

## PROJECT ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: A REMEDIAL APPROACH TO THE LOCAL BELIEF ON DEATH  
IN AMBILOBE, MADAGASCAR

Researcher: David Tsilavina Mbolatiana

Primary advisor: Solofo Georges Jean Mesmert, DMin

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The tribe of Antakarana in the northwestern part of Madagascar has many different cultures in all areas of life from birth until death. But the most crucial fact that each Adventist has to contend with is the funeral rituals and customs that do not fit in with the biblical teachings. Therefore, some members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church also follow and practice these rituals and customs, which, in turn, can create conflict within families, compromise their personal beliefs, and impact both the church community and its growth. In this regard, it is significant to explore the local belief surrounding death in Ambilobe and subsequently suggest an appropriate remedial approach.

The study aims to identify the challenges faced by members regarding death rituals; and then develop and implement a remedial program accordingly. To attain

the objectives, this study uses the qualitative interviewing method. Questionnaires were prepared and administered to 120 members in the North Ambilobe District. In alignment with the difficulties encountered by members, a remedial program was also formulated, executed, and evaluated.

The results revealed that church members encounter family challenges, economic burdens, and spiritual confusion that may result in apostasy. The remedial initiative illuminated the minds of Adventist believers who were not adhering faithfully to the Bible teachings and were engaging in customary death rituals. This effort directed these church members back to the teachings of the Bible, facilitating their acceptance of the truth and comprehension of the doctrine regarding matters of death. Moreover, the project contributed to mitigating the pain and sorrow within mourning families and their relatives, guiding them toward embracing a simpler ritual. The evaluation of the project illustrates that church members who had previously adhered to traditional death customs and performed these rituals returned to a better understanding of the biblical teachings. This transformation encompassed not only their perspective but also their worldview. The implications of these findings offer valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners aiming to foster the growth of the church.

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A project

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology

by

David Tsilavina Mbolatiana

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APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

---

Primary Advisor  
Solofo Georges J. Mesmert, DMin

---

Programme Director, MAPTh  
Davidson Razafiarivony, PhD

---

Secondary Advisor  
Davidson Razafiarivony, PhD

---

Dean, Theological Seminary  
Feliks Ponyatovkiy, PhD

Adventist University of Africa

Date: October 2023

I dedicate this project to my family

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background to the Study**

Death is common to all mankind in the world and it reaches any class of people. Questions on death may arise with diverse perspectives which cause divisions among the family and in the community. These different perspectives result from confused views and assumptions about death.

In truth, man is mortal. Everybody dies, whatever their age or their social standing. The Bible talks about death. As a matter of fact, from the book of Genesis to Revelation, accounts and biblical events are the reality of death. However different opinions or perceptions of death may differ from those of the Bible teachings.

Some misunderstanding about death can be observed even through the attitude of some Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) believers in Ambilobe, Madagascar. As a result, the biblical teachings about death need to be emphasized to lead the people back to the truth taught by the word of God. The researcher has been the Adventist District Pastor of Ambilobe for four consecutive years.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

In the Ambilobe region, ancestral worship is prevailing. The majority of the population has inherited an animistic cultural background which asserts that the soul is still alive after the body dies. Then, the dead person or the ancestor continues to think, feel, and can bless, protect, or harm living ones.

And when people converted to Adventism, some of them still maintained this pagan belief. It entails problems, which are reflected in personal behavior inside the church, and it affects one's relationship with God as well. Some people go so far as to blame God the Creator for causing death.

Is a person who has died dead? What will happen after death? Does the Bible agree with some worldly beliefs on death? How to help members of the church in Ambilobe cope with death? Is there a remedial approach to this issue?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The research investigates the biblical conception of death and also presents the true teaching of the Bible on the matter of death to attempt to restore a real Christian worldview. Members of the church in Ambilobe are facing issues related to local beliefs and practices on death. The study aims to help them to deal with such issues and remain faithful as Adventist members.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is relevant in various ways. It provides answers to the question of many church members on whether the concept of death from the Bible and in the Bible is significant to them. The study is practically important for anyone willing to live a life in compliance with biblical truth about death and to get a truly Christian perspective on life after death.

The object of the study is the matter of death and as a researcher, it is found to be relevant in the author's field and service ministry: the Ambilobe North District. The wish is to involve Seventh-day Adventist Church members and the non-Adventist people in the community.

This research is very important for us and it is useful and helpful for the Adventist populations of the Ambilobe North District and the North Malagasy Conference to take away the unacceptable conceptions of death and the traditions within it.

### **Delimitation of the Study**

In this project, we focus simply on death and the conception of it from the Bible and try to restore the true Christian perception of death by Bible teachings in the Ambilobe North District. So, an educational program with spiritual revival must be done. In the meantime, an appropriate reformation would be needed without any delay to lead these Seventh-day Adventist believers to live an upright life in compliance with the Bible's truth concerning death.

### **Methodology and Procedure**

This project adopts a development program with implementation to deal with the conception of death in Ambilobe, Madagascar. Such a program should be biblically sound. So, it should be based on sound biblical teaching. The different chapters reflect further the way the project proceeds:

Chapter One introduces the study with the background, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, delimitation, significance of the study, methodology, and procedure. In chapter two, the researcher provides a biblical/theological foundation about death and the afterlife. In Chapter Three, the local setting of Ambilobe and the issue raised by unbiblical conceptions of death and its effect on the church will be discussed. Chapter four brings the remedial approach to the local belief in death inside the Ambilobe District. Chapter five presents a summary and conclusion.

It was aimed that members of the church in Ambilobe would be set free from superstitions. Family conflicts resulting from ancestral practices based on the concept of death would be reduced or solved. The life of Christian believers would comply with biblical truth.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION ABOUT DEATH

#### **Death in the Old Testament**

According to the introduction, we are going to see the theological foundation of death in the Bible. After that death conception outside the bible, the death will be discussed.

#### **Eden**

The story of the beginning of the universe is narrated in the book of Genesis. Genesis narrates how life on earth started, and how death would come as a result of disobedience to God. After placing the first human beings in the garden, God warned them that as soon as he ate the forbidden fruit, they would die. This is the first statement about death in the Scriptures.

Genesis records that they were tempted by the devil and disobeyed God. Death came because of Adam's act of disobedience. Robert Jamieson declared that death was regarded as the punishment for insubordination.<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White says that if Adam had remained obedient, he would have lived in immortality, both temporal and spiritual. She says: “Immortality was promised them on condition of obedience; by

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<sup>1</sup>Robert, Jamieson, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, October 3, 2023. <https://www.abiblecommentary.com/jamiesonfaussetbrownbiblecommentary.pdf>.

transgression, they would forfeit eternal life.”<sup>2</sup> Matthew Poole affirms and adds some details: “Temporal, or the death of the body, which shall then begin in thee, by decays, infirmities, terrors, dangers, and other harbingers of death.”<sup>3</sup> Adam received a curse according to Genesis 3: 19. “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Adam himself went through the experience when his son Abel was killed by Cain (Gen 4:8). Subsequently, Adam himself died (Gen 5:5), and Genesis 5 narrates that so and so "died." Ralph Earle further says “You’ll not only die spiritually, in losing the life from God, but also, from the moment you will become a mortal, and you will continue in a dying state until you die.”<sup>4</sup>

As said earlier, they did not die immediately, by the time they ate the forbidden fruit. But in the fourth chapter, Abel was the first human being to die on this earth. Ellen G. White asserted that it was the sin of disobedience that brought all the calamities upon this earth and that includes death.<sup>5</sup>

It was the transgression of divine law by Adam and his wife that brought death to this earth. As Edersheim states death was considered the penalty and the amends of sin.<sup>6</sup> This life of transgression continued in the days before the flood, which prompted God to destroy all mankind. Human beings were then given mercy for 120 years to

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<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings: Comprehensive Research Edition [CD ROM] (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 2008), 60.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Coke, “Genesis 2,” in *Coke’s Commentary on the Holy Bible*, accessed September 3, 2023, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/tcc/genesis-2.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Adam Clarke and Ralph Earle, *Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1967), 20.

<sup>5</sup> White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 61.

<sup>6</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Day of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), 165.

change but they refused. Because of their disobedience, all of them died except for the family of Noah.

Death still strikes all human beings today. Transgression brings a lot of troubles on this earth.<sup>7</sup> The joy and happiness of the human race have been completely ruined by death from the beginning until now.

### **The Israelites**

Beginning from Genesis chapter 12, God chose Abraham to build a new nation through his descendants and it grew according to God's promise over time. Abraham's descendants would become slaves in Egypt for more than 400 years. Psalm 105 relates the story.

Many biblical writers in the Old Testament also express the Hebrew view of death in which they collectively say that death is the same as sleep. Job called death a sleep (Job 14: 10-12), as did David (Ps 13: 3), Jeremiah (Jer 51: 39, 57), and Daniel (Dan 12: 2).

