Death, Dying, and the Afterlife: A Comparative Exploration of Greek, Jewish, New Testament, and African Christian Perspectives

Prof. Mumo Kisau

Professor of Biblical Studies, School of Theology (NEGST)

Africa International University

Mumo.Kisau@aiu.ac.ke

Abstract

Death, dying, and the afterlife have been central concerns across human cultures, with interpretations of such phenomena varying greatly across time and space. The paper offers a comparative review of Greek, Jewish, New Testament, and African Christian views on death and eschatology highlighting both points of convergence and divergence. Greek thought on death ranges from the Homeric shadowy, underworldly Hades, in which souls exist in a dismal limbo, to Platonic doctrines insisting on the soul's immortality, to Epicurean philosophical positions denying postmortem existence altogether and emphasizing the finality of bodily death. Jewish thought similarly evolved from early depictions of Sheol in the Hebrew Bible, a shadowy place of the dead, toward Second Temple ideas embracing bodily resurrection, apocalyptic visions, and the hope of divine restoration. The New Testament reinterprets death through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ with an emphasis on bodily resurrection, final judgment, and communal eschatological hope. In African traditional conceptions, for example, among the Akamba and the Akan, death is not an end but a rite of passage into ancestor hood. These perspectives emphasize the continuity of community, moral accountability, and the ritual passage from the world of the living into the ancestral world. A comparative analysis demonstrates resonances between New Testament and African perspectives, such as beliefs in life beyond death, moral responsibility, communal orientation, and the importance of ritual in marking important transitions in life. However, divergences

remain, particularly with respect to the nature of the afterlife judgement, and the Christocentric hope accentuated in Christian contextualized eschatology that incorporates indigenous motifs, in particular “homegoing” and ancestor remembrance, and yet grounds hope in the resurrection of Christ. Such an approach carries implications for pastoral care, catechesis, liturgy, and ethical living. Ultimately, this paper shows that African intuitions of continuity and relationality can enhance Christian theological reflection without compromising the distinctiveness of the gospel message.

Keywords: Death, afterlife, Jewish eschatology, New Testament theology, African Christianity, eschatology, ancestral continuity.

Introduction

Few realities are as universally acknowledged yet as diversely interpreted as death. Across cultures, religions, and philosophies, death has provoked deep reflection about the nature of existence, the meaning of life, and the possibility of an afterlife. While death itself is a biological inevitability, the interpretations of its meaning vary significantly. For some, death is final annihilation; for others, it marks a passage into another mode of being. Still others view death as a transformative threshold between worlds, linking the visible and invisible, the temporal and the eternal.

This article explores conceptions of death, dying, and the afterlife in four distinct but interrelated traditions: Greek philosophy and religion, Second Temple Judaism, the New Testament, and African Christianity (with particular attention to Akamba traditions of Kenya). These traditions are selected not only for their intrinsic richness, but also because they reveal important points of convergence and divergence. For instance, both Greek and African perspectives wrestle with the immortality of the soul, though framed differently: Greeks tended toward metaphysical reasoning, while African traditions tended toward ancestral cosmologies. Similarly, Jewish and New Testament perspectives develop within

dialogue with Hellenistic thought but are grounded in Israel's covenantal worldview and eschatological hope.

The comparative nature of this study allows for deeper theological and cultural insight. In particular, it invites reconsideration of how Christian theology might better engage both the biblical witness and indigenous African traditions. Such dialogue not only prevents reductionist interpretations of either tradition but also generates fresh theological possibilities.

In approaching this subject, it is crucial to recognize that death is not simply a metaphysical abstraction; it is a profoundly social, ritual, and emotional event. Funerary practices, mourning customs, and communal remembrance all shape how societies interpret death's meaning. Thus, this exploration will weave together philosophical, theological, and anthropological perspectives.

The aim of this article is threefold. First, it seeks to provide a descriptive account of how death and the afterlife are conceived in each tradition. Second, it offers comparative analysis to highlight points of resonance and tension. Third, it proposes theological insights relevant for Christian theology in Africa, particularly in light of ongoing discussions about inculturation, eschatology, and pastoral care with a touch of Bible translation.

