to God) or to hell, and the body dies, but will join the soul on the day of resurrection. Another group believes that both the body and the soul go to sleep until the resurrection. Between these two extremes are those who believe in the concept of temporary places for the believers to stay until the resurrection.

The proponents of the idea that the soul goes directly to heaven or hell have biblical support for their ideas. The preferred biblical texts used to defend their ideas are the following: Jesus' parable concerning the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-20 portrays the rich man as being in Hades (*Sheol* in Hebrew) otherwise known as hell, while the poor man was carried by the angels to Abraham's side in heaven. A second example can be found, in the story of Jesus on the cross, where Jesus prayed to his Father just before his death saying "into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46) and while talking to the criminal hanging on the cross beside him, He says "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). A third example is given in Phil 1: 23 when Paul expresses "the desire to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better".

The idea of the soul reaching hell or heaven (the place where God is) immediately after a person's last breath, assumes the separation of body and soul after death. The body is assumed to return to its original state, dust, whereas the soul goes to either heaven or hell. Their main premise is that both Jesus and believers, the righteous, go directly to heaven after death, while the unrighteous, those who are non-Christians, do not go there. These concepts follow Greek tradition which stresses the immortality of the soul with the body as a prison, a provisory place, a tomb, for the soul.

We have explained above (section 3.1.3) that the Christian view of human nature, however, rejects this separation of the body and the soul in man. Instead, a human being is created to be a holistic living entity, and is not perceived to be a body and a soul that can be separated from one another. Maloney (1982, 47) explained this idea in this manner:

"As Christians, we must reject a literal interpretation of Platonism and even the imagery given in some biblical writings that would separate our bodies from our souls, as though two constructive parts of us were physically wrenched from their unity into a separation that would last until resurrection day. By turning to a more biblical view of man, we can offset this literalness."

The separation of the body and the soul neglects or nullifies also God's plan concerning the resurrection of the body and the judgment on the Last Day. If all departed believers are already with God at the point of their death, there is no need for the resurrection of the body and God's judgment anymore.

Tom Wright¹⁷ highlights another perspective about the intermediate state. He considers heaven to be a temporary stage on the way to the eventual resurrection of the body. So, then, heaven is not the ultimate destination but a temporary lodging until the resurrection day. For instance, Wright clarifies that when Jesus said to the disciples “there are many dwelling places in his Father’s house (John 14:2)”¹⁷; when Paul spoke of his desire to depart and to be with Christ (Phil 1:23), and when Jesus was speaking to the criminal in the cross saying “today you will join me in Paradise”(Luke 23:43), they all referred to this (these) temporary place(s) prior to the resurrection of the body. According to him, this provisional residence (heaven) is only meant for God’s people, namely Christians or believers (Wright 2007, 52). The opposite of heaven for the Christians, is hell for the non-Christians. So, in one sense, Wright refutes the idea that the soul goes directly to God. He prefers to say that the soul will be in a temporary lodging (heaven or hell) until the resurrection. He says, “The ultimate destination is not going to heaven when you die, but being bodily raised into the transformed, glorious likeness of Jesus Christ” (Wright 2007, 180).

He explains, furthermore, that there exists no hierarchy of status in these temporary places, where some Christians go directly to heaven, while others wait in Purgatory (Wright 2007, 181). Here, Wright wants to emphasize that in spite of the fact that he believes we all go to a temporary lodging after death, he does not agree with the Catholic Church’s teaching about Purgatory.

Purgatory was not a popular subject nor part of the Church’s teaching, but it was of universal, prominent importance in the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages (Horne 1986, 93). For Catholics, Purgatory is a place between life on earth and the final afterlife, where souls can be purified through the help of the prayers and sacrifices of the living. In other words, the living can submit offerings, sacrifices, and prayers on behalf of the dead to help them move out of a state of unrighteousness and into a state of righteousness. It is well known, that in the Middle Ages those who wanted to rescue their dead relatives from Purgatory could buy indulgences to save them.

There are a variety of understandings about whether Purgatory is in hell or whether it is a provisional residence before the day of the resurrection (Horne 1986, 93-95). One annual event

¹⁷ Tom Wright was the Anglican Bishop of Durham and a professor of New Testament at the University of St Andrews in Scotland. He wrote the book entitled *Surprised by Hope*.

which is based on the idea of purgatory is the commemoration of “All Saints’ Day” or the “Feast of the Souls” which is celebrated annually on the second of November. Horne explained that “all who have been baptized in the name of Christ, and who have not rejected him are united, across the barriers of time and space, with one another through him...” and the “requiem masses are not merely nostalgic memorial services which indulge wistful recollections of former, happier days, but are real offerings of love and prayer on behalf of those who have gone into the silence of God” (Horne 1986, 93).

Wright’s writing indicates that, “This commemoration shows a sharp distinction between the ‘saints’, who are already in heaven, and the ‘souls’, who aren’t and who are therefore still less than completely happy, and need our help to move on” (Wright 2007, 180).

A long time ago before the assertions of Wright, in the sixteenth century, the reformers Luther and Calvin had already rejected the idea of Purgatory and the practices of the Catholic Church related to it, such as the sale of indulgences and the requiem masses for the dead. What made the reformers and their contemporaries deny the existence of Purgatory was not only that it does not have a biblical basis, but also because it invalidates the redemptive work of Christ on the cross and the doctrine of justification by faith (Berentsen 1985, 188; Horne 1986, 96). Calvin called Purgatory “a deadly fiction of Satan which nullifies the cross of Christ chiefly on the grounds that it threatened the scriptural teaching that salvation is gained by faith in Christ alone”. Nevertheless, nearly 30 years after the Reformation, the Catholic Church accepted the idea of Purgatory as one of their official teachings, during the Council of Trent (1546.1563). Here is their declaration concerning this teaching:

“The Catholic Church, instructed by the Holy Spirit and in accordance with Sacred Scripture and the ancient Tradition of the father, has taught in the Holy Councils and most recently in this ecumenical Council that there is a purgatory, and that the souls detained (inside, arrested, imprisoned) there are helped by the acts of intercession (*suffragia*) of the faithful, and especially by the acceptable sacrifice of altar. Therefore this holy Council commands the bishops to strive diligently that the sound doctrine of purgatory, handed down by the Holy Fathers and the sacred Councils, be believed by the faithful and that it be adhered to, taught and preached everywhere” (Horne 1986 ,95).

However, in spite of the fact that this doctrine of Purgatory became official in the Catholic Church by the Council decision in Trent; some fervent Catholic Christians have been reluctant to accept the existence of the Purgatory due to the lack of scriptural support (Berentsen 1985, 187). It is important to note, that the most recent action regarding the doctrine of Purgatory is that

Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) removed it from The Catholic Church's official teaching (Wright 2007, 179).

It is not surprising that people are hesitant to accept the idea of an interim existence that allows for the possibility for the person to attain a higher purification after death life. It is generally accepted that when a person dies, he or she can no longer do anything for themselves. Thus, they would have no chance to affect their own purification post-mortem. Any preparation for the afterlife must be done before a person's last breath, death. God judges no one for what they do in the intermediate state, but judges according to what people do during their lives. He knows that the interim state is only a state of waiting for the universal resurrection, and is not a time for purification or for rectification. I agree with Wright (2007, 183) when arguing that "The suffering of the present time, not of some post-mortem state, are the valley through which we have to pass in order to reach the glorious future".

As far as the Orthodox Church is concerned, a number of its writers like Peter of Moghila and Dositheus defended the doctrine of Purgatory in the seventeenth century. But nowadays, most, if not all, Orthodox theologians reject the notion of Purgatory, trusting that the faithful do not suffer at all during their interim state. However, they are still convinced that Christians have a duty to pray for the departed, in case any of the departed should need help for purification. I, myself, am convinced that none of the departed can be helped by the prayers of the living; each person will be judged by his/her own life, not by the contribution of others on their behalf after their death.

Yet, some might puzzle about the texts written in 1 Pet 3: 19, 4:6 "the gospel was preached also to those who are dead" and "By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison" wondering whether these are in support of the reality of Purgatory and the possibility of a second chance for purification in the afterlife. The scope of this thesis does not allow for a separate discussion of the meanings of these two references. What I can say, is that I understand there to be no relation between the words "prison" and "dead" as stated in these verses, and Jesus' death. The death of Jesus is, in reality, the same kind of death as man's death because He became a substitute in His death for all mankind who are subject to death. Therefore, also He could do nothing while He was in the tomb or in *Sheol* until his resurrection. Moreover, the words "the dead" and "prison" metaphorically refer to the separation of human beings to God (spiritual death) and the bondage of sin. So, it is certain that there is no second chance for

purification or repentance after death, during the in-between state. As a result, there is no need for the idea of Purgatory. Finally, the parable about the rich man and Lazarus reveals that there is no second chance after our life here on earth.

Another thought about the intermediate state, the idea to which Lutherans generally adhere, is the notion of the soul falling asleep. The idea that the dead are asleep or have fallen asleep is mentioned several times in the Bible. Here are some examples: “Lazarus had fallen asleep” (John 11: 11, 14); Stephen, “He fell asleep” (Acts 7:60); etc... The understanding of the soul falling asleep does not require the soul to separate from or leave the body at the time of death. This idea is consistent with the concept that the body and the soul are a single entity, the one being nothing without the other, and that they stay together both in life and in death. So, in death, it is incorrect to say that the soul leaves the body.

In earlier times, Lutherans declared their belief in the separation of the soul and the body in death using this declaration: “Scripture teaches that physical death is not annihilation, but the separation of the soul from the body”. However, realizing that this concept stemmed from or was influenced by Hellenistic ideas, a new understanding took place (Stephenson 1993, 37).