In the matter of funerals, it was important for the Israelites to be buried in a tomb that had a special meaning and also had a religious faith associated with it (i.e., resurrection). Thus, Jacob, even though he died in Egypt, left a message for his son to take his bones to the grave of his ancestors, in his father's tomb, and not in Egypt (Gen 47: 29-31). Later, Joseph asked for the same (Gen 50: 24-26) also. Matthew Henry states that "Joseph, by faith in the doctrine of the resurrection, and the promise of Canaan, gave commandment concerning his bones."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ellen G. White, *EGW Comments SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, *Gen.-Deut.*, Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings: Comprehensive Research Edition [CD ROM] (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 2008), 1085.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 94.

The Hebrew's conception of death evolved. The author of the book of Ecclesiastes declares that there is a day to be born and there is a day of death for all mankind. He also adds that when a person dies, the deceased no longer knows anything about himself or herself or anyone else according to Ecclesiastes 9: 5-6. He affirms also "the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it" (Eccl 12: 7). It applies to all humankind.

### **Mesopotamians**

Although the dead were buried in Mesopotamia, no attempts were made to preserve their bodies. Death was conceived of in terms of appalling grimness, unrelieved by any hope of salvation through human effort or divine compassion. The dead were, in fact, among the most dreaded beings in early Mesopotamian demonology.<sup>9</sup> From their point of view, it was created by a goddess, and the place was named Kur<sup>10</sup> where people could continue their lives after death. Black and Green noted that the care was never the same between the burial for those who were poor in their life, and those who were rich, and also when they entered into the abyss.

### **Egyptians**

The history of the Old Testament is closely connected with that of the Egyptians. Egypt was among the greatest in those days and followed different rituals, customs, and cultures. They had many kinds of gods and had their temples. In that way, Egypt was a polytheist nation. Firstly, the Egyptians had their view of humans (anthropology). The Early Egyptians assumed that individual human beings consisted

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<sup>9</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Death," accessed September 13, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/science/death>.

<sup>10</sup> Jeremy A. Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons, and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary* (1992), s.v. "Kur."

of three basic parts: the physical body and two non-material elements known as the ka and the ba. The ka is an individual's life force; the element that makes the difference between a living body and a dead one; each person's ka ultimately came from the creator and returned to the gods at death. The ba is comparable to the Western notion of the soul or personality, the feature that makes each person a unique individual, apart from the physical element of the body.<sup>11</sup> The understanding of these three parts of humanity led to a certain way of looking at death and the afterlife among the Egyptians.

Therefore, when it comes to the context of death, Egypt had his conception of it. Joshua Mark notes that "death was simply a transition to another phase of one's eternal existence."<sup>12</sup> Through death, the Egyptians had an opportunity to live again. A text found in the Near Ancient East reads "The Egyptians looked upon death as a continuation of this life and a fulfillment of the good things of this life."<sup>13</sup> Another historian adds: "They regarded death as a temporary interruption, rather than the cessation of life. ...When they died, they were mummified so the soul would return to the body, giving it breath and life."<sup>14</sup>

Mummification is very important to Egyptians because it guaranteed their immortality after death and had to be followed in detail. The mummification was composed of: "the perfumes, drugs, stuff, amulets, prayers, are all repeated, even to

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Der, ed., *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2005), 17.

<sup>12</sup> Joshua J. Mark, "Death in Ancient Egypt," *World History Encyclopedia*, accessed September 3, 2023, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1050/death-in-ancient-egypt/>.

<sup>13</sup> James Bennett Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts: Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 33.

<sup>14</sup> Din Amaechi, "What Purpose Did Temples Serve in Ancient Egypt?" Better Tourism Africa, March 17, 2022, accessed September 3, 2023, <https://bettertourismafrica.org/egypt/what-purpose-did-temples-serve-in-ancient-egypt/>.

the smallest details, to secure for the man the immortality attained by the god."<sup>15</sup>  
According to Gaston, the Egyptians adopted mummification because "religious beliefs required that the body be preserved and recognizable to the owner's spirit (ka) when it returned to the tomb for sustenance."<sup>16</sup>

## **Death in the New Testament Times**

### **Jesus' View**

Jesus, in the Gospels, used the word sleep, referring to death. "In the NT Christ stated that the dead daughter of Jairus was sleeping (Matt 9: 24; Mark 5: 39). He referred to deceased Lazarus in the same manner (John 11: 11-14)."<sup>17</sup>

The term most used is Thanatos which means either physical death, a carnal indifference to spiritual matters, or an insensibility to divine things. George Knight confirms that "the Greek words for 'sleep' - such as kaimao, katheudo, and hupnos quite often rendered 'sleep' refer in many instances to the sleep of death."<sup>18</sup>

Jesus died on the cross and He was resurrected on a Sunday morning. His death is special because "He . . . has saved the world from the danger because He has set right the world's relations to God."<sup>19</sup> Through that death, all humanity on the earth should have the eternal life. This provides hope for the human being that one day, we

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<sup>15</sup> Gaston Maspero, *Life in Ancient Egypt and Assyria* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1892), 125.

<sup>16</sup> Rosalie David, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Egypt* (New York: Facts on File, 1998), 206.

<sup>17</sup> Siegfried H. Horn, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary (SDABD)*, rev. ed. (1979), s.v. "Death."

<sup>18</sup> George R. Knight, ed., *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 403.

<sup>19</sup> Alexander Maclaren, *The Epistles of John, Jude and The Book of Revelation* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 2016), 91.

will have the resurrection: “The dead would be raised, and would share with the living in a general judgment from which all would finally emerge purified.”<sup>20</sup>

## **Paul**

The Apostle Paul has written many of the books of the New Testament and he too talks about death. His background religion relates to the Pharisees. According to Anthony Saldarini, “Paul is the only person besides Josephus whose claim to be a Pharisee ... (Phil 3: 5) and he is the only diaspora Jew identified as a Pharisee.”<sup>21</sup>

The Apostle Paul has many references to death in his writings and he starts by saying that death is the consequence of sin, as the judgment according to the Law of God.<sup>22</sup> In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul says that death is the last enemy for all humanity and through the power of Christ it will be defeated. Paul's writing focuses on the "doctrine of redemption through the Death of Christ is only once mentioned, and then in the most general way (I. v. 10).”<sup>23</sup> As George Milligan mentions, the apostle Paul speaks of the miraculous power of the resurrection of Christ and that it affects all believers. His victory over death is complete. And His victory is made available to his people. Death's destruction is certain (1 Cor15: 26, 54; Rev 21: 4).<sup>24</sup>

Paul says that this mortal body will be clothed with immortality when Jesus appears at His Second Coming and it will be changed in an instant. As R. E. Davies

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<sup>20</sup> J. Estlin Carpenter, *The Johanne Writings: A Study of the Apocalypse and the Fourth Gospel* (London: Constable & Co., 1927), 9.

<sup>21</sup> Anthony J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society: A Sociological Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 134.

<sup>22</sup> Paul C. Jong, *Exegesis on the Book of Romans* (Seoul: Hephzibah Publishing House, 2006), 350.

<sup>23</sup> George Milligan, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1908), 67.

<sup>24</sup> Leon Morris, “Death,” *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 267.

says "At the second coming of Christ, believers' bodies will be changed, and all traces of sin, mortality, and death will be removed. Then death will be swallowed up in life (1 Cor 15:52-57)."<sup>25</sup>

From Paul's point of view, those who have done what is right will be different from when they go through death because they will rise again, and be changed.

### **The Book of Revelation**

John continued on his point of view about death in the book of Revelation. According to John, "At the judgment, death, and hades are said to be cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20: 14) signifying that as God brings in the new heaven and new earth (Rev 21), the last enemy, death (1 Cor 15: 26), is finally and irrevocably destroyed."<sup>26</sup> There will be two different types of death. The first death is the result of sin which applies to all human beings. The second death applies to all wicked persons, after the 1,000 years of Revelation 20, when the wicked are eternally annihilated (Matt 10:28).<sup>27</sup>

The book of Revelation describes a second death for the unbelievers (Rev 21:8). At the end of the book, John saw in a vision that the new earth would come and there would be no more dying again (Rev 21: 40. This will be the re-creation made by God for all creatures.

John and Paul shared the same view of death: there will be a resurrection and people will come back to life and put on immortality. The Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes in the New Testament times have their different point of view on death and

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<sup>25</sup> R. E. Davies, "Death," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 72.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Horn, *SDABD*, s.v. "Death."

the afterlife. But Jesus came, and through His sacrifice, sin was destroyed. Thus, humanity has the assurance of the resurrection.

## **The Notion of Death outside the Bible**

### **Greco-Romans**

During the time of the New Testament, the Jews were associated with Greco-Romans. “The Greeks believed that at the moment of death the *psyche*, or spirit of the dead, left the body as a little breath or puff of wind.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Socrates**

Socrates (ca. 470 BCE–399 BCE) was an ancient Greek philosopher considered to be the main source of Western thought. Socrates’ view of death can be summarized in the following recapitulation. Socrates insisted that for a moral person, death was a good thing and should be welcomed. Suicide was wrong, he added, because men and women are the property of the immortal gods, and as such should not be harmed intentionally because this was an attack on the property of others. But when death did come, it was no bad thing.<sup>29</sup>

It was because of the immortality of the soul, Socrates argued, that death was no evil. The purpose of philosophy was to free the soul by guiding it to eternal truths, and so when death came, it was a liberation.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Department of Greek and Roman Art, “Death, Burial, and the Afterlife in Ancient Greece,” *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), accessed September 13, 2020, [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dbag/hd\\_dbag.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dbag/hd_dbag.htm).