Greek and Roman Perspectives on Death, Dying and the Afterlife

The Greek and Roman perspectives on death, dying and the afterlife are briefly outlined here below since it forms a critical background to the early Christianity.

1. Early Greek Views: Homer and the Shadowy Afterlife

Greek reflection on death begins with Homer, whose epic poems depict the afterlife in bleak terms. In the Iliad and the Odyssey, the dead are consigned to Hades, a shadowy underworld where existence is diminished and joyless. When Odysseus visits the underworld, he encounters Achilles, who laments that he would rather be a servant among the living than

a king among the dead (Fagles, 1996). This portrayal underscores the Greek fear of death as a loss of vitality and honor. The afterlife offered no real comfort, only a continuation of existence in weakened form.

Yet even in Homer, there are hints of alternative possibilities. Heroes sometimes gain special honor through *kleos* (glory), achieving a form of immortality through memory and song. This symbolic immortality through fame foreshadows later Greek philosophical efforts to transcend death.

2. Philosophical Developments: Immortality of the Soul

Plato transformed the Greek discourse on death by introducing a robust doctrine of the soul's immortality. In the Phaedo, Socrates argues that the soul is distinct from the body and survives death (Plato, 1997). Death, therefore, is not to be feared but embraced, for it liberates the soul from the body's prison, allowing it to contemplate eternal realities. The philosopher is thus the one who "practices dying" daily by detaching from bodily pleasures (Plato, 1997). This dualistic vision profoundly shaped subsequent Western thought, often influencing Christian interpretations of resurrection and immortality.

Aristotle, however, offered a more restrained account. For him, the soul (psyche) was the form of the body, not an independent substance. While he allowed that the "active intellect" (*nous poietikos*) might be eternal, he rejected Plato's sharp dualism (Lawson-Tancred, 1986). Thus, death signified the dissolution of the human composite, leaving unresolved the question of personal immortality.

3. Hellenistic Philosophies: Stoicism and Epicureanism

Later Hellenistic schools took divergent paths. The Stoics affirmed a cyclical cosmos governed by divine reason (*logos*). Individual souls, as sparks of the divine fire, might persist temporarily after death, but ultimate dissolution into the cosmic whole was inevitable (Laertius, 1925). Death was therefore natural and not to be feared.

Epicureans, by contrast, denied any form of postmortem existence. Lucretius, the great Epicurean poet, insists that "death is nothing to us," since when we exist, death is absent, and when death comes, we no longer exist (Lucretius, 2001). For Epicureans, fear of death was a superstition to be overcome through rational philosophy.

4. **Mystery Religions and Popular Beliefs**

Beyond philosophical elites, popular religion offered different consolations. Mystery cults such as those of Orpheus, Dionysus, and Eleusis promised initiates a blessed afterlife, often through rituals of purification and rebirth. Orphic tablets discovered in graves contained instructions for the soul's journey after death, suggesting a more hopeful vision than Homer's bleak Hades (Graf & Johnson, 2007).

Roman religion, heavily influenced by Greek traditions, emphasized ancestor veneration and the continued presence of the dead in the lives of the living. The cult of the dead, household gods (lares), and imperial apotheosis reflected a conviction that death did not entirely sever social and political bonds.

5. **Synthesis: Ambivalence and Diversity**

In sum, Greek and Roman thought reveals a spectrum of views. From Homer's shadowy underworld to Plato's immortal soul, to Epicurean denial, to mystery cult promises of blessedness, there was no single doctrine of death and the afterlife. Instead, these diverse conceptions reflect both existential anxieties and cultural creativity. Importantly, these perspectives created the intellectual and cultural background into which Judaism and Christianity articulated their distinctive visions of resurrection and eternal life.