So, the expectation of the Christian should be the resurrection of the body, which cannot be separated from the soul, but not the resurrection of the soul or “the soul’s survival of bodily death” (Stephenson 1993, 42). It is convincing that after death, the whole body sleeps and waits for its resurrection. Following the teachings of Augustine, Luther, Pope John XXI, and Karlstadt understood that “Souls in the intermediate state share the fate of their mortal bodies, rising to life again with them only on the last day” (Link 2012, 168). In addition, in my opinion, the whole person presents after death, but not the souls alone referring to the parable concerning the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-20).

The Pauline idea of being with Christ, or in heaven after death is a bit blurred. It is confusing as to whether the words “heaven” and “paradise” have the same meaning or not; and whether they are the ultimate goal or are the intermediate state. According to Wright, heaven and paradise are the same, and they refer to the temporary lodging, not the ultimate destination. From this point of view, it is logical that believers can both be in the interim state and with Christ, which supports what Paul thought at that time. Moreover, the falling asleep of the soul does not mean an unconscious soul, but that “the dead are held firmly within the conscious love of God and the conscious presence of Christ, while they wait that final day” (Wright 2007, 184).

Agreeing with Wright, and taking into consideration what Christian Scripture teaches, Stephenson explained that “Christ’s lordship over the believing dead would be inconceivable apart from their continued existence with Him: ‘If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living’ (Rom 14:8-9); and St. John in his Revelation affords us that the departed saints, between their death and the resurrection, are occupied with the worship of the Almighty” (Rev 7:9-10, 14-15) (1993, 52). He adds that:

“...bodily death does not involve the departed’s being catapulted from time into pure divine eternity. Paradise moves towards the consummation of creation, not its abolition. Thus the souls of the martyrs are aware of the passage of time; otherwise their cry ‘how long?’ (RV 6:10) would be meaningless. The blessed dead are waiting (RV 6:11) for the ingathering of the whole Church, for the *Parousia* and the consummation of God’s promises in the new heaven and the new earth”. (Stephenson 1993, 52)

Stephenson’s idea fits with Schwarz statement that “not everybody dies at the same time...we will wait until all are assembled for the final resurrection and for judgment day” (Schwartz 1984, 568). Moreover, in the Lutheran confession and liturgy, there is a scriptural testimony to the reality of believing the dead to be in the intermediate state. In the doxology of the Holy Supper, the Church praises the Lord with the angels and archangels and with all company in heaven (Stephenson 1993, 52).

As discussed earlier, the consideration of human nature, the human composition, to be a dichotomy (body and soul) or a trichotomy (body, soul, and spirit) causes us difficulty in our understanding of what exactly happens to us after death. The crux of the matter is to know whether the soul or the spirit leaves the body in death. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that the soul will leave the body, because human beings are not perceived to be distinctly body and distinctly souls, but complete living beings. What is seen often in the Scriptures is: God gave his Spirit (Judg 3:10, 6: 34, 11,:29; 1 Sam 10:6, 16:13); took away his Spirit (1 Sam 16.14, 1 Kgs 22:24) to certain people in the Old Testament and He prophecies the giving of His Spirit which was fulfilled on Pentecost (Acts 2). King David prayed and requested that God’s Spirit would not be taken from him (Ps 51:11), not the soul. As Hefner (1984, 333) said, the spirit “does not exist as a third entity alongside the physical (somatic) aspects of the human”. So, in my opinion, when Jesus said, “Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46) and Stephen said, “Lord

Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59), they were not talking about their own souls. These texts, then, cannot be used as good arguments to support that the soul goes directly to heaven or paradise.

In spite of all these conclusions concerning what happens to both believers and non-believers after death, and whether believers go directly to heaven or are with Christ or in front of God, all is quite speculative, even though some conclusions can be assumedly backed up by Christian Scripture. Speculation can certainly be true, or it can be wrong.

It needs to be kept in mind that everything that happens beyond death is not part our worldly existence, which is bound to material matter and the boundaries of time which are realities in our physical world. Life on earth is intimately connected with space and matter. Time, is measured in past, present, and future. However, in eternity, beyond this material world, God, clearly states that there is no concept of time (Schwartz 1984, 568). We can only think in terms of what we know to be true about matter and space in this present world. Therefore, because of the discrepancy of the reality of matter and space beyond death, it cannot be thought to be similar to what we know on earth. It infers that no one can really know what happens in the afterlife, especially in the intermediate state. That is why the use of the term “sleep”, in describing the interim state, is preferable. Schwartz gives a good description:

“Since we put our hope not in a state between death and resurrection but in ‘the resurrection of body and the life everlasting’, the notion of an intermediate state of sleep until judgment is at most an optional construction...When we cross the border of space and time, we encounter God’s eternal presence and become coeternal with God and all the others who have gone before us. Regardless of when we cross the demarcation between this life and life eternal, we will appear at the ‘other side’ at the ‘same moment’ together with everyone” (Schwartz 1984, 569-570)

This idea is related to Martin Luther’s advice:

“In a similar way as one does not know how it happens that one falls asleep, and suddenly morning approaches when one awakes, so we will suddenly be resurrected at the Last Day, not knowing how we have come into death and through death” (Schwartz 1984, 570).

In addition, I understand from this term “sleep” that no one can do anything to change the status of the person who is asleep, but we can hope is that he/she will awaken again and will meet his/her family and friends. This concept is different from the term “death” which has a more negative meaning than the word “sleep”. The intermediate state, it is only a temporal death, a waiting period until the resurrection. Real death is separation from God after the judgment,

which is eternal death. That is why, Jesus did not use the word “death” or “died” referring to the physical death of Lazarus “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep” (John 11:11), and “Stop wailing, ‘she is not dead but asleep’” (Luke 8:52). So, until the resurrection day, all the departed are asleep and at rest. No matter when each person leaves this earth in death at difference times, God sees it all through his glasses beyond this present world.

Therefore, it is reasonable to say that the idea of necromancy or the cult of dead is forbidden in Scripture (Deut 18: 9-12) although Israel practiced it sometimes (1 Sam 28). The dead can never do anything for the living. They are never thought of as gods because there is no transformation (no growing nor diminishing, no becoming better nor worse) in the in-between state. Even Jesus himself, did not become God in his death. Nor is He “God despite his death; but he is God in that he died” (Jenson 1984, 188). Therefore, there can be no expectation of becoming a God after death. In other words, man remains man after death and does not become a God. It means that no one should consider or believe in the departed as gods who are able to protect us or bless us or have any authority over the living.

We have stated that a Christian participates in Christ’s death and in His resurrection through baptism. Therefore, the Christian’s afterlife has already begun in the present time while still living on earth, but is not yet consummated (Schwartz 1984, 558-560). Thus, the period of in-between is an indeterminable period of “already- though not yet” and this is the period of rest or sleep. It can be concluded, then, that when Jesus told the criminal “today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43), He was speaking of this double sense of “already - not yet”. He is already with Christ, however, until the resurrection.

In review, it has been explained that the Christian God is the One who was revealed in the Old Testament to Moses and Israel, as the Creator of everything in this world, and Who raised Jesus Christ from the dead in the New Testament. Human beings, who were created with bodily parts in the image of God, are special creatures as compared with all other living beings, and are destined to live in union with God, to have a good relationship to God. However, human beings now must die because of The Fall. God’s saving work through Jesus Christ; God’s original intention for human beings will be restored. Man never becomes God, even after the resurrection day. Believers will, however, be restored into a right relationship with God their creator again.

Chapter four

SAKALAVA TRADITION AND CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

In this chapter, there is threefold objective which is to analyze the Sakalava tradition with the Christian faith in order to avoid rejecting altogether the Sakalava tradition; to find out how to approach the Sakalava when proclaiming the gospel; and to describe how to care for and to maintain the Sakalava converts. I do not intend to judge or to criticize negatively the Sakalava tradition or some denominations. Rather, I want to demonstrate how it is possible to appreciate and encourage the Sakalava in the customs which are compatible with the Christian faith. Also, I want to provide a new perspective and ameliorate Sakalava practices which are somewhat analogous with the Christian faith. At the same time, I will explain the reason for denying some Sakalava practices which are inappropriate within the life of Christian faith and teachings.

4.1 Analysis of Sakalava tradition with Christian faith.

It is worth noting that no culture is suitable 100% for the message of the Christian gospel. Although Jesus was born into the Jewish culture, the core of the message that He brought did not completely fit within the Jews culture and teachings. That is why Jesus was hated and persecuted by some elders and some groups of people such as the Pharisees, and the Sadducees. Ultimately, Jesus died on the cross and Christians believe, He has risen from dead. Even after Jesus' resurrection, speaking the message of the gospel, the apostle Paul stated: "...but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles (1 Cor 1:23). It implies that the gospel of Jesus Christ for transforming and giving a new meaning to a given culture if the practice is not appropriate for the gospel. Therefore, in order to see what Sakalava culture is compatible or incompatible with Christian faith, I will divide into three the analysis: the understanding of God, the understanding of death, the understanding of afterlife.

4.1.1 The understanding of God

It is known that many countries have complained about the early methods of evangelization used in non-western countries largely because they rejected all the cultures of the recipient countries.

Bevan¹⁸ expressed the feeling of the Africans and the Asians as follows: “What African and Asian countries began to realize was that there are values in their cultures that are just good as, if not better than...” (Bevans 2011, 11). It is not my intent to keep complaining about what the missionaries have done but rather to analyze the Sakalava beliefs and practices vis-à-vis the Christian teaching and to see which of Sakalava tradition are compatible with Christian teachings. We begin by analyzing the understanding of God, recognizing that religion and culture cannot be separated in the Sakalava tribe. Both Christian and traditional Sakalava believe that God is the source of everything. So, it is necessary to start with the understanding of God to facilitate the following analysis which concerns death and the afterlife. One question that arises is whether Sakalava God is the same as Christian God.