<sup>29</sup> Gregory Elder, “Professing Faith: Socrates’ View of Death and the Immortal Soul,” *Redlands Daily Facts*, accessed September 14, 2020, <https://www.redlandsdailyfacts.com/2016/06/01/professing-faith-socrates-view-of-death-and-the-immortal-soul/>.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

Further, Socrates said that a better example would be that the soul is like a cloak made by a weaver, and just as the cloak continues to exist after the death of the weaver, so too the soul must outlast the body.<sup>31</sup>

### **Flavius Josephus**

Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian of the 1st century AD records how doctrinal disputes about death, the existence of an afterlife, and the fate of the soul, were embodied in the views of various factions.<sup>32</sup> Flavius Josephus was among the Pharisees, so most likely believed in the immortality of the souls as the Pharisees did.

### **The Pharisees**

Anthony Saldarini describes how Pharisees understood death. For Pharisees, "every soul is imperishable; only the soul of the good passes into another body. The souls of the wicked suffer eternal punishment."<sup>33</sup> Ancient Jewish History confirms that "the Pharisees also maintained that an after-life existed and that God punished the wicked and rewarded the righteous in the world to come."<sup>34</sup>

### **The Sadducees**

According to Saldarini, Sadducees said there was "no endurance of the soul. No rewards or punishments."<sup>35</sup> And the Bible points out their belief. The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection, whereas the Pharisees did. In Acts, Paul chose this

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Death."

<sup>33</sup> Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 110.

<sup>34</sup> Mitchell G. Bard, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Middle East Conflict* (New York: MacMillan, 1999), Ancient Jewish History: Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes, accessed September 13, 2020, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/pharisees-sadducees-and-essenes>.

<sup>35</sup> Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 110.

point of division to gain the protection of the Pharisees.<sup>36</sup> Because of their interpretation of the Torah, "the Sadducees rejected the idea of the Oral Law and insisted on a literal interpretation of the Written Law; consequently, they did not believe in an afterlife."<sup>37</sup>

### **The Essenes**

The Essenes were Jews who lived their lives away from the general Jewish population. One group that was well known to historians was settling in the monastery of Qumran, northwest of the Dead Sea. According to Josephus, they believed in the immortality of the soul and that they would receive their souls back after death.<sup>38</sup>

### **Jerome**

Jerome was one of the Fathers of the church. He wrote many letters, one of which was the letter to Paula. "He [Jerome] asks her to remember that Blæsilla is now in paradise, and so far, to control herself as to prevent enemies of the faith from caviling at her conduct. Then he concludes with the prophecy (since more than fulfilled) that in his writings Blæsilla's name shall never die."<sup>39</sup> The sentiment of the letter clearly shows what Jerome believed about death and the afterlife.

### **Catholics**

Catholics commonly believe that death is the passing from the physical world to the afterlife, where the deceased's soul will live in Heaven, Hell, or Purgatory. At

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<sup>36</sup> "Sadducees," Wikipedia, accessed September 13, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadducees#Beliefs>.

<sup>37</sup> Bard, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Middle East Conflict*.

<sup>38</sup> Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.18.

<sup>39</sup> Jerome, *Letters of St Jerome to Paula* (6.49 trans. Fremantle, Lewis, and Martley).

the end of time, when Christ returns, many Catholics believe that the bodies of the dead will be resurrected.<sup>40</sup> They have another conception about the soul: "One of the main things about our soul is this - it will live forever. Everything else around us is changing; things begin and later die out. But not the soul. Since God makes a soul, it lasts forever. We say the soul is immortal."<sup>41</sup> The church believes in the purgatory. "The belief in purgatory (an interim state in which a correction of a dead person's evil condition is still possible) of the Roman Catholic Church gives the deceased opportunities for repentance and penance to ameliorate their situation."<sup>42</sup>

### **Seventh-day Adventists**

The subject of the state of the dead is one of the 28 doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This is the 25<sup>th</sup> fundamental belief of the church which is based on the Scriptures. The statement of belief reads: "The wages of sin is death. But God, who alone is immortal, will grant eternal life to His redeemed. Until that day death is an unconscious state for all people."<sup>43</sup>

The *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* notes "SDAs believe that man is by nature a mortal being, that immortality is conditional on accepting Christ, and that it will be bestowed simultaneously on all the saved of all ages at the second coming of

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<sup>40</sup> St Mary's University, "What the Church Says about Death," *The Art of Dying Well*, accessed September 13, 2020, <https://www.artofdyingwell.org/what-is-dying-well/a-good-catholic-death/church-says-death/>.

<sup>41</sup> Philip Leinfelder, *Your Soul - What Is It? And What Is Its Destiny?* (La Crosse, WI: Spicer and Buschman), 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Concepts of Life after Death," accessed September 13, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christianity/Concepts-of-life-after-death>.

<sup>43</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, The Ministerial Association, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe ...: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, DC: All-Africa Publications, 1971), 382.

Christ.”<sup>44</sup> This teaching distinguishes Seventh-day Adventists from other mainline Protestant denominations.

The Adventist Church also believes that transgression leads to death but that intimate relationships and serious communion with Christ will lead to eternal life. Because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, the Adventist Church believes that it brings forgiveness to everyone, and affirms that Jesus is the mediator between God and man, and no other sacrifice is required. The Adventist Church believes that Jesus' work of forgiveness continues for every sinner now in the Most Holy Place as High Priest.

### **Ellen G. White**

Ellen White has her perspective on death. She made her statements on immortality, of which she says that it is a serious error to believe in it.<sup>45</sup> She disagrees with those who have communion with the dead, as the spiritists did. She affirms: "Furthermore, God has expressly forbidden all pretended communication with departed spirits. In the days of the Hebrews, there was a class of people who claimed, as do the spiritualists of today, to hold communication with the dead."<sup>46</sup> She asserts that the devil is at work in these spirits of the dead who pretend to be alive again. In her book *The Great Controversy*, she states "He [Satan] has the power to bring before men the appearance of their departed friends. The counterfeit is perfect; the familiar look, the words, the tone, are reproduced with marvelous distinctness."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, rev. ed., (1996), s.v. "Death."

<sup>45</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings: Comprehensive Research Edition [CD ROM] (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 2008), 588.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 556.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 552, 560.

Ellen G. White was also convinced that death was caused by sin. But because of Jesus' death, sin was taken away. She affirms, "He [Christ] was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. 'By His stripes we are healed.'"<sup>48</sup> For that reason, she summarizes that for someone who died in Christ, it is just a few moments like sleep: "To the Christian, death is but a sleep, a moment of silence and darkness."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings: Comprehensive Research Edition [CD ROM] (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 2008), 25.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 787.

## CHAPTER 3

### DESCRIPTION OF THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE AMBILOBE DISTRICT

#### **Ambilobe**

Ambilobe is a part of the DIANA region, of-which which the capital town is itself Ambilobe. The local people of Ambilobe are called the Antarakana which is a blend of several tribes.

#### **Ethnic Composition**

The tribes composing the population there include the Sakalava of Menabe, descendants of Andriamandisoarivo from the Menabe region now known as "Antakarana Zafin'ny Mena." There is also the "Sakalava Zafin'ny Fotsy" from King Andriandahifotsy, in the region of Boeny, called "Antakarana Zafiny Fotsy." There are the Bare, Betsimisaraka, the Antandroy, the Antemoro, the Anjoany, and the Ajojo, and they all have different ways of carrying out their cultural customs.

#### **Economic Activities**

Ambilobe has experienced a significant migratory movement (immigration more than emigration). The price of the sapphire stone in the rural municipality of Tanambao-Marivorahona, more precisely in the township of Ambodromifehy in 1996, has attracted many immigrants coming from the SOFIA region and the east of Antsiranana. There was also the sudden outburst of gold mines in Labeka and Betsiaka that caused a demographic explosion in the periphery of Antakarana.

The establishment of an aquaculture industry has reinforced the phenomenon of migration as it has attracted more workforce, thus creating an increase in population in the village of Ampapamena and also in the village of SIRAMA.

### **Culture of the Ambilobe People**

A very symbolic custom of the Antakarana kingdom is celebrated every five years in the Royal Palace of Ambatoaranana, during the month of November, and it lasts for two weeks. The year before the celebration, a visit to the cave of the kings where the previous kings were inhumed is made, for the coronation of the royal mast. This royal mast is 12 meters high and it is the union of two blocks of wood, male and female. Only on Friday at noon, the king on his seat symbolizing the throne of Antakarana, circles eight times as a lap of honor around the royal mast, while the population formulates all the blessings and wishes for the grace of the kingdom.