Jewish Perspectives on Death, Dying and the Afterlife

1. **Death in the Hebrew Bible**

The Hebrew Bible presents death as the inevitable destiny of all humanity. In Genesis, death is linked to human disobedience: "for dust you are and to dust you shall return" (Gen

3:19). Death is not described as natural but as a consequence of sin and alienation from God. Yet despite this sobering origin, the Hebrew Bible's portrayal of death is complex and varied. The dominant conception is Sheol, the shadowy abode of the dead. Sheol is depicted as a place "deep down in the earth" (Prov 9:18; Isa 14:9), a realm of silence and forgetfulness where both righteous and wicked alike descend (Johnson, 2002). It is not a place of torment or reward, but rather of diminished existence, cut off from the praise of God (Ps 6:5). In this sense, Sheol resembles Homer's underworld—somber and without eschatological hope.

Yet the Hebrew Bible also contains hints of hope beyond death. The psalmist confesses, "You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption" (Ps 16:10). Similarly, Job affirms, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth" (Job 19:25). These texts anticipate later Jewish and Christian claims of resurrection.

2. Emergence of Resurrection Hope

By the time of the exile and Second Temple period, new developments arose. Influenced both by prophetic visions and apocalyptic expectations, the belief in resurrection emerged as a central tenet. Daniel 12:2 offers the clearest Old Testament witness: "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." Here, death is no longer the end, but a temporary sleep before divine judgment.

The Maccabean martyrs' testimony further underscores resurrection hope. In 2 Maccabees 7, seven brothers willingly endure torture, proclaiming their confidence that "the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life" (2 Macc 7:9) (Goldstein, 1983). Their willingness to suffer stems from conviction that God's justice will vindicate them beyond death.

This development reflects a major theological shift: rather than viewing Sheol as humanity's final destiny, Jewish thought increasingly envisioned a decisive divine intervention at history's end. Resurrection was not merely about individual survival but about the corporate vindication of Israel and the restoration of justice.

3. Apocalyptic Literature and Afterlife Imagery

Jewish apocalyptic writings expanded upon these ideas. Texts such as 1 Enoch, 2 Baruch, and 4 Ezra depict elaborate scenarios of cosmic renewal, judgment, and reward. The Book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 22) describes different compartments of Sheol for the righteous and the wicked, anticipating later Christian notions of heaven and hell (Nickelsburg, 2001).

Similarly, 4 Ezra envisions a final judgment in which the righteous shine like the sun, while the ungodly are consumed by fire (Stone, 1990). These apocalyptic visions served both theological and pastoral purposes: they assured persecuted communities of God's ultimate justice, and they offered meaning amid suffering.

4. Diversity of Jewish Thought

It is important to note, however, that Jewish views on death were not monolithic. The Sadducees, who controlled the temple aristocracy, denied resurrection (Matt 22:23; Acts 23:8), holding to the older Sheol tradition. By contrast, the Pharisees affirmed resurrection and judgment, a belief shared by most common Jews of the time (Sanders, 1992). The Essenes, influenced by dualistic thought, spoke of the soul's liberation from the body, reflecting a hybridization of Jewish and Hellenistic ideas. Thus, Second Temple Judaism contained a spectrum of perspectives: Sheol as shadowy existence, resurrection as eschatological hope, and soul-immortality under Hellenistic influence.

5. Theological Significance

The Jewish conception of death and resurrection represents a profound theological advance over surrounding cultures. Unlike the Greek focus on the soul's immortality or the cyclical cosmologies of other traditions, Judaism's resurrection hope was grounded in the covenantal faithfulness of God. Resurrection was not a natural property of the soul but an act of divine power that vindicated the righteous, restored Israel, and renewed creation.

In this sense, Jewish eschatology provided the soil in which New Testament teaching on resurrection, eternal life, and judgment would take root. The Christian proclamation of Jesus' resurrection both presupposes and transforms this Jewish background.

The New Testament Perspectives

1. **Jesus' Teaching on Death and the Afterlife**

Jesus' ministry introduced a radically reoriented understanding of life, death, and the hope of resurrection. His teaching built upon Jewish eschatology but introduced new emphases on personal resurrection, eternal life, and the immediacy of God's reign.