The notion of God in Sakalava tradition was previously discussed in chapter II, section 2.2.1. It has been said that together with the belief on the existence of one supreme God who created the hands and the feet, the world, the Sakalava still believe in many gods or divinities, including the king. Additionally, for the Sakalava, the departed ancestors become gods when they get proper funerals and help from the living. In chapter III- section 3.1.1, it is stated that the Christian God is the God who revealed himself to Moses and to the Israel in the Old Testament and He is believed to be the creator of all creatures in this visible world. In the New Testament God is also the One who sent His Son to rescue fallen humanity from death into eternal life.

The problem is how to reconcile these Sakalava beliefs with Christian teaching. Some of the informants state that the God of Sakalava is the same as the Christian God; while others state that the Sakalava God is different from Christian God. It is always necessary to find fair and gracious ways to tackle these big differences. It can be thought that the Sakalava belief in the supreme God who created the world is from the general revelation which shows that God can be known through nature, and this God is Yahweh (Ps 19:1-4; Rom 1:20). It means that in all places, all people can know God through observing the beauty and the power in the nature.

It can be explained from the name of God in Sakalava: *Zanahary* which means “the One who creates” or *Ndragnahary*, “the master who creates” (chapter II- section 2.1.1) That is, the Sakalava believe in one God who creates through nature. Moreover, one of proverbs concerning the existence of God says: “*Aza mijery ny lohasaha mangina fa Andriamanitra ao an-tampon’ny*

¹⁸ Stephen B. Bevans is a Roman Catholic Priest and a Professor of a Mission and Culture. One of his famous books is entitled *Models of Contextual Theology*.

loha” (“Do not think or see only the quiet valley, but (think about) God above the head”). This proverb can be interpreted and used in many ways such as the existence of God, the omnipresence of God, the omniscience of God, the fear of God and so on.

However, the existence of many divinities or gods causes difficulties for monotheistic Christians and begs the question of whether the Sakalava god(s) is really the same as Christian God. As we look at these many divinities in Sakalava, the notion of polytheism immediately comes to mind. As mentioned in chapter II- section 2.1.1, there are many divinities in the Sakalava tradition: male and female divinities, divinities of the superior or inferior region, divinities of North or East, the maker of bones or muscles etc...On the one hand, these various titles of divinities might refer to one God but in different activities or places. That is, it might simply result from the lack of adequate vocabulary to identify God. For instance, when the Sakalava use the four corners to identify the divinities, it might be the way of showing the omnipresence of God. On the other hand, it might come from different speculations of the forefathers. The oral tradition of the Sakalava is not a written tradition such as that of Christians, resulting in everyone reflecting on the existence and the activities of God and interpreting it in various ways. It reminds us of the use of different titles and names of Yahweh or Jesus depending on how God acts or reveals himself to different people.in different times and contexts In the Bible, there are lots of titles of God such as Most High God, God Father, God King, Holy God, Righteous God, Lord of Hosts, many more. By the same token, Jesus has lots of titles such as Son of God, Son of Man, Son of David, Messiah, King, High Priest, and so on.

Nevertheless, it cannot be sure that the Sakalava God is the same as the Christian God. It should be kept in mind that when Yahweh revealed to Moses and to the Israel, He was aware of the existence of many gods in the world. Yet, the people of Israel were taught and trained to believe in one God, Yahweh (chapter III- section 3.1.1). It is logical and natural for everyone, every tribe, and every country to look for a being who is more powerful than humankind to consider as God. For the Israelites, until the time of self-disclosure of Yahweh, they must have believed in any god(s). Similarly, even if the Israelites had believed in one God before Jesus’ incarnation, it was still difficult for them to believe in and to accept Jesus as God. So, the fact that the Sakalava believe in many gods does not keep the Church from preaching the one true God, Yahweh.

Finally, Paul had a good strategy when he preached about Jesus and the resurrection to the people in Athens in Acts 17: 16-34. Like the Athenians, the Sakalava are very religious, but it is not written anywhere in the Sakalava places of worship whether they know the gods they believe in or not. What is clear is the fact that most of Sakalava people do not hear about Jesus and His power. That might be one of the reasons why they keep their tradition. So, Paul's approach is one of the best ways to handle the polytheism in the Sakalava tribe. I would suggest that even if it is believed that the Christian God is different from the beliefs of Sakalava, it is good in the beginning to orient the people based on what they have, and to gradually lead them to a new understanding of the truth. For instance, the Sakalava already believe in on supreme God who created everything and gave life. This good point should be affirmed as they are led to understand what God has done in Jesus Christ for salvation.

When the Sakalava people consider the king as God, it interprets the king as God's representative, especially when they think that God is in very remote area (Chapter II- section 2.1.2). The royal system is part of human organization and can be seen in many countries in the world. So, when the Sakalava have this system, it is a sort of adaptation or imitation of the neighboring countries. It also reminds us of the Israelites consideration of the king in the Old Testament which was somewhat similar to the Sakalava idea. God is the King of Israel and He has shown his readiness to be with Israel day and night, especially after His revelation and the exodus out of Egypt. God is always showing the Israelites that He is not far from them, but is with them offering protection, offspring and land (Chapter III- 3.1.1). Nevertheless, the Israelites asked Yahweh to give them an earthly king such as all the other nations had (1 Sam 8). Even though aware of the dangers of having an earthly king, Yahweh appointed a king to the Israelites in response to their requests. Unfortunately, not only did most of Israel's kings lead them to worship other gods but they abused their power to overrule or to treat Israel severely (1 Chr 5:25, 2 Chr 26:16, 1 Kgs 21:7, cf. 1 Sam 8: 11-17).

It is still seen in the Sakalava tribe that the Sakalava commoners and slaves do not have freedom because of the monarch system (Fiadana 1993, 70). Also, the king wants always to be served as God and leads the people to other gods for his/her benefits. It does not mean that it is not good to have king as a leader or an elder in the society. It is necessary to have a good leader if he/she brings peace and gives freedom to people, specifically when the king or the leader shows the true, the real God. Therefore, it is clear that the way of understanding the king and the

role of the king in the Sakalava society is different from that of the Christian's. In the Bible, Jesus is the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies, as Lord, King, and Son of God, found in the Old Testament (2 Sam 7:12-16; 1 Chr 17:12-13; Ps 2; 110). So, Jesus Christ is the Great King and the King of kings, King of all nations because of his death and his resurrection in the fulfillment of prophesy (John 18:37; 1 Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14; 19:6, 16). Jesus himself said "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt 28:18). Although having that best and highest position, the King Jesus is a humble and a peaceful King (Matt 21:9; John 12: 13). The reason for his coming on earth is not to be served but to serve in freeing people from their sin and result of that sin (death), through the sacrifice on the cross (Matt 11:28; Mark 10:45). Therefore, Jesus is the only King who has led people in the right way and has given people peace and liberation, especially salvation for eternal life (John 3:16; 8: 36; 14: 6, 27 etc...).

One idea of understanding of God which is not compatible with the Christian faith is the Malagasy third way of understanding of ancestor (Chapter II, section 2.2.2). That is, when the departed achieves the land of the ancestors after long passage, he/she is called ancestor in the stage of being near God, or even understood as God. The Sakalava expect protection and blessing from the ancestors when they remember the latter by means of sacrifices and worships; while wrath and punishment - sickness, childlessness, poverty, and even death- to those who do not venerate the ancestors. In chapter III section 3.2.2, it is previously stated that any kind of necromancy and cult of the dead is forbidden in the Christian Scripture. It is not consistent with the Christian teaching to expect the blessing or protection of the dead. Only God can protect and bless people as He is the creator and the Lord of all creation. So, the expectation of the living to receive protection, healing, offspring, prosperity from them is in vain. Some people have begun to realize that the orphan people would have been the happiest in the world if the ancestors, the spirits of the dead, the departed could help or bless or protect.

Two beliefs unique to the Sakalava tribe, spirit possession and cult of the king's relics, are not compatible with the teachings of the Christian faith. Firstly, in terms of need for visible and tangible God, like the relics of the *dady* (chapter II- section 2.4.2), it is previously mentioned that Yahweh is not far from his creature, including human being, but presents in continuing creation, in his protection, and especially his ever-presence through the his Holy Spirit (chapter III- section 3.1.1 and 3.2.2). Everyone can call on God anytime through Jesus Christ because of his death and his victory over death; and he is ready to reply and to respond to people's needs

(Matt 6:4, 18; 7:7; Col 3:17). Secondly, not only is there no scriptural basis of the spirit possession and the cult of the relics, but again, in the Bible all kinds of cult of dead and the inquiring or the consultation of/with medium are prohibited (Deut 18:9-14; Exod 22:18; Lev 19:26, 31; 20:6, 27; Jer 27:9-10).

The well-known story of Saul, dead Samuel, and medium En-dor in 1 Sam 28: 3-25 is uncertain as to whether it was associated with Yahweh or Satan. Because of the work of medium En-dor, Saul could communicate with Samuel, but it is not clear whether this is with his physical or spiritual appearance or just his imagination. However, it is said that what Samuel said was from Yahweh or Yahweh's plan (vv. 16-19). From the Christian point of view, the divination and the necromancy are associated with the dead and viewed as demons (Zuesse 1987, 379-380; Bourguignon 1987, 345-346). Thus, the story in 1 Sam 28 is ambiguous. My informant P2 (09 July 2012) stated that Satan can deceive people in different ways; even Satan can use the name of Yahweh to cheat people. For example, some magicians and diviners use a Bible with their medicine as means of deceiving people in Madagascar, because Christianity is of such dominant importance there.

4.1.2 The understanding of death

With regard to the cause of death, Sakalava and the Christian have almost the same ideas (Chapter II- section 2.3.1; chapter III- section 3.2.1). First, that the supreme God as the creator of everything, including the mankind, also has the authority to end someone's life is a common idea among Sakalava and Christians. It is not a question of whether it is a different God who decides one's death, but the acceptance of the supreme God's decision. Secondly, the common understanding of the cause of death is the idea that the death is the result of mistakes. In that case, death is understood as God's judgment and punishment as contrasted with the gnostic idea that human beings are predestined to be mortal due to the part of human nature created from the dust. Therefore, it is admitted that everyone must die, both in Sakalava tradition and in Christian doctrine. The third common idea of death between the Sakalava tradition and the Christian teaching is the reality that death is not the final existence for human being. Both traditions state the possibility of the afterlife.