The "Ziara" has also become a traditional worship due to the adoption of the Islamic religion by the kings of Antakarana. It is a visit to the Muslim cemetery of the royalty done by the king and his guests during September of every year at the full moon.

The local traditions have strong morals and social influence on the local and regional population. For example, it is taboo to hold a funeral on Tuesdays in this area.

As a matter of fact, despite the constant evolution of culture in the Malagasy society, most of the Antakarana people still advocate for traditional values, especially on beliefs and worldviews about death and the afterlife. The reason for this is that the ordinary Antakarana people have a cultural inheritance from an ancestral belief in spirits encompassing the reverence for ancestors, the consultation with the spirit of the dead, and so on.

Moreover, the Antakarana people only have a faint idea about the human relationship with God the Creator, and know the concept of sin.

### **Understanding of Death by the Antakarana People<sup>1</sup>**

According to the Antakarana people, death is not the end of life. Even though it is the end of physical life, it is perceived as the beginning of life in the unseen realm beyond the world. In fact, when a person dies, his or her body is to be prepared for burial but the soul turns into a spirit that is invisible and immortal. The spirit of the dead person dwells elsewhere in the unknown realm beyond the world and may occasionally appear as a ghost or haunt a place.

In addition, the spirit of a dead king or deceased dignitary can temporarily possess a woman or a man and use them to command customs and acts on its behalf. This kind of spirit is named "Tromba" and the person host whom he possesses is "Saha," meaning place to dwell or temple. Otherwise, the "Tromba" and the Antakarana royalty exert a strong influence in shaping and preserving the traditional values and social customs in the Antakarana community. Every year in August, the king of Antakarana calls for a gathering of all the hosts of the "Tromba" and they perform a ritual bathing.

### **Ritual Preparation of the Corpse**

When a member of the Antakarana people is deceased, the body must undergo several procedures before the actual burial.

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<sup>1</sup> Alalady and Amidou Riziky (both of them are teachers at Ambilobe College they are also from the local place)

## **The Ritual Bathing**

This is done by a close relative; all parts of the body must be washed with water and soap. If the deceased one is a female, the braids of her hair should be untied.

Ritual clothing is used for wrapping up the body after the ritual bath. The body must be laid down and covered with an overturned garment. Any plastic bottom, zipper, or metal thing must be taken off. The jaw is bound to the head with a strap. The two thumbs must be joined and bound with a strap. The two big toes must be joined and bound with a strap.

When all these preparatory rites have been performed by close relatives, the body is entirely wrapped up with a pall, usually white for the common people but a red one for a person of royal blood. And the wrapped body is to be shrouded between two drapes called "Tandriko."

In other words, the body must be kept out of sight before it is placed in the coffin, during the funeral wake period before the burial rites, between two or three days. It is forbidden to put anything black in the coffin with the corpse because the color black annihilates the ghost or the spirit of the dead. That is why it is a taboo.

## **Funeral Period**

The duration is less than four days for the funeral wake, usually two or three days, but the day of burial is fixed by the bereaved family and must not fall on a taboo day which is Tuesday, the forbidden day to perform the burial.

## **Expenses**

When someone dies, the funeral expenses are a burden on the bereaved family, not only for the care of the deceased but also for providing food and beverages for those who come together to sympathize with the family. In addition, it is customary to

slaughter an ox for every single day of mourning, and all of the meat must be consumed on that day. In this way, a death might bring shame to the bereaved family that cannot afford the funeral expenses. Usually, the Antakarana people are very sympathetic towards funerals.

Nevertheless, generally, about a third or slightly less of the funeral expenses are covered by the social contribution of the community. In short, when death occurs in a family, it causes a heavy economic burden due to the funeral traditions.

### **Ritual Supplication to the Deceased One**

When everything is ready for the funeral and the body is already in the closed coffin covered with a white cloth, the coffin is taken out of the mortuary house and put down on a mat in front of the attending crowd. This is done in the open air, with the close relatives sitting around the coffin, led by an eminent elder of the family who delivers the speech of ritual supplication to the deceased one called "mikigny."

He makes a farewell speech to the deceased, imploring him or her to accept to the new state of death and to accept to go to another world different from the world of the living where there is no more suitable place for him or her to dwell.

Accordingly, he conjures him or her not to disturb any living person or to mingle with any people. But to be willing to dwell in peace in the new world where he or she is fit to dwell. In the grave, the guardian lights a fire where the remains of the ancestor's dwell. This allows their spirits to leave to be where they belong in the underworld.

### **The Ritual Breaking Off of Marriage Union: "Fagnitosagna"**

This customary rite must be performed to grant the widow or widower the freedom to remarry. If not, when she or he remarries, he or she may likely be haunted

and disturbed by the ghost of the deceased ~~one~~ because he or she claims the right to be his or her wife or husband. Therefore, a prominent elder of the family sits down with the widow or the widower in front of the coffin to make a ritual to the deceased, telling him or her that from now on, he or she is no longer fit to be linked in a marriage union to a living person who still alive in a body incompatible with the afterlife where the deceased has gone.

Immediately after this rite, the new widow or widower gets a bucket of water poured onto him or her, and he or she is wrapped in a cloth. At that moment, the coffin is lifted and carried to the burial site by close relatives. At the same time, the widow or widower goes in the opposite direction with some people following him or her, and they do not assist with the actual burial.

### **Ritual Invocation “Joro Mampandry”**

When the burial is performed, before leaving the grave, the close relatives of the deceased sit down around the grave, led by a prominent elder of the family who will make the invocation.

First, a ritual speech is performed to the foregoing relatives who were previously buried in the graveyard, asking them the newcomer to their resting place with grace, so that he or she may dwell in peace-and have a good relationship with them.

Second, the elder conjures the newly buried person to dwell in peace with the foregoing dead relatives and not to come back to disturb or mingle with the living because there is no place for the dead and they should not interfere with the lives of the living.

When the funeral is over, everyone goes home and when they enter the house, the women of the family enter first and the men go in later. There is already a fire

burning at the door to stop the phantoms and ghosts. From the point of view of Antakarana, these are the ancestors who are not inhumed in the tombs and who might follow around in case of a similar incident.

### **The Post Burial Supplication “Joro Fafiloha”**

This rite is to be performed after a few days, usually one week after the burial, at the place where the funerals took place. Bereaved relatives and close friends gather on a suitable day in the morning, led by a respected elder of the family.

The family uses two types of water during this ritual; the first one is called “ontsavelegno” (honey + water + salt) but the second is called "Barisa" (caramelized honey + water). Then the two waters are each poured into a bowl and brought together with mango leaves. Before the invocation ritual, the clothes of the deceased that were not used on him when he was buried were gathered at the center. Then the elder starts sprinkling the water (*Ontsavelogno* or *Barisa*) on the heads of everyone present. Then these waters are also sprinkled on the ground, then also sprinkled on the place where the body was. Finally, the rest of the clothes that were gathered in the middle are also sprinkled with these waters.

The entire group is then seated on mats and the elder asks God and the ancestors for blessings and peace on behalf of the living. He conjures the newly deceased to give his or her blessing to the place and people he or she has left behind to be on good terms with the previously buried and to make no further demands on the living.

### **Religious Environment**

As for the religion, under the dynasty of their king, the people of Antakarana did not want to adopt any religion other than the worship of ancestors that still exists in this town today. It is told that an old man from Poland, named Beniwirosky, wanted

to evangelize the Antakarana but the project failed due to the unwillingness of the majority of the people. Today it is estimated that the percentage of Christians is not even as high as 10% of the population. However, the Islamic religion is a dominant religion in Ambilobe today.

It is told that due to a promise that was made by King Tsimiaro I, his family and himself became Muslims (during the war against the troops of Ranavalona, Tsimiaro I made a pact with the leader of the Muslims that if he managed to save his family, they and himself would embrace the Islamic religion). From that time, the Islamic religion was adopted in this region and until today it is dominant in the district of Ambilobe, as the Islamic faith is practiced by almost 80% of the population. As Islam is an ancestral religion of the residents and the kings themselves promoted it, Ambilobe became a predominantly Islamic society. Thus, it was only the newcomers/foreigners who had settled in the city that had become Christians.

### **Seventh-day Adventists in Ambilobe**

Since the French colonial period, some Christian religious denominations have had a relatively strong social influence within the community in the Ambilobe region, such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, and the Malagasy Reformed Protestant Church.

In the Year 1950, a veteran of the Antakarana ethnic descent, who had served in the French navy, returned to Ambilobe to live freely as a civilian. This man was the first light bearer of the Advent message in this region. His name was Tofotra Ambroise.<sup>2</sup> He was a former sailor who used to live the earlier part of his life according to his natural desires, doing whatever suited the wishes of his own body

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<sup>2</sup> All this information is from Tofotra Jeanine, she is a daughter of Tofotra Ambroise.

and mind. After being baptized in the Seventh Day Adventist church in Diego Suarez, he became a devoted Christian believer who, by the grace of God, always tried to learn and to live according to what pleased the Lord for the rest of his lifetime.