In the Gospels, Jesus consistently affirms the reality of resurrection. When challenged by the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, he declared: "He is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him" (Luke 20:38). This directly affirms the continuity of life beyond death under God's care.

Jesus also proclaimed a twofold destiny after death. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31), the poor man is carried to "Abraham's bosom," while the rich man finds himself in torment (Blomberg, 1990). This story conveys both continuity with Jewish ideas of Sheol and a sharper differentiation between reward and punishment.

Perhaps most central is Jesus' proclamation of eternal life through faith in him. In John's Gospel, he declares: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live" (John 11:25). Here, resurrection hope is not merely a future event but is embodied in the person of Christ himself.

Finally, Jesus' own resurrection is the climactic demonstration of God's victory over death. The empty tomb and appearances to the disciples function as both historical testimony and theological claim: death has been decisively defeated (Wright, 2003).

2. Pauline Theology of Resurrection

Paul's letters articulate the most developed New Testament theology of death and resurrection. For Paul, resurrection is central to the gospel: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor 15:17). The resurrection of Jesus is both the first fruits and the guarantee of believers' future resurrection (1 Cor 15:20).

Paul rejects the notion of a purely spiritual immortality of the soul; instead, he insists on a bodily resurrection. However, this is not the same as resuscitation of the old body but a transformation into a "spiritual body" (σῶμα πνευματικόν) animated by God's Spirit (1 Cor 15:44) (Fee, 1987). The continuity and transformation of the body preserves both Jewish resurrection hope and a distinctly Christian emphasis on the Spirit.

Paul also describes the eschatological sequence: at Christ's return, "the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive… will be caught up together with them" (1 Thess 4:16–17). This apocalyptic imagery provided comfort to early Christians grieving their dead, affirming that death does not sever the bonds of the community of faith.

Furthermore, Paul portrays death as both enemy and gain. It is the "last enemy to be destroyed" (1 Cor 15:26), yet he also declares, "to die is gain" (Phil 1:21), since death ushers the believer into Christ's presence. The paradox reflects both the realism of death's power and the confidence in Christ's victory.

3. The General Epistles and Revelation

The wider New Testament affirms and expands upon these themes. The letter to the Hebrews presents Jesus as the one who "shared in [our] humanity so that by his death he

might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil" (Heb 2:14). Death is portrayed as a defeated foe through Christ's priestly sacrifice.

The book of Revelation offers the most vivid eschatological imagery. The martyrs are promised life and reign with Christ (Rev 20:4–6), while the wicked face the "second death" in the lake of fire (Rev 20:14–15). The final vision is not escape to heaven but the renewal of creation: "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1), where "death shall be no more" (Rev 21:4). This consummation unites resurrection hope with cosmic renewal, echoing prophetic expectations.

4. Theological Synthesis

The New Testament proclaims a robust theology of death and resurrection:

- Continuity with Jewish Hope: Resurrection as God's vindication of the righteous.
- Christocentric Fulfillment: Jesus' resurrection as the decisive event that guarantees eternal life.
- Communal and Cosmic Dimensions: The destiny of individuals is tied to the renewal of all creation.
- Pastoral Comfort: Death is acknowledged as an enemy but stripped of its ultimate power.

This Christ-centered eschatology transformed the early Christian communities, enabling them to face persecution and death with hope in the resurrection and confidence in eternal life.

African Traditional Perspectives

1. Death in African Thought

In African Traditional Religions (ATR), death is not considered an absolute end but a transition—a passage from visible existence into the invisible community of the living-dead

(ancestors) (Mbiti, 1990). Death is viewed as the completion of life's natural cycle and a doorway into the ancestral realm, where one continues to influence the living.
Unlike the dualistic Greek notion of body-soul separation, ATR often emphasizes continuity of community across the boundary of death. As John Mbiti famously put it, in African thought "the departed are not dead, but the living-dead." (Mbiti, 1990, p. 25). They remain present within family life through memory, ritual, and spiritual interaction.

This understanding fosters both reverence for the ancestors and fear of neglecting them. Death does not sever bonds but reconstitutes them in a transformed mode. Thus, African cosmologies view human existence as cyclical: birth, life, death, and ancestral continuity.