On the other hand, apart from these three common insights, the Sakalava still think that the mistakes in the society such as breaking the social law or the taboos bring about death. Also, the *tromba* and the ancestors have the right to kill people. These latter threaten the Sakalava

people day and night when they still keep their tradition 100%. Additionally, the Sakalava believe that death cannot occur without human participation by means of witchcraft methods.

The hope of the best life after death motivates the Christians to accept the reality of death whatever the reasons, particularly the belief that God gives and He also takes away (Job 1:21). Thus, the Christian should not be tempted to inquire the medium or the witch doctors regarding the source of death. It is enough to accept that death is God's decision and result of sins (Chapter III- section 3.2.1). And, Christian should not fear the threat of the *tromba* or the ancestors because they are already dead and cannot do anything to the living. In short, in death, the body, the soul, and the spirit of the dead stop functioning (Chapter III- section 3.2.2).

Furthermore, as previously stated in Chapter III- section 3.1.2, 3.2.2, human beings are not destined to become God after death. Human beings remain human after death, in spite of God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ. Much more, when it comes to the idea of departed ancestors, there is no expectation of any action from the dead people because it is believed that the period of death is just time for rest or for sleeping in metaphoric way. So, any actions of the spirits of the dead in this world are just Satan's demonstrations according to most of my Christian interviewees (P1, P2, C1, C2, R1, R2, R3 and so on). In a word, it can be said to be Satan's deception or Satan's imitation. Indeed, it is proved practically that Satan just pretends to be the ancestors because the real ancestors would not harm or threaten their relatives all the time (C2, 02 July 2012). It can also be said that Satan just pretends because all of the harmful acts from so-called ancestors are healed by Christian prayers and gifts of healing¹⁹. To some extent, the Church in Madagascar is growing fast because people run away from the fake ancestors after enduring a long time of bondage, suffering and death. Sharp illustrated one case that "another Sakalava convert was a twenty- year-old man who joined (Christianity) because he was deeply distressed by the suffering that he saw his mother and ex-wife endure as *tromba* mediums" (Sharp 1993, 268). So, humankind never becomes God and people should not be cheated and

¹⁹ In the book of Lesley A. Sharp, *The Possessed and the Dispossessed*, Zaloky, an old Sakalava woman, describes her past activities as a medium as very difficult. She said "...I saw black spots for three days! It was terrible...when a *tromba* spirits gets angry, he makes you sick...I didn't have money to host a ceremony to make him happy, and this is really frightening me. I wondered, is he going to kill me? ...We live near the newly built Lutheran Church, and my spirit didn't like it either...Then one day I just wandered into the Church, possessed by the *tromba* (spirit)! Can you imagine! I don't remember what happened, but Marcel and pastor say that they stopped the service there and drove out the spirit.....Now Marcel and I pray there every week..." Sharp adds in his book: "Zaloky is now a respected leader in the Church" (page 267).

tempted by Satan to envy or to expect to be like God. For these reasons, I do not agree with the meaning of deification as the purpose of becoming God ontologically.

In terms of funeral rites, each tribe and each country generally have its own rites and traditions. The Bible shows us the Jewish culture's perspective on the reality of death (Chapter III- section 3.2.1). The Christian Scriptures clearly state that "there is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance" (Eccl 3:4). So, it can be said that there is no words suggesting we should not weep or mourn. It is comprehensible that the familial separation is not simple when someone dies. For Jews, they are used to showing their sorrowfulness and their grief in outward manner such as weeping, rubbing ashes, shaving the head, tearing the clothes and so on (Gen 37:29, Job 1:20) and they have a long process of mourning until the bereaved are comforted and at peace .Whereas, in general, the Sakalava also mourn in outward manner like weeping, shaving, not taking a bath, not wearing good clothes or washing clothes, not eating good food and so forth. Also, the Sakalava have long period of mourning which is divided in 3 stages: rite of separation, rite margin, rite of aggregation (Jaovelo-Dzao 1996, 181) (Chapter II- section 2.3.2)

We are urged in the Scripture to "rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn" (Rom 12:15). It has been said that when someone dies, the family and the society appropriately show sympathy and contribute on the need of the family such as money, food, and clothes for wrapping the corpse, during the funeral ceremony. This practice shows the kindness and the love of people toward the bereaved family according to the Scripture "rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn" (Rom 12:15) and "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2). This good habit has been practiced by all tribes in Madagascar for a long time and there is no need for rejecting it in the Malagasy culture.

Moreover, the Christian should show that sympathy to all people either Christians or non-Christians. Also, when the departed is a Christian or from Christian family, the Church is called to take advantage of the opportunity to preach the Christian hope of the eternal life during the funeral ceremony. It is the time for witnessing the goodness of Christianity and the belief that those who believe in Christ will be resurrected and will have an everlasting life.

Nevertheless, it is not a good motivation when people sometimes show sympathy without love but rather out of fear of society or a fulfillment of social laws. It is already mentioned in chapter II- section 2.3.2 that what motivates some people to express sympathy is a sort of

selfishness and fear of the ancestors and ancestors' punishment. It means, they contribute or show sympathy to gain favor in order that they will be shown sympathy if one of their family dies. The Church always teaches people to live with unconditional love and to do everything out of unconditional love (1 Cor 16:14).

Another difficulty with the Sakalava practice of mourning is the fact that it burdens the misery of the bereaved and the whole community twice or more, particularly when one king dies. Lot of taboos and rites must be followed during the mourning period. For instance, when a king passes away, the commoners and the slaves are not allowed to work, to bath, to eat good food; also, they must contribute toward all the expenses and all duties during the funeral. The slaves have to wait for the dead body until it reaches the full desiccation. For the commoners, sacrifice has to be made, houses sometimes have to be burned, just to mention a few (Chapter II- section 2.3.2). All these practices do not respect the human rights but they also affect the health, the timetable and the financial plan of many families. Fortunately, the use of slaves as sacrifice, when a king dies, does not exist anymore nowadays (Chapter II- section 2.3.3). On the one hand, the mourning contribution might be a way of showing respect to the king or the dead's family. On the other hand, it might destroy the whole body and the whole life of the family or the society, especially when life is getting more and more expensive in Madagascar.

There are no laws prohibiting the manner in which the bereaved mourn; how long they mourn, how they appearance or what they look like, or how they act and react during the mourning time. As Christians, there is no relationship to the acts of mourning and whether the departed has a possibility of a good afterlife. In other words, mourning does not impact whether the departed is heir to eternal life. In similar way, the livings' intercession (prayers, sacrifices on behalf of the departed as a means to reach the land of ancestors (for Sakalava) or eternal life (for Catholic Church's doctrine on purgatory), are not acceptable and do not have a scriptural basis (Chapter III- section 3.2.2).

Rather, the promise of eternal life depends on the departed himself/herself when he/she was alive. It is clear that those who believe in Jesus Christ have that eternal life (Mark 16:16; John 3:16, 36; Acts 16:31). In addition, physical death is not a final existence but a temporal one, in contrasted with the eternal death after the God's final judgment. So, the Christians should not focus too much on the mourning in spite of the hardship of the separation, except giving comforts and supports to the bereaved ones. Rather, it is important to underline the hope of the

everlasting life because of Jesus' salvific work (Chapter III- section 3.2.2). This leads us again to the next explanation which concerns the understanding of the afterlife.

4.1.3 The understanding of the afterlife

In general, the understanding of the afterlife cannot be separated with the understanding of God and the understanding of death. So, as commented above, death is not one's final destiny. There is hope of everlasting life after the resurrection day and the last judgment. There is also eternal death for those who do not believe in Christ and his salvation (cf. John 3: 16, 36). While, similar to the Christian view, death is not the final existence (chapter II- 2.3.1).

The Sakalava belief in the existence of the ancestral land can be used as a starting point of declaring the Christian teaching of community of saints. In Old Testament, there was time the Israelites believed in the special place for the departed ("gathered to his people" or "to go to his fathers"). It is clear that the Israelites did not think this place of departed as a place for the spiritual ancestors, but only one place for gathering the departed. While for the Sakalava, the ancestral land is expected to be a spiritual place for the departed, and from this spiritual place the ancestors control the living. The hope of the existence of this ancestral land in the hereafter is seen through some practices during the funeral ceremony. For instance, the departed is equipped with some tools in the strong wood coffin. The departed is told not to come back to the living anymore and the ancestors are asked to welcome the newly departed (chapter II-section 2.3.2). It is amazing in Sakalava that when someone dies far from the family and it is not possible to bury the corpse in the family's tomb, there is a special rite to call the dead spirit to be together in the land of ancestors (C2, 02 July 2012).

Therefore, this hope of afterlife is one of good points in Sakalava tradition, in which the Christian should take advantage to proclaim the idea of afterlife in a new meaning. It should be clear that the community of the believers begins in Baptism (already) and will be consummated (not yet) in the second return of Christ. That is, the Christian is dead to sin with Christ in baptism and is resurrected with him into eternal life. It is clear that in baptism, believers are adopted to be children of God so that they can communicate and live with him in the everlasting life (cf. John 1:12; Gal 3:26; 4:4-7; 1 John 3:1-2). This is the "atonement" which shows that the believers are "at one" ("at-one-ment") with God in eternal life. Moreover, the Church teaches that those who believe in Jesus Christ are able to have eternal life, regardless of age, social class, gender, to denomination. (cf. John 3:16; Gal 3:28). By contrast, according to Sakalava tradition, the

ancestral land is limited to those who fulfill the above mentioned requirements. In addition, children, prisoners, witches, slaves and marginal people do not have any possibility of achieving admission to this community of the ancestors. To believe in Christ means to accept that Jesus is the Son of God and was sent by His father to redeem the fallen human race. Therefore, the exigency of proper burial and good conduct is not the Christian criteria for having eternal life. (Chapter II- 2.3.3). According to Christian doctrine, and emphasized in the Lutheran doctrine of Justification, no one is justified and saved by his/her own work or by any human intervention, but is justified and saved through and in Jesus Christ alone (chapter III-section 3.2.2).