Mr. Tofotra Ambroise had coincidentally met a foreign SDA Pastor who was assigned to conduct an evangelistic campaign in the city of Diego Suarez in 1956, and thereafter the two men maintained a good relationship and sympathetically felt a sense of fellowship towards each other, due to the former's similar professional military background in Europe during the World War II.

Accordingly, at the end of this evangelistic campaign in Diego, Mr. Tofotra discovered the Bible truth of the Advent message and got baptized.

Then, as soon as he returned to his home in Ambilobe, he decided to launch an evangelistic initiative by organizing a Sabbath School session and a Bible study group every Sabbath day in his home. In this way, the group grew in size and social dimension as time was running forward.

The Rehanany<sup>3</sup> family was the first to receive the Adventist message after the Bible study led by MrTofotra. He was the father of a family and was born around 1903 in Ampahinia Ouest Toliara. He married Mrs. Ndrama and they had five children: Joseph Rehanany, Zoe Velo Lucie, Soamisy Bernadette, Rehanany Jean-Paul, and Filao.

He and his family were originally Catholic believers but in 1960, he and his wife were baptized and became a devoted follower of the Adventist Church until his death. So, the first church was built next to their house, there were four houses where they prayed together for 1 year, the Ramosa Justin family, the Ramanambelona

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<sup>3</sup> Jean-Paul Rehanany was the source of this information; he was the Son of Rehanany.

family, the Jean family, and Anasthasie. All of these families were from the South of Madagascar who immigrated to Ambilobe to find work. These families were butchers and farmers in that town. It should be noted that the first Seventh-day Adventist Church was in Amboahitra.

In 1961 the Church in Matiakoho was built and these families were among those who helped to build it, and there was another guest to support them. For example, specially, Mr. Tofotra worked in close collaboration with the SDA Church leader in Diego, concerning the lodging and a primary school building in 1961.

Meanwhile, Mr. Tofotra decided to get married and became a prominent social group leader and later an active church leader in the Matiakoho SDA Church in Ambilobe.

Mr. Tofotra and Rehanany were so enthusiastic that they preached the gospel even though they did not go to school, but through God's Power, they were able to read and teach the Bible. They supported the church through the donation of so much money, especially in support of the missionary work. Later on, by their work, the Adventist message based on the Bible spread to the big cities there.

Henceforth in 1962, Pastor Rakotovao and his family were sent and assigned to lead the church and to start up the Adventist school in Ambilobe at this point. Adventist education and school were well appreciated by local parents and the population in Ambilobe and were recognized as an effective evangelistic strategy to meet the needs of the local people.

Other times, the SDA Church membership has been constantly increasing in number, and it has become a District in Ambilobe. In December 2014, the North Malagasy Conference decided to divide Ambilobe into two Districts, South and

North. The North Ambilobe District is composed of 4 Churches 10 Groups, and 5 Sabbath School Groups with 856 members.

Table 1 below represents the Churches that make up the northern Ambilobe district.

Table 1. North Ambilobe District

Name of Churches	Church	Group
Anoronala	X	
Ampamakiampafana	X	
Betsiaka		X
Ambiba	X	
Antanamariagy	X	
Antsambalahy		X
Ampampamena		X
Andranomiditra		X
Ambararata		X
Andranomamy		X
Antafitsioka		X
Antsaravibe		X
Antolantelo		X
Ambilo		X
Andrafiabe		X
Betsimiranja		X
Labeka		X
Mantalimaro		X
Maromokotra		X
Mahatsara		X
Mahadera		X
Mahavelona		X
Marivorahaona		X
Ambohibaky		X
Ambakirano		X

Source: District Pastor<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Northern Ambilobe District of Seventh-day Adventists, "Minutes of North Ambilobe District Report" (Anoronala, Ambilobe: Northern Ambilobe District, 10 April 2018), 1.

Up till now, about 90% of the municipalities in the Ambilobe district have an Adventist church.

## **Presentation of the Results of the Study**

### **Data Collection**

The North Malagasy Conference Committee voted to permit the researcher to conduct a personal interview in the North Ambilobe District. The researcher prepared a personal questionnaire and went to church members of the North Ambilobe District. The North Ambilobe District is divided into four sectors and the researcher interviewed each sector.

### **Demographic Information**

The Interview was conducted with 120 members in the North Ambilobe District. It is to be noted that 30 members were taken from each sector to give this total number.

### **Project Study Analysis for the Interview**

1. Do you have a daily prayer service in your home? According to the interview we did, we can observe that the rate of participation in a daily prayer service is unfortunately low. Because, 91.66% of the answers demonstrate that they do not have a daily prayer service in their home, which leads to a spiritual problem for them. And 8.33% of the answers indicate that they have a daily prayer service in their home. This result is very delicate in the context of the spiritual life of the members

2. Do you have a daily Bible study in your home? We can remark through our investigation that many members neglect a daily bible study. Precisely, 87.5 % of respondents said that they do not have the time for personal bible study at their home. That result is a misunderstanding of the Bible. 12.5 % of respondents have daily Bible

study, which means that very few of the church members take it seriously for their personal spiritual life.

3. Do you belong to the Antakarana tribe? We can note that 16.66% of the members were from the local tribe according to their responses. 83.33% of them were from another tribe. It means that locally, the outside tribes are more numerous than the local tribes in the church. That demonstrated the contradictions or oppositions of the local beliefs to the Adventist Church.

4. Did you go through baptismal class? We discovered that 16.66% did not go through baptismal class according to their answers. Perhaps after the evangelism campaign, they were immediately baptized. 83, 33% of them went through the baptismal class. As a result, many of them do not completely know the basic truths of the Bible.

5. Do you understand the Bible's truth about the state of the dead? To this question, a great part of the members responded that they understand what the Bible says about death. Actually, 33.33% of answers demonstrated that they did not understand the Bible's concept of death. However, 66.66 % of the responses indicated that they have more clarification and understanding of the Bible truth about the state of the dead. This is the result of a lack of baptismal class.

6. Do you believe that dead bodies bring blessings to the rest of the family? We have two different answers to this question. First, 58.33% assert and are persuaded that the dead give more benedictions for them. And secondly, 41.66% of the answers stated that dead bodies do not bring any more benedictions for the living family.

7. Do you still have a relationship with the dead already buried? Our research demonstrates that 75% of the answers stated that they still are in relation with them

through their spirit. They believe that the connection with the dead body is maintained even if they live in different places. 25 % responded that they do not have any connection with their deceased family or friends. This is a misunderstanding of the state of the dead.

8. The family must expend a lot of money for the dead, why? According to their responses, 58.33 % of them agreed because the family must buy a zebu and more rice since when a family does not have this zebu and rice, nobody comes to the funeral and they do not participate in any of the programs even to the tomb. 41.66 % said that as part of the Antakarana tribe, they must follow the traditions no matter what the consequences are, it is part of the respect for the ancestors.

9. Are there any impacts on the rest of the family if they don't follow all the rituals done to the dead body? During the interview, 62.5% answered that there are always impacts on the rest of the family, sometimes immediately, sometimes in the long term, but it comes like a curse. 37.5% said that there is nothing that happens to the family.

10. What are the impacts if someone decides not to do anything about the local customs and death rituals? Those who do not follow the rituals in this culture, have to face problems as 83.33% of the answers demonstrated, that there is a big impact, mainly family conflicts and community conflicts 16.66% of the answers also confirmed the community conflicts.

### **Church Challenges**

**Family conflicts.** The tribe of Antakarana in the northwestern part of Madagascar has many different cultures in all areas of life from birth to death. But the most crucial fact that each Adventist has to contend with is the funeral rituals and customs that are not in line with the teaching of the Bible. As a result, some of the

members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church also follow and practice these rituals and customs.

This culture causes a division among family members and relatives if they do not the common beliefs. Those who do not follow the rituals in this culture, have to deal with the problems not only for the family but also with the community. That leads to conflicts between the community and the family who does not practice the rituals. That leads to an immediate separation between the branch of the family and the person who does not practice it, they will not receive even a small part of the heritage from their parents. No more brother, no more sister after that decision related to the practice or not. That affects the life of the church because the church has to take care of all things that relate to the death of that person up to the burial in the tomb. It is very hard for the members, even if it is considered a good act.

**Economic problems.** A death that happens within a family amount to economic loads on the back of this family because they must pay a huge amount of money to buy at least one zebu to provide food for those who join them in this sad situation, and when a family does not have this zebu, nobody comes to the funeral. Nobody participates in any of the entirety of the program up to the tomb. The Antakarana culture on death is very strict. All persons who come to assist this unfortunate situation need to eat and the zebu is the main staple and favorite food at that time.

**Syncretism and apostasy.** On the other hand, this culture also entails some Seventh-day Adventist Church members to compromise with the Bible principles and biblical belief on death and they become weak in faith because they go to church and do all things that relate to the church and they try to be faithful members of the church. But when a death occurs in the family, they also practice the rituals. They

merge the belief in God and also the culture because they are afraid of the family and the community and also the dead body. After all, when the rituals are not complete, the dead body cannot become an ancestor which blesses the family according to their thoughts. Syncretism comes to such members because of that death and the rituals. That affects the church because that practice leads the members to live in hypocrisy and that becomes a barrier for evangelization.