2. The Akamba Concept of Death

Among the Akamba of Kenya, death is understood as a "homegoing"— a passage into the realm of ancestors (*aimu)* (Were &Wilson, 1971). Traditionally, the Akamba regarded death as inevitable but not final. A person who lived a morally upright life, maintained good relationships, and raised a family was believed to transition peacefully into ancestorhood.

Missionary encounters often undermined these rich images, branding them as "pagan" or "superstitious." Elias Bongmba critiques this neglect, noting that missionaries imposed Western eschatology without adequate inculturation (Bongmba, 2002). Yet, even today, many Akamba Christians hold a dual consciousness: embracing Christian resurrection hope while still honoring traditional idioms of death as a journey "home."

A University of Nairobi thesis (2006) similarly observed that traditional Akamba rituals, such as last rites, burial customs, and communal mourning, continue to shape Christian funeral practices (Mutiso, 2006). This suggests that inculturation must engage Akamba views not as rivals but as resources for contextual theology.

3. Akan Perspectives and Funeral Rites

The Akan of Ghana provide another example of the intersection of African eschatology and Christian hope. Traditionally, the Akan believe that death transitions the person into the spirit world (*asamando*), where the deceased joins the ancestors. Proper funerary rites are crucial to ensure a smooth passage. Failure to perform these rituals risks leaving the spirit restless, wandering, or even malevolent.

Contemporary Akan Christians often navigate a tension between cultural expectations and biblical teaching. Eric Owusu (2025) shows that while elaborate funerals remain culturally central, Christian teaching (especially 1 Thess 4:14 on resurrection hope) calls for moderation (Owusu, 2025). Owusu counsels a balanced approach: affirming cultural respect for the deceased while re-centering eschatological hope in Christ. This model of "faithful negotiation" has relevance for other African contexts, including the Akamba, where Christians must discern how to integrate cultural rituals with Christian confession.

4. Wider African Eschatological Themes

Across Africa, several common themes emerge:

- Death as Transition: Death moves a person into ancestorhood rather than extinguishing existence.
- Moral Accountability: The manner of one's death and posthumous destiny are linked to how one lived.
- Community Continuity: The dead remain socially present, binding generations together.
- Ritual Necessity: Funerary rites ensure safe passage and maintain cosmic harmony.

Recent scholarship challenges earlier dismissals of ATR as lacking eschatology. Ekeke and Ekpenyong (2024) argue that ATR, like Christianity, affirm an afterlife, moral accountability, and consequences beyond death—though expressed in different frameworks

(Ekeke & Ekpenyong, 2024). Similarly, Edward Agboada (2023) highlights ATR's cyclical cosmology as fertile ground for reimagining African Christology.

5. Theological Implications for Dialogue

The persistence of traditional concepts of death among African Christians underscores the need for inculturation theology. Rather than rejecting ATR perspectives, theologians should critically engage them as preparatory frameworks for the gospel.

- The Akamba notion of "homegoing" can enrich Christian preaching on resurrection as a journey into God's eternal household.
- The Akan emphasis on funeral rites reminds churches of the pastoral importance of dignified farewells.
- The ATR focus on community continuity resonates with biblical visions of the communion of saints and the resurrection body as corporate.

The challenge is to maintain the distinctiveness of Christian resurrection hope while affirming cultural categories that express human longing for life beyond death.

Comparative Analysis

1. Points of Convergence

Despite their different origins, the New Testament and African traditional perspectives converge in several key areas:

a. Belief in Life Beyond Death

- The New Testament affirms the resurrection of the dead and eternal life in Christ (1 Thess 4:14; 1 Cor 15).
- African Traditional Religion affirms continued existence after death, either as an ancestor or in a spiritual realm (*asamando, aitu*) (Mbiti, 1990).