Finally, the basic Christian teaching is the belief that there is no mediator except Jesus Christ. He has fulfilled all the requirements concerning the sacrifice in the Old Testament. There is no longer any need for sacrifice other than the Great Sacrifice on the cross, when Jesus Christ offered himself unto death as substitution for sinful humankind and for our salvation. He was the Great Priest and the Sacrifice at once. Consequently, only Jesus is the mediator between God and human beings, and through him believers enter and are heirs to eternal life (Heb 4:14-16; 9). Also, as a result of his self- sacrifice and his victory over death, he was given the authority in the heaven and on earth (P2, 09 July 2012) (Chapter II- section 2.4.2).

We see in this analysis that the Sakalava have had strong practices and beliefs concerning God, death, and afterlife. Even if the Sakalava tradition and Christian teaching are not considerably different, the analysis displays that the Church needs to be ready to lead the Sakalava to the real destiny of human beings after death, which is eternal life. Further, it is seen that Sakalava have good, compatible practices available to prepare them for Christian faith. Therefore, in what follows, I shall deal with how to approach the Sakalava

4.2 Ways of approaching the Sakalava

At this point I will focus on practical and missiological ideas as a complement to the theoretical teachings of the Christian faith. I bring this emphasis because it has been experienced that the challenge of the Christian Church in working with the Sakalava tribe concerns not only on their tradition, but it also the matter of how to approach them. So, knowing what is the strength and the weakness of the Sakalava, the Church needs to know how to approach the people in this tribe. Then, before describing the strategies of approaching the Sakalava, I shall explain what hinders the Sakalava to convert to Christianity.

4.2.1 The obstacles of the evangelization to Sakalava:

There are at least four hindrances make the evangelization difficult toward the Sakalava people: Sakalava characteristics, Catholic methods, the tribal conflicts and the weaknesses of the Church.

The strong religious beliefs and practices in the Sakalava society shape their characteristics. As mentioned earlier, all practices in the Sakalava daily life depend on the monarch system and the beliefs related to the ancestors. So, every single thing the Sakalava people plan to do is based on precaution due to fear of punishment, and particularly fear of death.

It is then understandable that the Sakalava react negatively to other people or refuse to receive other traditions in order to keep their own tradition when we realize that behind this reaction is the protection of their whole life. It should be kept in mind that when people are born and trained in a specific tradition, the mind, spirit, even the entire life and being of these people is grounded in that tradition and it is difficult to change or to be convinced to leave their habits. Even the Scripture says: “Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it” (Prov 22: 6).

Consequently, various characteristics are attributed to Sakalava which relates to these feelings of keeping their traditions. Most of my interviewees mentioned and described the characteristics of Sakalava which connect them to one another because these characteristics are shaped by shared education and resulting anxiety. It all tends to the same purpose of observing the tradition in order to have good lives. Some interviewees, (R2, L1,.) described the characteristics positively, saying the Sakalava are careful, religious, people, while others (P2, S1, S2) described them negatively saying they are arrogant, unsociable, unfriendly, worried, anxious, suspicious, hesitant, and jealous people. So, for example, when the Sakalava are said to be arrogant or unfriendly, it is all about his carefulness and caution about mixing their tradition with another. That is the reason why they prefer to move to another place if there are newcomers near their places. How much more, if there are evangelizers coming to the Sakalava area, just for sharing the gospel door by door or in the open area, they are often not welcomed or listened to. It is common for the Sakalava to defensively when they are asked about their religion or when some people want to proclaim the gospel to them. They defend themselves like this: *silamo zahay* (we are Muslim) in spite of the fact that most of them are Muslim by name, but not by practicing; or *fady anay mivavaka* (to worship is our taboo) (P1, S2, and Sharp²⁰ 1993, 75) which

²⁰ Lesley A.Sharp is Assistant Professor of anthropology at Butler University.

is a confusing response because they do not reply like *fady anay fivavahana kristiana*, (Christianity is our taboo). It causes me to wonder if they do not actually understand what they practice when they venerate their ancestors with prayer and sacrifice in their shrine.

In addition, relating to what has already been stated, the Sakalava fear losing their identity when they start to accept other religions or cultures, namely Christianity. So, when they are careful on their relationship to others, the primary reason is maintaining their identity and the fear of detaching from their tradition. For them, Christianity is a foreign religion, *fivavaham-bazaha* and a foreign culture, *fombam-bazaha* (G2, 23 July 2012; C2, 02 July 2012).

It is worth noting that although the fear of ancestors is of predominant importance in the Sakalava life, the feeling of being protected and blessed is still counted as well. In other words, even if the Sakalava feel threatened by the ancestors by means of the diviners and the *tromba*, at the same time, they get advice and feel blessed and protected by the ancestors. Not surprisingly, the ancestors or the diviners manage to provide the satisfaction some of the Sakalava need because they might have little powers to perform good things- signs, healing, protection, killing, etc...- to people. In the Old Testament, it is written for instance, that when Moses was ordered by God to do miracle in front of Pharaoh, he turned the staff into snake, the wise men and sorcerers of Pharaoh managed to do fairly the same as Moses did (Exod 7: 10-12a). The point here is to show that the Sakalava people might feel they have benefits or advantages of the help from their gods or ancestors, although they feel threatened and frightened by them as well.

Concerning the second obstacle, Catholic Methods, the Sakalava are easily converted to Catholicism vis-à-vis Protestant, namely Reformed (FJKM) and Lutheran Churches (FLM). In fact, Sakalava cultures are quite adaptable to the Catholic's doctrine and practices, especially in terms of ancestors' veneration. While the Sakalava have the practice of helping the departed, by means of a proper funeral, prayer, and sacrifice to achieve the ancestral abode, the Catholic Church has the practice of helping the dead, by means of prayer, to rescue from the purgatory (Chapter III, section 3.2.2). Additionally, the veneration of Saints in the Catholic Church can be associated with the Sakalava idea of the ancestors because similarly, both the Catholic Church and the Sakalava consider the Saints and the ancestors as a mediator between God and human beings. It implies that the Roman Catholic Church does not prohibit the Sakalava from keeping the practice of worshipping the ancestors. Thus, the Sakalava would rather become Roman Catholic than Protestant (cf. Sharp 1993, 74). Additionally, people are attracted to the Roman

Catholic Church because they provided social services such as schools and hospitals before the Protestants in the North West of Madagascar. In short, it is difficult for the Protestant to approach the Sakalava due the Catholic methods.

Regarding tribal conflicts, Christianity is also considered to be a *Borizano* religion, *fivavahan'ny Borizano*. *Borizano*, called as well *Merina*, is one tribe from the Capital of Madagascar (Jaohindy 1994, 32-33). This tribe is the one who first received the gospel from the missionaries in nineteenth century. It implies surely that the *Borizano* or *Merina* are more advantaged and more advanced in faith compared with the other tribes in Madagascar. At the same time, this tribe also is more advanced in education. These two cases have an impact in the social and political relationship to the many areas in the island. The Sakalava have felt dominated by the *Merina* and the former do not love the latter in general. This bad relationship and sense of resentment helps explain the difficulty of the proclamation of the gospel. Therefore, Christianity is understood as a foreign religion and *Merina* religion. Sharp (1993, 75; 77) explained the problem between the Sakalava and non-Sakalava in terms of conversion and the daily life relationship like this:

“Sakalava hostility toward non-Sakalava has played a role in their resistance to conversion....There is a body of fady which places Merina in an extreme position outside the realm of association for Sakalava. Some Sakalava tromba are said to be fady Merina(“having a Merina Taboo”), so that Merina may not attend tromba ceremonies, nor may they approach Sakalava tombs or other sacred locations. Many Sakalava extend this fady to everyday interactions as well and deny Merina access to their homes.”

Nevertheless, other tribes, like *Betsileo*, *Antesaka*, are not allowed to pass or to enter in some Sakalava areas, apart from the *Merina*.

The fourth obstacle to approaching the Sakalava tribe concerns the weaknesses of the Church. One of the big problems of the Church is the fact that the evangelizers or the Christians do not know well the Sakalava tradition. The Sakalava is a strict tribe and has their own identity and their own peculiarity which are related to their religion and their culture. In fact, most of the active people who come to preach the gospel to the Sakalava are not well-trained. Rather, they just go with enthusiasm because of their free time, and their zeal to share the gospel of Christ. Knowing Sakalava culture requires mastering some of the important Sakalava languages, greetings, clothes, manners of respecting, and other behaviors. They might fail along the way if their procedures and their approaches do not convince the Sakalava to welcome them. The

evangelizers, for example, need to know that they need to be careful about forcibly starting with prayer or with opening the Bible, when beginning to let people know about Jesus. Another example is that it is necessary to know whether they should stand or sit or greet first, when proclaiming the gospel. Another challenge for the Church is the hardship of life. Most of the Sakalava live in the remote area. So, it is not easy to reach their places due to the problem of money, security, time table, and so on.

One of the weaknesses of the Church is related to the moral character and the comportment of the Christians. As commented above, the Sakalava tradition shapes their conduct and their relationships in their daily life. So, the poor conduct of Christians, such as smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, fighting with neighbors, lack of respect, lack of love, etc..., might discourage the Sakalava from becoming Christian (C1, L, G1).

After explaining the challenges and the obstacles of approaching the Sakalava, I shall now describe the suitable strategies to approach them.

4.2.2 Strategies of approaching the Sakalava

Being aware of the obstacles in approaching the Sakalava, the strategies ought to be designed to reflect these understandings. However, I cannot say that all problems or obstacles will have an available solutions or answer. The point is to find out how the Church should walk and what needs to be done which inviting the Sakalava into the Christian community.