It does not stop on syncretism but continues into backsliding from the church. Some members decided to drop out of the church because of that practice. The fundamental belief of the Seventh-Day Adventists on death is the source of blockage for the practice of the rituals on death in the Antakarana culture. When an Antakarana becomes a member of the church, it becomes a problem for the family when death comes. And to avoid that problem, they will decide to drop out of the church and follow the family rituals. That decreases the statistics of the church and that causes the church to die if all members drop out of the church.

### **Summary**

Death is one of the most relevant realities that frame the worldview and beliefs of the Antakarana people. Through the study of some noteworthy facts on the funerals of a common Antakarana person, some conclusions may be drawn:

Death is the end of bodily life and it is the beginning of a metamorphosis into an immortal soul defined as the spirit of the dead that can act; to feel, think, and to haunt sometimes. The Antakarana people, as well as the Malagasy people, fear and have a respectful attitude toward a dead person. That is the reason why the worship of ancestors is one of the deepest convictions in the traditional culture and the people. Moreover, when a person dies, his death may entail a huge financial burden to the bereaved family.

Accordingly, Bible truths should be taught diligently to this community to enlighten their worldviews so that a revival of the attitude of Christian believers can brighten the true reformation of the Christian life.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION, AND EVALUATION

#### **Program Design**

It is clear that there are two areas in which a strategic plan needs to be put in place for development. The first aspect is for all members in the Ambilobe North District, which are several program designs presented and established. All the suggestions should be for a remedial of the spiritual and social engagement for them in the context of the local beliefs and practices on death and their rituals. The second suggestion is made in order to fully reach out to unbelievers who maintain the customs and follow the rituals word by word about death. But it is a great challenge to evangelize to the people of Antakarana as they will not have a firm conviction before God because they always compromise.

#### **Spiritual Response**

##### **Abraham, God's Friend**

Throughout the interview's interpretation, the first problem they have is spiritual. Indeed, spirituality is the basis of the relationship of a human being with God. The lack of spiritual maturity leads to syncretism. The first remedial approach in the Ambilobe North District is the spiritual growth. The researcher realized that this District needs a model from the Bible for the spiritual response. The life of Abraham was the best example to promote the spiritual growth for each member in that district. Ellen G. White affirms that "Abraham had grown up in the midst of superstition and

heathenism. Even his father's household, by whom the knowledge of God had been preserved, were yielding to the seductive influences surrounding them, and they 'served other gods' than Jehovah."<sup>1</sup> The Christianity Bible Commentary declares that "God made choice of Abram, and singled him out from among his fellow-idolaters, that he might reserve a people for himself, among whom his true worship might be maintained till the coming of Christ."<sup>2</sup>

The district committee and the researcher established the ABRAHAM, GOD'S FRIEND program which focuses on an intimate relationship with God through the prayer life such as: church Morning Prayer, personal prayer, Wednesday evening prayer.

### **Camp Meeting**

The goal of the camp meeting is for the transformation of the character of the church, as Ellen G. White wrote that camp meetings were "to promote spiritual life among our people. ... We need to meet together and receive the divine touch."<sup>3</sup> For the sake of the Ambilobe North District spirituality, the researcher organized a camp meeting in that District with all the members in it. The main point during the camp meeting was the true conversion of church members. For that reason, the entire program and the trainings were taken care of by the researcher and the elders. The camp meeting lasted three days from the 2<sup>nd</sup> up to the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 2018 in the Anoronala church, and during this moment, the study concentrated on the life of Abraham.

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<sup>1</sup> White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 125.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott, *Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997) 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings: Comprehensive Research Edition [CD ROM] (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 2008), 6:10.

Table 2 shows all the schedules during the camp that was happen in the district.

*Table 2. Camp meeting program*

Friday 2 <sup>nd</sup> of February 2018	Saturday 3 <sup>rd</sup> of February 2018	Sunday 4 <sup>th</sup> of February 2018
Welcoming 2 pm	Calling of Abraham 8 am – 9 am	Abraham rescued his nephew 8 am – 9 am
Installation 3 pm to 5 pm	God’s purpose for Abraham 11 am – 12 pm	Digging the well (importance of spiritual education) 9.30 am -10.30 am
Moment of Praise and Meditation 6 pm – 7.30 pm	Abraham builds an Altar (importance of prayer) 2 pm – 4 pm	Abraham sacrificed Isaac (the value of obedience) 11 am – 12pm

During the camp meeting, the district secretary recorded that 560 church members assisted the program. As a result, the participation of church members in assisting the church program was progress like the Sabbath and Wednesday and Friday evenings.

### **Discipleship**

Discipleship is one of how members develop their spiritual growth. This method is based on the way Jesus worked when He was on earth with his disciples for three years. "They watched him pray, heal, preach, and teach. They observed Jesus in his dealings with difficult people. Through all of their experiences with him, they learned that Jesus' lifestyle was radically different from the one they had learned from

birth. They were challenged to a new life."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, in responding to the problem of understanding the doctrines of such members, the solution proposed is a deeper Bible Study. This method follows the statement from the General Conference as members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church:

Seventh-day Adventists recognize and appreciate the contributions of those biblical scholars throughout history who have developed useful and reliable methods of Bible study consistent with the claims and teachings of Scripture. Adventists are committed to the acceptance of biblical truth and are willing to follow it, using all methods of interpretation consistent with what Scripture says of itself. These are outlined in the presuppositions detailed below.<sup>5</sup>

From March 2018 until June 2018 every Sabbath afternoon, all the churches inside the district had a deeper Bible Study program.

### **Reinforcing Baptismal Class**

Through the interview, 70% of the churches in the North Ambilobe District did not go through baptismal class. The baptismal class is very important in the Adventist Church because it provides for all the spiritual support and spiritual growth. Baptismal class is also the preparation for the human being who decides to follow Christ. When the moment of preparation or the study is too short, it is not enough for spiritual growth. Ellen White declares the importance of the Bible class study or the baptismal class "Often it would be more profitable if the Sabbath meetings were of the nature of a Bible class study. Bible truth should be presented in such a simple, interesting manner that all can easily understand and grasp the principles of salvation."<sup>6</sup> In 2014, the Sabbath School Ministry from the General Conference added

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<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 134.

<sup>5</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, "Methods of Bible Study," accessed September 9, 2020, <https://www.adventist.org/documents/methods-of-bible-study/>.

<sup>6</sup> Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings: Comprehensive Research Edition [CD ROM] (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 2008), 348.

that there are three major points in the baptismal class: “Baptismal classes are a vital part of the Sabbath School ministry. They are designed to teach people the basics of biblical knowledge and the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Any Sabbath School can organize and use baptismal classes as part of its programming.”<sup>7</sup>

First of all, the baptismal class should be established in the church which does not have it. Each Sabbath School director of each church must create that class and the board chooses one person who can teach. The class starts during the Sabbath School time in each church. The church board should be a supervisor of that class.

Secondly, once every Sabbath is not enough for the baptismal class. For that reason, Ellen G. White talked about Paul’s experience in Corinth: “It had been Paul’s work to instruct the Corinthian converts in the rudiments, the very alphabet, of the Christian faith. He had been obliged to instruct them as those who were ignorant of the operations of divine power upon the heart.”<sup>8</sup> The Bible mentions that Paul spent one year and a half in Corinth to study and teach the Bible to the people in that city at that time. It means that special Bible study needs more time. So, in the afternoon before the church program starts, the class opens again from 2.00 to 2.30 p.m. That is a reinforcement of the class for the needs of the class members and that provides an advantage. When the study is finished at the end of the study time, the persons who attended this class will be mature.

Thirdly, the children should have their baptismal class because their age needs another style of learning. This class acts as a tool to help the parents to guide their children. Ellen G. White again noted that more children accepted Jesus in their age so

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<sup>7</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, “Baptismal Classes,” accessed September 10, 2020, <https://www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org/page-433>.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings: Comprehensive Research Edition [CD ROM] (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 2008), 271.

the parents must take care of them and guide them in that commitment and engagement. She says:

Parents whose children desire to be baptized have a work to do, both in self-examination and in giving faithful instruction to their children. Baptism is a most sacred and important ordinance, and there should be a thorough understanding as to its meaning. It means repentance for sin and the entrance of a new life in Christ Jesus. There should be no undue haste to receive the ordinance. Let both parents and children count the cost. In consenting to the baptism of their children, parents sacredly pledge themselves to be faithful stewards over these children, to guide them in their character building.<sup>9</sup>

The Sabbath School board takes responsibility for the functioning of that program because the child from 8 to 14 years is in the best moment for baptism and they need to understand all the truths in the Bible about the state of the dead.

During the first semester of the year 2019, each church in the Ambilobe North District applied the baptismal class. The result demonstrated that 90% of the churches were doing it.

### **Familial Response**

The local understanding of death causes separation in the family. If the members stand firm and follow God's word, they lose their rights and their own families, even their heritage.