  Both reject the notion of death as annihilation.

b. Moral Accountability

- NT texts emphasize judgment according to deeds (Rom 2:6; Rev 20:12).
- ATR traditions also link one's destiny after death to moral and social conduct in life. For example, the Akamba believe that a peaceful transition into ancestorhood depends on a morally upright life (Mutiso, 2006).

c. Communal Orientation

- In the NT, salvation is not only individual but communal: believers form the body of Christ, and the hope of resurrection includes the whole people of God (1 Thess 4:17).
- In ATR, the community of the living, dead, and unborn is inseparably bound. Ancestors remain part of the family's social fabric (Mbiti, 1990).

d. Ritual Significance

- NT funerals (e.g., Acts 8:2 for Stephen) and practices of remembrance (1 Cor 11:26 in the Eucharist) show that ritual accompanies eschatological hope.
- African funerals are deeply ritualized, marking the deceased's safe passage and affirming communal continuity.

2. Points of Divergence

a. Nature of the Afterlife

- The NT presents resurrection as bodily, transforming mortality into immortality (1 Cor 15:52–54).
- ATR often envisions continuity of existence as spiritual ancestorhood rather than bodily resurrection (Ekeke & Ekpenyong, 2024).

b. Judgment and Finality

- Christian eschatology stresses a final judgment (Heb 9:27) leading to eternal life or separation from God (Matt 25:46).
- ATR emphasizes relational continuity—exclusion from ancestorhood is possible, but eternal damnation in the NT sense is largely absent.

c. Christocentric Hope

- NT eschatology is grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ: "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again…" (1 Thess 4:14).
- ATR hope is grounded in cosmological cycles and ancestral continuity, not in a once-for-all historical event.

3. Case Study: Akamba Christianity

Among the Akamba, missionary influence created tensions between traditional and biblical eschatology. While missionaries discouraged ancestral imagery, Akamba Christians continued to speak of death as *kwiikala na aitu* (living with the ancestors) (Bongmba, 2002). This meant that the person who has died has not gone far but is near the living – to the extend that a drink would be poured for the departed to partake as a form of communion.

Here, comparative theology offers possibilities:

- The NT image of "home with the Lord" (2 Cor 5:8) resonates with the Akamba metaphor of homegoing.
- Instead of rejecting ancestral concepts, pastors can reinterpret them Christologically: Jesus is the ultimate ancestor, the firstborn from the dead (Col 1:18).

This reframing affirms cultural categories while rooting hope in Christ's resurrection.

4. Case Study: Akan Funerals

Owusu's 2025 study of Akan funerals demonstrates how Christian communities negotiate between cultural tradition and eschatological faith (Owusu, 2025). His balanced model—honoring cultural rituals while centering Christ's resurrection—parallels Paul's pastoral strategy in 1Thessalonians 4:13–18. Applied more broadly, this approach suggests that African eschatological practices need not be abandoned, but re-oriented toward biblical hope.

5. Toward a Theology of Integration

The comparative analysis points toward a theology of inculturation:

- Continuity: African insights into community, transition, and ritual can enrich Christian theology.
- Correction: NT eschatology challenges ATR by affirming bodily resurrection, final judgment, and Christocentric hope.
- Contextualization: African theologians can use indigenous categories (e.g., Akamba "homegoing") to articulate resurrection in culturally resonant ways.

As Agboada (2023) argues, ATR's cyclical cosmology can serve as fertile ground for developing an African Christology that fully embraces the NT's resurrection hope while speaking in indigenous idioms (Agboada, 2023).

Toward a Contextual African Christian Eschatology

1. Method: Inculturation Without Reduction

A contextual African Christian eschatology must be inculturated—articulated with African categories, without reducing the New Testament's distinct witness to the triumph of God in the bodily resurrection of Jesus and the final renewal of creation. In practical terms, this means "translation with transformation": receiving indigenous motifs (homegoing, ancestral presence, communal continuity) as contact points, then reinterpreting them within the Christ-event and the biblical promise of resurrection and judgment (Bediako, 1995). This method respects the integrity of African cosmologies while affirming the Christocentric, resurrection-centered horizon of the New Testament (Wright, 2003).