The first task of the Church is to address the fear of suffering and death in the Sakalava. It is clear from the beginning that the Sakalava do not want to leave their religion and their culture due to the fear of punishment from their gods and their ancestors. On the one hand, in the Old Testament, Yahweh punished many times the Israelites through sickness, disaster, even death, when the Israelites did not follow the Commandments. From this reality, the attitude of Yahweh seems somehow to be similar to the Sakalava ancestors or gods. On the other hand, Yahweh himself sent his only Son in the world to be punished in order to rescue the Israel and all human beings out of his punishment. God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ shows his mercy and his love towards his living beings. So, it is essential to show the Sakalava that Christianity is a religion based on grace and love rather than fear and threat. It is the promise of forgiveness and grace that is the heart of the Christian Gospel. That is the reason why people ought to rely on God's salvific work in Jesus Christ, and every believer has the eternal life without participation and without lots of criteria.

By the same token, the Church needs to assure the Sakalava people that as they leave their tradition, they will discover a new life condition filled with the promise of protection, blessings, health, better life, and confidence. The story in Exod 7, above-mentioned, is a reflection of the reality of Jesus Christ. I mean, although the wise men and the sorcerers of Pharaoh could somewhat compete with Moses to perform the miracle about the staff turned into snake; Moses' snake is more powerful than theirs. It is said that "But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs" (v 12b). Likewise, even if there are some kinds of blessing, protection, and healing are seen in the other religions, namely Sakalava tradition, Jesus Christ's power is more than other powers in the world. Actually, Jesus Christ did not come into the world only to give solutions to the people's needs and problems. Rather, he came in the world to give life and life in abundance (John10:10). To what extent, he does not only give life here on earth and but especially everlasting life hereafter. It reminds me one of my interviewee S2 who testified as follows:

I was brought up in a Sakalava family which was very active in the Sakalava tradition since my childhood. Our gods were Andriamisara and the *tromba*. At the age of forty, I was sick for 4 years. Being tired and fed up with consulting the *tromba*, due to the overpayment of the expenses-cow and money- without recovery, so I decided to find out whether it is helpful to go to Church or not. I thought that Jesus Christ is a big magician and I would get healed. Just testing, I saw that Jesus Christ is not only a magician but he is my Lord, King, Savior... Only in Christ, people have eternal life.

Therefore, a good strategy is to make clear that Christianity is a reliable religion. For those who are sick, Jesus is the healer; those who are poor, Jesus is the provider; those who are slaves and feel oppressed and burdened, Jesus is the liberator; those who feel marginalized and detested, Jesus is Love; those who want to ask the needs to God, Jesus is the only one mediator; and those who fear of death, Jesus is a life provider and has the eternal life.

Also, it is necessary to explain to the Sakalava that everyone must die due to the sin of humanity, but this death is only temporal death and is not the final existence. What is needed is the fear of the eternal damnation, the eternal death (cf. Matt 10:28). It should be clear so that there is no need for human contribution or proper funeral through sacrifice or prayer, in order having eternal life in Christian doctrine. Finally, the Church should explain clearly to the Sakalava that human expectation after death is not to become God. Believers are already God's children in baptism and can communicate with him through Jesus Christ, and this relationship will consummate in the last Day.

Furthermore, from a practical perspective, it is imperative that the Church train well the Christians and the evangelizers regarding how to live with non-Christians and how to share the gospel in terms of conduct, clothing, respect, messages, and so on. The Reformed Churches have better strategies than the Lutheran Church which they started years before in the North West of the Island. On the other hand, the Lutheran Churches have worked in the South West part of the Island which is the area of the Sakalava Menabe. Having the same characteristics, Sakalava Menabe and Sakalava Boeny should be seen and be approached in the same ways. In order to share the gospel with the Sakalava, said my interview S2 (04 August 2012) and (Milavonjy 1993, 188), the Christians should start with a good relationship until the Sakalava feel the goodness of being Christian. It means that for the Sakalava, relationship and trustfulness are in the first step, but not the Bible or the preaching of gospel, because they have their own strong religion. It is better for the Christian, as a complementary of this good relationship, to prepare a sketch or a drama showing the power of Jesus and the goodness of Christianity vis-à-vis the Sakalava religion. One catechist explained his strategy when he was an evangelist in the countryside saying that he used to prepare a drama with the Christians in the open area, in the Church yard, to fascinate the Sakalava non-Christians at that time. He tried to mingle the Sakalava tradition with the Christian practices, but his purpose was always to show that the powerfulness and the victory of the Christian God as compared with the Sakalava God (G1, 28 June 2012). In short, apparently a good way to approach the Sakalava does not begin directly with the using the Bible. Instead, teaching might be displayed indirectly through means of physical and daily relationship or such things as playing a Christian drama about the victory of the Christians, depending on the context.

One of significant cultural values in the Sakalava tribe is the respect of the elders. As mentioned in chapter II, section 2.1.2, this tribe is familiar with the socio-political organization which has a hierarchy of - king or queen- royal family- commoners- slaves. So, those who are in higher position get respect from the lower position and so on. Even, among the same classes, they still have their own hierarchal system and practice respect. Conversely, the duty of the elders is supposed to show the right way and the wisdom to the people through admonishing, guiding, criticizing, and encouraging people to do good things. The informant L (14 July 2012) said that “the leader of one sub-tribe always encourages his followers to love one another, not to

fight each other". This tradition helps and facilitates the life of the whole society because it brings peace and a good fellowship among the entire family.

The ultimate purpose of practicing this respect is how people revere their ancestors and their gods. It can be said that what makes the Sakalava strong on their tradition is their ability to respect those who have authority over them. Interestingly the notion of respecting our elders has a biblical basis, particularly when it points to parents, leaders, and kings, and even to God (Exod 20:12; Lev 19: 32; 1 Pet 2: 13, 17; etc.). So, Christians are asked to respect to all people, and especially those who have authority in society, in the Church, and in relationship to God. In this case, the Sakalava already have the positive practice of respecting parents, leaders, ancestors, and their gods. So, the Church is challenged to find a way to ameliorate that practice in a way that is consistent with Christian teaching. Christians need to pay attention to this essential point when living with and approaching this tribe. It is a shame for Christians if they fail to respect that which is good in the Sakalava tradition. The knowledge and the use of this respect will help Christians to gain the trust of the Sakalava or at least to be welcomed in their heart and at their door. Many messengers have experienced that when they go, knock the on door, and ask first to speak to the leader of one place or one village to share the gospel, that it is then easier to reach the whole people if the leader has first opened the door to the Christians (R3, P2).

Finally, it is also very helpful for the Church if the Sakalava converts share the goodness of Christianity with their fellows Sakalava who are yet non-Christians (C1; R3; L; Jaohindy 1994, 37). First, the Sakalava converts know the important things in Sakalava, and from that they can declare and clarify what the reasons are as to why they are willing to leave their tradition. Second, the Sakalava converts can explain to the Sakalava non-Christians that Christianity is more than a foreign religion or a *Borizano* religion, but rather a religion for those who need freedom, health, blessings, protection, peace and eternal life. The Sakalava converts are an apparent and a lively testimony that Christianity is not a taboo for the Sakalava in that nothing happened to the converts since they made the decision to become Christian and leave the traditional religion.

Now I shall explain the factors related to Sakalava conversion and the maintenance of Sakalava convert.

4.3 Sakalava conversion

Currently, there are few Sakalava converts as compared with other tribes in Madagascar. What I mean by the term “conversion” is the decision of a person or people to leave and move from one religion to another. So, I am referring in this case to the conversion from the Sakalava religion to Christianity. In what follows, then, I intend to show the reasons why the Sakalava convert in order to encourage the Church and to let Christians know the breadth and depth of God’s work. I also want to describe what the Church need to do to order to maintain these converts

4.3.1 *The factors of Sakalava conversion*

From the beginning, it has been said the Sakalava people are a special tribe because of its strong religion and culture. It is difficult for the Sakalava people to leave their religion and it is hard for Christians to approach and convince the Sakalava to become Christian. As explained previously, when they are in need, they are used to consulting the diviners and *tromba*. Most of the time, these latter refer to the ancestors arguing that they broke the ancestors’ taboo or the ancestors need to be remembered by sacrifice. It is not surprising that the Sakalava live in fear, suffering, poverty, sickness, and without freedom and joy (cf. the case of Zaloky above-mentioned).

As a result, the feeling of anguish and painfulness in life can be considered as starting points in the Sakalava conversion. In a Malagasy saying “*mamy ny miaina*” and “*mamy ny aina*” (to live is sweet, life is sweet), people reflect on their life along with the treatment. When finding no solution from the traditional treatment, I mean, going to different diviners and *tromba* and spending money and the property, some Sakalava go and test what they consider as the Christian care if they have heard about it, but they do not decide immediately.

It is worth stating that the Lutheran and Reformed Church in Madagascar are gifted in one special revival movement called *Fifohazana* which started in the nineteenth century. Hans Austnaberg²¹, who wrote a book entitled, *Shepherds and Demons*, explained more about this movement. Just to mention some ideas about the *Fifohazana*: This is a special and indigenous gift which is meant for preaching the gospel to all people, casting out the evil spirits (demons), taking care of the mentally sick and laying on of hands on the people’s head in the name of Jesus

²¹ Hans Austnaberg is a Lutheran Professor in practical theology in Misjonshøgskolen (School of Mission) in Stavanger, Norway.

Christ. To be able fulfill this mission, the Church calls and trains Christians starting at least in the age of 23 and reaching the age of 25 at the consecration.. The consecrated Christians are called *mpiandry* (shepherds) (Austnaberg 2008, 55-68). I can say that the strength and the growth of the Lutheran Church relates mainly to the mission of the *Fifohazana*.