**Visiting.** A home visit is very important in all the terms. As far as concerned in this project, this takes a high place also. Because a visiting program is an opportunity to know well the church members in all the terms, for that reason “Pastoral visitation to families is all about caring and sustaining member’s

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<sup>9</sup> Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings: Comprehensive Research Edition [CD ROM] (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 2008), 499-500.

relationships with the Church.”<sup>10</sup> The District committee decided to do visits, home per home with the church leader. The members who were victims of the result of their decision were the first to be visited and after that, all the church members were given the opportunity too.

**Action unit.** “The principles of the gospel cannot be disconnected from any department of practical life. Every line of Christian experience and labor is to be a representation of the life of Christ.”<sup>11</sup> To represent Christ, it must be in the practical life and demonstrated in the actions. Each church inside the District established an Action Unit which gathered 6 or 8 members. The group is to help each other for growth, edification, uplifting, and outreach.

**Family hope meeting.** To encourage the members in front of the death issues, to give them hope for the future. The researcher conducted a family hope meeting on the 9<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> of April 2018. All the families were invited to assist in this program which was concluded by the Lord's Supper. Thus, the program was very important to all families for each church because it provided a new understanding concerning death. It opened their mind to meditate about the end and what happens after death. It also helped the family to build their faith for the best of their future life. In the timetable below, we see the program and the theme which relates to the subject.

Table 3 shows all the sermons dedicated to giving hope to each family in Church for one week.

*Table 3. Family Hope Meeting Sermon*

Title	Key text	Summary	Objective
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<sup>10</sup> Evans N. Nwaomah, Sikhumbuzo Dube, “Pastoral Visitation as a Veritable Tool in Strengthening Family Relationships,” *Insight: Journal of Religious Studies* 14 (December 2018): 127.

<sup>11</sup> Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings: Comprehensive Research Edition [CD ROM] (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 2008), 5.

Anger, source of Death 9 <sup>th</sup> of April 2018	Gen. 4: 9	The result of sin is death and the sin led Cain to anger towards his brother Abel and in the end Abel was the first human being to die in the Bible.	To explain to the family that anger can be a source of death if the humanity cannot control it
Buried well 10 <sup>th</sup> of April 2018	Genesis 35: 8	If all the members of the family are faithful to God until their death, they will have the special gift such as eternal life.	To explain through the life of Deborah the nurse of families that if we have a good conduct and good behavior, the end will be different for those lives in contrast
Do not slander God 11 <sup>th</sup> of April 2018	2 Sam. 14: 14	God is not the source of death as humans think.	To clarify the mind of all families that God does not allow us to die, even if we are wicked and to avoid blaming God in the context of Death
70 or 80 years 12 <sup>th</sup> of April 2018	Psalms 90: 10	Lifespans are different for those who lived in the time of Adam	To demonstrate with the families that even if we are limited on this earth, we have the hope that the day will come when we will live in eternity with God
JESUS CRIED 13 <sup>th</sup> April 2018	John 11: 35	In front of Lazarus' death, Jesus cried but later, Lazarus was resurrected by Jesus' power	To confirm in the mind of the families that Jesus has power over death and that is our hope for today and the future
Tears made us blind 14 <sup>th</sup> of April 2018	John 21	The death of Jesus instilled fear and caused tears to the disciples.	To clarify with the families that we are winner through the death and the resurrection of Christ

**Social financial support.** The members who are victims of the result of this decision receive the first visits and after that, all the church members have the opportunity too. Prime mentioned that “social call in that the pastor is interested in his people as people, their families and concerns and interests.”<sup>12</sup> Since May 2018, the District committee decided to raise some money, which is 20,000 Ariary from each church to support the family when someone dies among the family members.

The District treasurer is the first responsible for the fundraising. Before the burial, the Church Board and the pastor come to support and encourage the family and give them the money that has been raised.

**Funeral program suggestion.** Through the interview, it has been noted that the moment of the funeral is considered a very important moment for the Antakarana culture. Yet, the Adventist church also has a guide concerning that. But to adapt to the context and not to bring contrast in it, the researcher advises a simple format.

### **Ministry Response**

The conception of death in the local area of Ambilobe is sometimes a block for evangelization. The researcher adopted two approaches to facilitate that.

**Jesus’s approach.** There is no better way to approach people, to change, and lead them than through Jesus’s method which is related to the Seventh-Day Adventist method around the world known as “Guided by the Bible and the Holy Spirit, Seventh-day Adventists pursue this mission through Christ-like living, communicating, discipline, teaching, healing, and serving.”<sup>13</sup> The researcher

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<sup>12</sup> Prime Derek and Begg Alistair, *On Being a Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2006), 172.

<sup>13</sup> General Conference of seventh-days Adventists, “Mission Statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” *Seventh-day Adventist Church Official Statements*, accessed September 11, 2020, <https://www.adventist.org/official-statements/mission-statement-of-the-seventh-day-adventist-church/>.

organized a series of training for evangelization focused on Jesus' approach each month.

**Mass media approach.** Our church co-founder Ellen G. White was clear about this. She wrote: "We must take every justifiable means of bringing the light before the people. Let the press be utilized, and let every advertising agency be employed that will call attention to the work."<sup>14</sup> The district has also decided to hold a Scripture presentation twice a year on television and radio from the 18<sup>th</sup> up to the 28<sup>th</sup> of July 2019 for the first presentation. The next was from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 2019 that has been conducted by the researcher.

### **Program Implementation**

#### **Morning Prayer**

Prayer is essential for spiritual growth as one manual said about prayer's purpose, "The purpose of prayer is to enable us to come into His presence where we are changed. It frees His hand to do more in our own lives and in the lives of those for whom we pray."<sup>15</sup> Since the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February, the researcher with the committee of the North Ambilobe District implemented that the church should open every morning for a special prayer time, starting at 5 a.m. and ending at 6 a.m.

This program is divided into three parts: The first part focuses on the reading of one chapter per day (Revived by His Word) and also the reading of the morning watch. The second part is sharing one promise verse in the Bible and the last is about a special prayer request in which all the assembly participates.

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<sup>14</sup> White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 6:36.

<sup>15</sup> Heather Haworth, *Prayer as Ministry*, PDF file, 2012, <https://adventist.uk/fileadmin/shared-data/resources/prayer-ministries/BUC-Prayer-as-Ministry-MANUAL.pdf>.

## Personal Prayer

Subsequently, the daily prayer life was also established in each church around the North District Ambilobe. It is like a chain of prayer three times per day as set up at 5 a.m., 1 p.m., and 8 p.m. There is also a prayer service in each house that has been organized for each church. This program had a positive impact on the lives of each member as they received answers to their prayers, many also testifying of their experiences.

## Wednesday evening prayer

To live that life of prayer, the Wednesday evening prayer also changed and the researcher and the committee of the North Ambilobe District adopted a new program on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February 2018.

Table 4 represents the program of Wednesday Evening prayer from 6.30 pm to 7.30 pm.

*Table 4. Wednesday Evening Prayer Program*

Timing	Program
1 min	Opening program
1 min	Psalm
3 min	Song
3 min	Opening prayer
4 min	Praise and adoration prayer
1 min	Verse reading
3 min	Invocation prayer
3 min	Verse reading and Song
3 min	Thanksgiving prayer
3 min	Verse reading and Song
4 min	Announcement
3 min	Song and prayer
15 min	Spirit of Prophecy study
10 min	Prayer requests
3 min	Song and last prayer

## **Church Department Support**

The family's intervention in the matter of death causes several problems in the family. It is very hard to face it when it comes. For that reason, the family who passes through that difficulty needs more support. The Ambilobe North District used three departments of the church to respond to that family's needs and it was implemented in April 2018. The Antakarana rituals allowed two or three days for the dead body to stay in place for the family and friends to come to offer their condolences.

The Woman Ministry had the responsibility of cooking and taking care of the food for all who came to assist that unfortunate moment. The Youth Club ensures that there is enough wood for the cooking and also assures the night program. The Men Ministry or Good Samaritan takes care of the tomb where the dead body is to be buried. The church clergy occupy the worship program during the night and also before the entombment.

## **Funeral Program**

Since April 2018, the Ambilobe North District applied a simple format of the funeral program when that moment arrived.

Appreciation moment for the assembly who assisted, and who brought money, which helps them in different aspects.

Report: this is the moment to give a transparent report to the assembly about all gifts that the family received from the assembly such as money, rice, or zebu.

Biography: that is the moment to describe briefly the dead person's biography, like a brief last remembering of the person who died.

Singing and prayer: the moment of praise and the moment to introduce the preacher of God in prayer.

Powerful sermon: The duration of the sermon is approximately between 10 and 15 minutes. Usually, the District Pastor takes charge of this sermon, or the Elder

Thanks, and final prayer: this is the end of the program, give all instructions for the burial and do the last prayer before going to the cemetery.

### **Jesus' Method**

According to Ellen G. White, the method of Christ is the best to approach people and evangelize them. She says "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'"<sup>16</sup> Christ cared about the whole person – physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually.