Theologically, inculturation starts with creation and covenant (God's good world, God's faithful purposes) and culminates in resurrection and new creation (God's definitive victory over sin and death in Christ) (Wright, 2003). Within this arc, African symbolism—especially the family/kinship idiom and community continuity, becomes a powerful vehicle

for explicating the biblical hope in ways that are pastorally potent and culturally intelligible (Mbiti, 1990).

2. Christ as "Proto-Ancestor" (Reframed)

African theologians have long explored Christ's relation to ancestors. Charles Nyamiti's and Bénézet Bujo's "Christ-as-Proto-Ancestor" proposals seek to bridge the gap between African reverence for ancestors and biblical soteriology (Nyamiti, 1984; Bujo, 1992). Properly framed, this analogy can be fruitful provided we clarify at least three points:

1. Singularity of Mediation: Unlike ancestors who mediate within the family line, the New Testament confesses one mediator—Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5) (Geheman, 2005). Therefore, the "proto-ancestor" metaphor can function pedagogically (a cultural bridge) but not soteriologically (as if Christ were merely one ancestor among many). Christ's mediation is universal and unique.
2. Bodily Resurrection vs. Shadowy Survival: Ancestors persist in communal memory and ritual; Christ is bodily raised, the first fruits of those who sleep (1 Cor 15:20) (Fee, 1987). This difference is decisive: the hope of believers is not only continuity with a lineage but transformation into incorruptible life.
3. Cosmic Scope: Ancestors protect and bless their kin; the risen Lord is sovereign over all creation, reconciling all things in heaven and on earth (Col 1:15–20) (Bediako, 1995). Hence, "proto-ancestor" language must be immediately expanded by Christ's lordship and the cosmic breadth of resurrection hope.

With these guardrails, the metaphor can help recode African intuitions of kinship and memory toward Eucharistic remembrance and baptismal incorporation into Christ's body—the family of God that spans the living and the dead and will stand together in the resurrection (on memory and eucharistic anamnesis as Christian "remembrance," see Wright, 2003, Pages 732–36).

3. "Homegoing" as Christian Eschatological Grammar

For the Akamba (and many African peoples), death is *kwitwa musyi*— "going home." Reframed christologically, the church may proclaim death as going home to the Lord (2 Cor 5:8), an idiom that honors the Akamba sense of familial belonging while anchoring hope in union with Christ (Mutiso, 2006). Pastors can explicitly teach that homegoing is not absorption into ancestorhood alone, but entrance into the presence of Christ to await the resurrection of the body (see 2 Cor 5:6-8; Phil 1:21-23).

Liturgically, this suggests:

- Naming and Remembering: Sustain the African practice of naming the departed but embed it within Christian remembrance ("the communion of saints"), emphasizing intercession to God rather than supplication to ancestors (Mbiti, 1990).
- Committal as Sowing: Use 1 Corinthians 15 in committal rites, teaching that burial is sowing a seed that God will raise imperishable—a metaphor resonant with rural African life and Scripture (see 1 Cor 15:35-49; Keener, 2005).
- Songs of Hope and Moderation: Encourage funeral worship that proclaims resurrection while moderating extravagance, following Owusu's counsel to the Akan and applying it among the Akamba (Owusu, 2025).
- Evangelicals in funerals focus on personal salvation, resurrection hope, and proclamation of Christ's victory over death.
- Roman Catholic tradition integrates sacraments (Requiem Mass, prayers for the dead) and remembrance in the communion of saints.
- Orthodox tradition emphasises memorial services, liturgical cycles, and prayers for the departed within the eschatological context of Christ's kingdom.

These approaches respect African funeral traditions while proclaiming the gospel of hope.