Looking again at the Sakalava conversion, when they have heard about the *Fifohazana*, some of them come to the Church and try to find out whether Christianity can give solutions or not. Normally, the *mpiandry*, shepherds, have to show the inquirers the criteria of their mission in order to succeed. The first criterion established by the *fifohazana* is to explain that the seekers need to accept and to believe in Jesus. In most situations, when the Sakalava come to the Church it is because of sicknesses and spirit possession. Secondly, the *mpiandry* are supposed to interview and to discuss or to counsel the concerned regarding whether they have received traditional medicine given to them by the witch doctors or diviners or *tromba*. Those medicines have to be burned in the name of Jesus Christ if they have them. In the experience of Church in Madagascar, the problems are resolved when the concerned believe in Jesus Christ and are ready to follow him (Sharp 1993, 270; Austnaberg 2008, 309). Typically, the Sakalava decide to convert to Christianity especially in difficult times, when they have received no solution from the traditional treatments. It is sort of a last resort solution.

In point of fact, when the solution is found, or when the sickness is healed, the whole family or the whole society are influenced and attracted to Christianity, and there is a mass conversion, so to speak. When the king or the leader in the society has a problem in his family and finds a good result because of the mission of Church, the whole clan becomes Christian. In one true story to the North of Majunga, the king's daughter was sick, but she was healed because of the *fifohazana's* work. From that time, this king declared officially to his family and his subordinates that they would convert to Christianity. This is a typical decision in strong-group-oriented society according to Hiebert's writing. Hiebert²² described this group decision in this way:

“In such communities, choosing one's religion is not a personal right. It is a most serious decision because it involves not only the individual but also his or her family and community...People talk about matters, and eventually the elders become involved. Finally, the

²² Paul Hiebert is a Christian from the Mennonite Brethren. He has an experience of the idea of conversion, especially the conversion from the Hinduism to Christianity. His book is entitled *Transforming worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*.

group as a whole, led by chief and elders, makes a decision based on these discussions ... Not surprisingly. Converting to Christianity in these societies often involves groups or the whole community... In other cases it extends to clans, tribes, and castes and the whole communities” (Hiebert 2008, 327).

One essential and amazing characteristic of the Sakalava conversion is the fact that God himself takes responsibility to call the Sakalava people to be his family members. Some of the converts I have interviewed testified that they became Christian without the Church’s evangelization or the Church’s participation. In reality, God, accompanied by the Holy Spirit’s work, can use various ways to gather people in his kingdom. One informant P1 said he decided to become Christian when he was having problems at school. Another reason is the fact that others come to the Church when in a time of need. They meet Christians who let them know about Jesus and take a temporary decision for a trial period. In this case, it is seen that Sakalava people do not know about Christianity, but once they hear about Jesus, that he is the Savior and able to release and to wipe away problems, they come to the Church. When I asked the reason for this given situation, the group G1 tried replying that sometimes God lets the problem happen in order to lead the people to him and to display his glory and his magnitude.

On the other hand, as a theologian, I realized also that it is not only in difficult times that the Sakalava become Christian. Sometimes, their decision starts with the children or the young people who follow their Christian friends. In the beginning, it may be just simple attendance, but, in the course of time the interest becomes a habit and eventually they understand Christianity and believe in Christ. This process does not stop until they share and convince their relatives-grandparents and parents, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles, and even neighbors and classmates. It might work for some people, but not for others. The point here is to let the Church know that there are various reasons for people’s conversion.

Typically, Sakalava conversion takes place when they are in a difficult time. Not satisfied and fed up with traditional methods, the Sakalava look to Christianity as a last resort. When they find solution through Christianity, mass conversion or a group decision occur in the Sakalava family, community, or even the whole society. This kind of conversion is not a new thing in the history of the Church. Stark²³ explained in his book *The Rise of Christianity* that in the Early Church, the growth of the Church was the result of social networks. He stated this as follows:

²³ Rodney Stark is an American sociologist of religion and he is from a Lutheran Church. He wrote a book concerning the growth of the Church in the Early Church, *The Rise of Christianity*.

“The basis for a successful conversion movement is growth through social networks, through a structure of direct and intimate interpersonal attachments...That is, each new member expands the size of network of attachments between group and potential converts” (Stark 1996, 20, 21).

After explaining the reason for Sakalava conversion, now I am going to talk about how to maintain the converts to Christianity

4.3.2 Maintenance of the Sakalava converts

The Malagasy Lutheran Church is one of the churches that is rapidly increasing in number because of the healing gift through the *fifohazana*'s mission. What I am trying to do now is to describe what the Church should know about the converts in order to maintain them in Christianity.

Firstly, the Church should not be satisfied with succeeding in converting an individual or a group of people to Christianity. It must bear in mind that the Sakalava conversion is often the result of non-satisfaction of their traditional religion and need of alternative solution. Indeed, they usually do not have time to go deep in knowledge and understanding of Christian faith. Rather, they only hear about Jesus Christ as the Savior, who can resolve their problems. As a result, their conversion is a quick decision, so to say a sudden turning point. This means that they only get a minimal understanding of the Christian faith because of the desire for resolution to their problems. In this case, the Church needs to be sure that the new convert is actually interested in learning the new religion. Then, it is essential for the Church to allow the new convert to gradually learn what Christianity is all about in terms of morality, Christian rituals, and the Christian perspectives. In other words, it is not automatic for the new convert to know about what Christianity is because he/she is new. Milavonjy Richardson explained the reason for the Sakalava converts go back to their former own religion as due to the lack of teaching in the Church. If possible, the pastor should have a good plan for discipleship in order to help the Christian, including the converts, grow in faith.

Secondly, welcoming the converts is the responsibility of all members of the Christian Church. It should be kept in in mind that the converts might face many difficulties in various forms. It consists of the experience of broken family relationship when it is about individual conversion, the problem of adapting a new practice, a new place, a new point of view, and a new community. So, the Church ought to try as much as possible to help the converts no be disappointed or to fall back to his/her former tradition. . If the Christian hosts do not care for the

converts through warm fellowship and do not make them feel comfortable, they might have regrets and go back to their old religion. For instance, if the convert breaks the relationship with his/her the family when becoming a Christian, the Church should be ready to take responsibility for his/her life. Sometimes, when the Sakalava new converts are excluded from their family, no one takes care of them and they face difficulties in other areas of life and are tempted to turn back to their non-Christian society.

At least, the Church should prepare a budget for the rejected converts or motivate the Christians to welcome them at home. In reality, conversion from one religion to another is not a must but a free decision, so it is not a definitive conversion. Therefore, the convert may reconsider and decide to return to his/her former religion when he/she discerns having made a wrong decision. The feeling that they made a wrong decision might be the result of lack of Christian support or cold Christian fellowship. It is plausible the fact that a simple conversion in the beginning and a huge turning point affects the whole future life of the converts, unless some better life physically, mentally, socially and spiritually are ready. It is useful if the Church can provide or look for a small job, a small place to live, gifts and so forth for the converts until they live in normal situation.

Finally, preachers and Christian lay people should explain clearly to the converts that the Church is not a magic place or a hospital in which the people remove the sicknesses, have everything, and do not experience problems and suffering anymore. In fact, the converts might have this mistaken understanding of Christianity because they decide to become a Christian when they have problems, but they might leave the Christianity once they are experiencing difficulties again. Thus, the converts need to be aware that the essence of Christianity is God's redemptive work in and through Jesus Christ to liberate human beings from the bondage of sin, Satan, and death, in order to have eternal life. Christian hope is not about resolving our earthly problems only, but the expectation of the life hereafter. The Apostle Paul stated that "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Cor 15:19). It is clear that everyone in this world is undergoing various dimensions of sufferings, and eventually has to go through the last enemy, which is death. Nevertheless, the distinction of believers is the hope of everlasting life. It does not mean that Christians should not care about the life on this earth, but they only need to think the life hereafter with Jesus Christ. Keep in mind that Christians have and live already the eternal life in baptism and in consummation after resurrection of body

(Chapter III, section 3.2.2). Although salvation has been accomplished in Christ, believers still might face difficulties until the end of the world. So, it can be said it is a big mistake when the Church teaches that the Christians ought not to care about the life on earth. In addition, it is a big mistake when the Christian and the non-Christian think that the Christians are not supposed to face difficulties, as it seems like an irony. The most important thing for the Christians is the fact of being with Christ either in good time or in bad time in this earth; in life and in death.

To summarize, it has been explained that not all Sakalava traditions are incompatible with Christianity. While some of these traditions need amelioration in order to fit the Christian faith, others are not well-suited for the Christian teaching. Then, it was explained that there are many hindrances that challenge the approach to the Sakalava in preaching the gospel of Christ, but it does not mean there are no converts to Christianity from this tribe. Finally the point was made that, it is not enough to lead people to Christianity without caring and taking responsibility to maintain the converts and to help them feel at home with the family of God.

Chapter five

CONCLUSION

I have focused on analyzing the Sakalava understanding of the afterlife in relation to the Christian doctrine. It has shown that both of these entities, traditional Sakalava and Christianity, have something to say about the expectations of the afterlife. The intention of the analysis is actually to present insights of afterlife in order to facilitate the mission of the Church. The field of systematic theology together with socio- anthropological and historical materials was used to examine these traditions.

Through exploring the concept of afterlife from both the Christian and the Sakalava tradition, we find agreement that death is inevitable for everyone on earth. Both traditions also agree that there is another existence after death.

In general, some of Sakalava tradition, such as the understanding of God, the giving of personal and monetary contributions on behalf of the deceased during the period of mourning, and the belief in the existence of afterlife, are somewhat similar to Christian faith. So, even though there are distinction between the Christian faith and the Sakalava's tradition, the Church should not deny or totally refuse their tradition, but ought to start with so-called similar view and improve it gradually until the converts fully understand the Christian viewpoint.