4. Pastoral Care: Naming Fear, Proclaiming Freedom

Many African communities interpret untimely death through witchcraft or spiritual hostility (Gehman, 2005). Christian pastoral care must name these fears without trivializing them, then relocate the community's trust in the victory of Christ:

- Deliverance Preaching: Preach Hebrews 2:14—Christ has destroyed the one who holds the power of death (see Heb 2:14-15; Bruce, 1990).
- Prayer and Protection: Offer robust intercessory prayer and communal solidarity, emphasizing that believers stand within Christ's triumph and the Spirit's power.
- Catechesis on Providence: Teach that not all suffering is demonically caused; some deaths unfold within the mystery of God's providence in a fallen world, where hope is not in avoidance of mortality but in resurrection life (see Rom 8:18-28).
- Different church traditions provide pastoral care within their contexts: Evangelical tradition emphasises assurance of salvation and freedom from spiritual hostility; Roman Catholic provides comfort through sacramental rites and prayers for the dead, including family offering; while Orthodox tradition guides through liturgical prayer and remembrance, emphasising participation in Christ's life and resurrection.

This pastoral approach honors communal experiences of spiritual conflict while freeing Christians from compulsive ritual appeasement of the dead.

5. Ethical Outworkings: Grief, Generosity, and Social Justice

A contextual eschatology must also address ethical consequences:

- Grief with Hope: Encourage lament (Ps 13) alongside resurrection hope (1 Thess 4:13–18). Grief is neither suppressed nor absolutized.
- Funeral Economics: In some contexts, funerals can impoverish families. Following Owusu's analysis, churches should cultivate solidarity funds that prioritize education, health, and care for widows and orphans, while encouraging moderation in expenditures (Owusu, 2025).

- Justice and Mercy: Resurrection hope energizes justice (1 Cor 15:58): because God will raise the dead and renew creation, work for social righteousness is not in vain (see 1 Cor 15:58; Rev 21:1-5).

6. Bible Translation & Theological Language

Where Bible translation projects struggle to express "resurrection," translators working among the Akamba and related communities might consider:

- Resurrection as "Raising to Wakefulness": Using idioms of sleep and awakening (Dan 12:2; 1 Thess 4:14) can connect with funeral language while clarifying that this awakening is God's act, not mere ancestral continuity (Gehman, 2005).
- Avoiding Ambiguity: Terms that blur resurrection with reincarnation or ancestral return should be avoided; explanatory marginal notes and catechetical materials can guide readers away from syncretism.
- Christ's Uniqueness: Glossaries should underscore Christ's unique mediation and bodily resurrection as the template and guarantee for believers (Gehman, 2005).

7. Catechesis and Communal Formation

To embed this eschatology in congregational life:

1. Creedal Formation: Teach the Apostles' Creed and 1 Corinthians 15 as core catechesis, rehearsing "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."
2. Testimony and Memory: Encourage testimonies of God's faithfulness in grief, integrating African practices of storytelling with biblical hope.
3. All-Saints Worship: Develop an annual Remembrance Sunday that names the departed in prayers to God, uses 1 Thessalonians 4 and Revelation 21, and points to the Eucharist as foretaste of the banquet of the kingdom (see Rev 21:1-5; 1Thess 4:13-18; Wright, 2003).

8. Constructive Synthesis: Keeping Hope Alive

- Death is an enemy defeated in Christ (1 Cor 15:26, 54-57).
- The dead in Christ await bodily resurrection (2 Cor 5:6-8; Phil 1:21-23).
- Ancestral language functions analogically for kinship, memory, belonging, subordinated Christ's uniqueness and resurrection (Nyamiti, 1984).
- African funeral rituals can be purified and reoriented, proclaiming homegoing to the Lord and the hope of the resurrection (Mutiso, 2006).
- Pastoral care addresses fear of witchcraft with deliverance, prayer, catechesis, and communal support, centering Christ's lordship over death (see Heb 2:14-15; Rom 8:26-27).
- Ethical discipleship flows from resurrection hope: grief with hope, generosity with wisdom, and steadfast labor for justice in the present world God will renew (see 1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:58; Jas 1:27).

In summary, a contextual African Christian eschatology honors African intuitions of continuity while rooting hope in Christ. It reframes "homegoing" as being at home with the Lord, transfigures memory of ancestors into Eucharistic remembrance, and replaces fear of spiritual hostility with confidence in Christ's victory. In doing so, African communities can grieve, hope, and live ethically within the promise that death will ultimately die.

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