Since the Sakalava still follow the royal system, their concept of afterlife is stronger than in any other tribes in Madagascar. The departed are of predominant importance as they are considered to have achieved the community of ancestors only after a huge contribution from the living during the funeral ceremony and the period of mourning. Indeed, according to the Sakalava tradition, it is the responsibility of the living to remember their ancestors in different ways such as the rite of *asa lolo*, the cult of the *dady*- relics of the king, and sacrifices in order to be reciprocally remembered by the ancestors by the bestowing of different blessings such as offspring, wealth, protection, health, and so on. Conversely, those who do not fulfill this remembrance and requirement of the ancestors are subject to punishment such as sterility, sickness, loss of property, and even death.

With regard to Sakalava tradition, the departed king and certain deceased people can be reincarnated into someone else, by so-called spirit possession- *tromba*, in order to be a mediator between God and human beings. In fact, even though the Sakalava believe in God as creator of

hands and feet, and everything, they prefer to communicate with, to worship, and to pray to the *tromba* and the ancestors. So, the basic understanding of afterlife in Sakalava tradition is the belief that the departed, who exist beyond this visible world, are considered to be as God and can influence the lives of the living, either destructively or positively. Even though the tradition of afterlife is considered to bring peace, blessings and good fellowship in the Sakalava society, most of the Sakalava people observe this tradition with fear and oppression due to the threat from the *tromba*.

From the Christian point of view, it can be said that the criteria for having eternal life after death do not depend on the participation of the living during the funeral ceremony and the period of mourning. Neither does, the departed have any influence on the living's afterlife because they are not considered to be as God and they cannot do anything except rest and sleep, waiting for the resurrection day. In fact, the destiny of the human being, as created in the image of God, is only to have communication and fellowship with God but not to become God.

I noticed from the analysis that most Christian denominations such as Lutheran, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Reformed, have the same idea that human beings are created as one being or one person (body and soul), in contrast to the gnostic view that separates the body from the soul, arguing that the body is a prison for the soul and the latter is released from the former in death. However, speaking to the matter of death and afterlife, many divergences come out among individuals and different denominations. The sources of this diversification are the concepts of deification, the sleeping soul, and the immortality of the soul. The understanding of deification as the destiny of mankind to become God is not convincing because man remains man before and after death. Instead, the idea of deification can be understood as union with Christ according to the doctrine of justification.

Speaking for myself, I agree with the idea of the sleeping soul while awaiting the resurrection of the body in accordance with the idea that body and soul are not a separate being. Particularly, the Scripture clearly speaks about the resurrection of the body (the one being) but not the resurrection of soul. Furthermore, the notion of immortality of the soul causes confusion among Christians and distorts some Christian teachings. The Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory, along with prayer for the dead is based on the concept of the immortality of the soul. Similarly, by the huge contribution of the living during the funeral ceremony and the period of mourning, the traditional Sakalava expect to receive blessings from their ancestors. The

veneration of the ancestors is derived from this idea of immortality of soul. According to Christian teachings, everyone is saved by what he/she has done before death, and there is no need for help from the living to save anyone, and there is no expectation either from the departed.

To some extent, either the idea of becoming God or the consideration of the ancestors as God is like a Satan's method of cheating human beings. Firstly, Satan pretends to be the ancestors and tries to do miracles to convince people. However, the real agenda of Satan is to separate human beings from God, and to bind and destroy people's lives. That is why the traditional Sakalava suffer and are threatened most of the time. Secondly, Satan has tempted human beings since the beginning of time to desire to be like God. Finally, the idea of immortality of the soul does not have a scriptural basis, rather, it is clear that the Scriptures forbid the cult of the dead and the consultation of the dead (Lev 19.31; Deut 18: 9-12, Isa 8:19).

Previous research by fellow theologians (Jaohindy, Milavonjy Richardson, and Fiadana Gabriel) investigated attitudes and characteristics of both Christian and Sakalava tradition using an external approach. The traditional Sakalava beliefs and customs of the afterlife can be seen as an obstacle for bringing the Sakalava into Christianity. By focusing on this tradition, however, the Sakalava can be approached internally. This approach compliments previous research and enhances the mission of the Church to the Sakalava tribe.

The obstacles encountered when approaching the Sakalava concern not only the Christian messengers but also the Sakalava themselves. In reality, it is essential that the Christians learn and know the Sakalava tradition before they embark on a mission to them. Since the Sakalava are good at fellowship, Christians should begin by a modeling and testifying about God's love in their daily lives as well as in their relationship to the Sakalava. Because of the threat, the fear, and the oppression from the Sakalava tradition that shapes the characters and the attitudes of the traditional Sakalava, Christians should proclaim God's redemptive work through Jesus Christ, in which those who believe in him have freedom, peace, and eventually eternal life.

Finally, the mission of the Church should not stop at getting the Sakalava into Christianity, but should continue to welcome and care for the converts with love and teaching in order to make them feel at home. It should be made clear to the Sakalava converts that Jesus Christ is the King of kings, ready to serve but not be served; and the Great Priest, the only one mediator between God and human beings because of his salvific work for the world.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview guides.

Information about the interviewees

- 1-Name:
- 2- Age:
- 3- Sex:
- 4- Place:
- 5- Function and education:

General questions about God

- 1- How many gods do the Sakalava have? Or, Do the Sakalava believe in many gods?
- 2- If yes, is there hierarchy system among these gods?
- 3- What is the relationship between god(s) and the living?
- 4- What kind of characters do(es) gods (s) have? Severe? Love? Merciful?
- 5- What is the responsibility of god(s) to the human beings?
- 6- How do the Sakalava people understand the existence of God?
- 7- How do the Sakalava people worship, venerate, and serve, God?
- 8- Where is the place of God according the Sakalava tradition?
- 9- What might happen if people don't worship God? Does God punish people?
- 10- Why do Sakalava people trust on their God, love their God, and worship their God?
- 11- What is the duty of the Sakalava to their God?
- 12- How do they worship or respect their God? How many times a day, a month, a year? Do they have to bring or to give something to God? What kinds of things should they give to God, if yes?
- 13- Can everyone give these things to God or should they have a special person to give it? Do people give things directly to God or indirectly?

General questions about ancestors and spirit possession (*Tromba*):

- 1- What do “ancestors” mean?
- 2- How do the Sakalava people understand the ancestors?
- 3- Do the ancestors have an authority in the life of the human beings?
- 4- Can everyone be an ancestor after death? If yes, How?
- 5- What is the relationship between God and ancestor, between ancestor and human being?
- 6- Is there a hierarchy system also among the ancestors?
- 7- What does “*tromba*” mean? What is the importance of the *tromba* in the Sakalava tradition?

General questions about Sakalava family and society:

1. What is the important thing in Sakalava tradition?
2. What is the relationship in the Sakalava family and in Sakalava the society?
3. How do they respect one another?
4. Do the Sakalava people have a rule in the family, in the society or not? If yes, those who break the laws, what might happen to them, does the family or the society have an authority to punish
5. What do the Sakalava people do in the bad situation or in the good situation? Should they contribute to the family in good or bad situation? If yes, what kinds of contribution?
6. What kinds of taboos do you have in daily life?
7. How do you understand what it will happen when somebody dies?
8. How do you treat the dead body? How do you do during the funeral period?
9. Do you have something to do after the funeral?
10. Do you have responsibility to the grave or to the dead?
11. How can you transmit from generation to generation your tradition?

General questions about death and afterlife

- 1- How do the Sakalava people understand the death? Meaning? Origin? Cause?
- 2- How do the Sakalava people face the reality of death?

- 3- What do the Sakalava people do during the funeral, the mourning time?
- 4- How do the Sakalava people understand the afterlife? The existence of the afterlife?

Particular questions for Sakalava non-Christians

1. Have you ever heard about the Christianity?
2. If yes, are you interested in it (Christianity)?
3. Have you ever lived with Christian families? If yes, how do you feel it?
4. What are the good things in your tradition?

Particular questions to Sakalava Converts

1. What is the difference between Sakalava tradition and Christianity?
2. Do you know why do the Sakalava keep their tradition and how do they do to keep it?
3. Why are you decided to be a Christian?
4. How long have you been in the Church?
5. What happened when you became Christian?
6. Did you have problems with your family when you decide to be a Christian? Are you ready to share the goodness of Christianity to others?
7. Can you preach the gospel freely to your family?
8. How many of your family are members of the Church nowadays?
9. In your opinion, should you keep anything from Sakalava tradition which is suitable for Christian doctrine? What are the things that converted Sakalava should not follow anymore from the Sakalava tradition?
10. Is it easy to talk about Christianity to the Sakalava? Could you say the weaknesses of the Church that might prevent the successfulness of the preaching the gospel to the Sakalava?
11. Could you give good strategies to help the Church to preach the gospel to the pagan Sakalava and to convince them?

Questions for the Religious leaders:

1. How do you understand the afterlife in the Bible?
2. Did the people in the Old Testament have and believe in life after death? And how about the people in the New Testament, the Church nowadays?
3. How many times do you preach this afterlife in the Church? Does the Malagasy Lutheran Church stress on their teaching about it?
4. Do you have special plans or programs to let your Christians know more about the eternal life?
5. Did you face difficulty with your Sakalava converts or other tribes about their tradition, especially the belief in life after death?
6. Do you have annual or monthly strategies to preach the gospel to the Sakalava area?
7. If yes, what usually happen, when you preach the gospel to them, are you well-received? Is it easy to get one or more of them to become Christians?
8. How is the percentage of the Sakalava in your Church, parish, and synod?
9. Have you had a good experience to bring that gospel to them? How do they react when you talk about the eternal life?
10. How do you feel the faith of the Sakalava converts? Is it difficult to educate or to teach them the Scripture?

Appendix 2

THE KINGDOMS OF THE WESTERN SAKALAVA

MAP SHOWING THE TERRITORY OF THE BOENY AND MENABE KINGDOMS

- The arrows indicate the migrations from the South to the North of the two dynasties
- The red area shows the Kingdom of the Sakalava Boeny