Table 5 below shows the training program led by the Personal Ministry department from the North Malagasy conference

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<sup>16</sup> Ellen G. White, *Le ministère de la guérison* (Dammarie Les Lys, France : SDT, 1942), 118.

*Table 5. Training Program*

Time and day	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
6.30 – 6.40	Greetings, opening program, song and prayer	Greetings, opening program, song and prayer	Greetings, opening program, song and prayer	Sabbath school program and Divine Service
6.40 – 6.45	Explanation of the program	Briefing	Briefing	program in the morning
6.45 – 6.50	Special prayer for the mission	Special prayer for the message	Special prayer for the messenger	
6.50 – 7.25	Training about mission (Biblical foundation about Mission, Matthew 28: 18-20 and Revelation 14: 6)	Training about the mission (Biblical foundation about the Church's message, John 11: 25-26 and Revelation 14: 13)	Training about the quality of the messenger who delivers the message (Matthew 10: 16)	Saturday afternoon based on the Method, to use to reach out to the people of Ambilobe. Based on 1 Corinthians 9: 20-23
7.25 – 7.30	Last prayer	Last prayer	Last Prayer	

Consequently, during June 2018, every Sunday evening from 6 to 7 p.m. there was special group training about evangelization in each church. This training was conducted by the Personal Ministry Director who had already assisted with the training that had been conducted by the researcher last May.

The TMI program was decided to be applied in each church in June 2018, which would consist of members involved in the ministry. There have also been three special working groups established to evangelize home per home every Tuesday. Tuesday is a day off for the Antakarana people so it is easy to find people in their own homes and the church took advantage of that moment.

**Jesus mingled with people as one who desired their good.** Jesus' first act was to interact with all people without exception. One cannot change the attitude and culture of a person or an area without approaching and mingling with them to know the root of all problems and bring the solutions that solve and relate to them. So, the preacher needs to be able to approach people and interact with them. This approach was implemented in the Ambilobe North District to encourage all believers to reach out to their neighbors not only in sad times but at all times.

Since June 2018, to apply it, a special discussion was conducted within the District regarding this interaction with people. It was decided that a working group would be set up in each church, which would consist of 6 to 8 people living close to each other and would work in the same place. There have also been three special working groups that want to evangelize home-by-home every Tuesday. Tuesday is a day off for the Antakarana people so it is easy to find somebody in their own home.

**Jesus sympathized with people.** He had compassion for all those people in front of him and He knew what happened to them and tried to lighten it. This sensitivity led to the ultimate destination and to assure the hope for them. This sympathy also means a thorough understanding of all things around people's lives. Sympathizing brings an attachment between each other. Based on the Antakarana culture about death as a whole, according to research, although it has been shown to have economic and spiritual implications, the people practice it even if it is of wrong understanding sometimes.

This approach was particularly adopted in the District of North Ambilobe to bring a new perspective, making it easy to understand and act in the appropriate way, which is inherently inside of them. The goal of changing perspectives will never be achieved if the rescuers do not understand what the person is going through.

To help evangelists understand and feel for those who are facing pressures, all the churches in which they have those victims have organized a special program to bear witness to all the problems they have gone through Special Sabbath Testimonies Program on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 2018 in the afternoon. This testimony focused specifically on all the sufferings in the face of non-compliance with the traditional Antakarana approach to death. No other topic was discussed during this time but all discussions were focused on it.

**Jesus ministered to their needs.** Not only did Jesus feel compassion for them, but He provided for what they needed at the same time. Bringing a new perspective is not just about empathy, it needs to be proven once the person's situation is known for what might be appropriate.

There are several ways in which this approach has been implemented in the Ambilobe North District to meet the needs of the people who have problems. For the past two years, the pastor's motto has been to show to the community that the Seventh-day Adventist Church exists in Ambilobe because the church is largely unseen. To provide for their needs, the local people must be made aware that there is a church that can be trusted to alleviate the problem if there is any.

All the deacons in the North Ambilobe District were deployed in each church like a bunch of contacts to know what happened among the interested people to whom the Adventist church was already evangelizing.

All Organized churches, however, made a decision when it was Sabbath Day that the family members would bring their share of rice to the church, and the deacon and the head of the Women's Ministry department collect it and later distribute it to the vulnerable person in the society. Furthermore, the pastor of the Ambilobe North District has specially invited the head of the health department of the North Malagasy

Conference to provide training on this subject and also conducted a three-day medical examination for free. The program was held from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 2018 and from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> of April 2019, both programs were specifically for women, and it was seen that many of them come and do it.

**He won people's confidence.** In the three years that have been set, people have come to know the existence of the Adventist church in general. Proof of this is the fact that the authorities would never forget to invite the Adventist church to every special event that goes on in the city like Independence Day. Next, no matter what the church does, there are always government officials who come and celebrate with the church.

As a result of this approach, many outsiders are interested in the Adventist church in Ambilobe and many people want to study the Bible in the church, some have even been baptized and continue to remain as church members.

**“Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me’” (to become disciples).** The fifth method of Jesus is the final step in fulfilling all these precepts, calling them to follow Him. That is why this strategy was developed in the North Ambilobe District because the Seventh-day Adventist Churches contribute in every way, to tell the truth to all and at the same time also, to make them want to join. After that, they also have their part in sharing with others. Since 2018, the program of sharing the truth in the Ambilobe North District has been focused on the local communities in that city.

According to a report sent to the Conference office, each quarter, there is evidence of the increasing number of people who answer the call and start in several villages to receive these messages. From 2018 to 2019, there were more than 130 new members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church throughout the North Ambilobe

District. Most of them have already attended the baptismal class and attended group training in their respective locations.

### **Radio Program**

For the outreach evangelization, the Ambilobe North District established a Special Committee to work on the radio station in July 2018. The objective of this program was to share and clarify the truth about death from the Bible to the people of Ambilobe. For 30 minutes each Monday, the Seventh-day Adventists have a special program to educate the people in that area through that radio.

### **Program Evaluation**

Evaluation is the best way to measure your success. Especially, remarks from the church members of Anoranala where the researcher led the program about the Morning Prayer, 80 to 140 people assisted this program each morning and they appreciated it and found it very interesting. However, some churches also requested that they need the researcher to lead their Morning Prayer program.

About 70% of the churches in the North Ambilobe District have adopted this approach and it has been successful. The most convincing evidence is the Antsambalahy Church, which has been established for more than 30 years but is still a group due to the small number of members in this church, with more people still seriously following the local culture of Antakarana. But when this method of Action Unit was applied the church grew rapidly. The purpose of the Action or small group is "The group is to help each to grow in their relationship with God, grow in their relationship with each other, and reach out to share what they have with others."<sup>17</sup> As

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<sup>17</sup> May-Ellen Colon, ed., *Keys to Small Group Ministry* (Lincoln, NE: Advent Source, 2010), 8.

a result, last June 2020, the church became an organized church because all the requirements were achieved.

From 2018 to 2019, five members died in the district. The evaluation of the church department support indicated that 70% of church members collaborated to support them during this unfortunate moment in all aspects. The District treasurer approved that all churches have paid their part. All the funeral services followed the simple format which was already implemented in the District. According to a report sent to the Conference office, each quarter, there was evidence of the increasing number of people who answered the call and several villages started to receive these messages. From 2018 to 2019, there were more than 130 new members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church throughout the North Ambilobe District. Most of them have already attended the baptismal class and attended group training in their respective locations.

The first is responsible for the radio station appreciating the participation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in spiritual and biblical education each Monday. He said that some people who were interested in the program came to them to get a copy.

To improve and symbolize the collaboration of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Radio and Television Feon'ny Mahavavy Ambilobe, the Adventist Youth department built a house that had one room and gave it to them in October 2019 during the youth congress in Ambilobe. As a result, the first responsible for that station and the Local government officials expressed their joy and announced publicly that for an indefinite time, the church would be able to hold a special radio and television program when it was ready.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Summary**

Death is very important in the Antakarana people's culture. Some beliefs run deep within them. It is the way of thinking that was left by ancestors from the past and is still respected by children today. Daily life is closely intertwined with the issue of death. This research has shown that this belief about death is one of the main barriers to people's understanding of the gospel and leads them not to become members of the Adventist Church because they know that they have different views about death.

According to an earlier report, some people are already members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church but they are still in syncretism. This led to doing this research to provide a proposed solution for them so that each of them can be grounded in the basic truths of the Bible.

#### **Conclusion**

The issue of death has always posed many questions. The reason is that everyone has their perspectives and beliefs and it is culturally structured. This research is based on the biblical view of death and helps many readers to understand the truth about it. The Bible teaches that death is the result of sin. By the time a person breathes his last, he is unconscious and returns to dust. The Bible always adds that there will be a resurrection in the last days, but there will be one resurrection to eternal life and another to eternal death.

This study and research will be a remedial tool to:

1. Clarify the mind of those Adventist believers who are not faithful to the Bible teachings and practice the customary ritual of death. Get these church members back to the Bible teachings and make them accept the truth or the doctrine about the matter of death.

2. Lighten and alleviate the pain and grief within the family and relatives in mourning and lead them to follow the simple ritual which is the right way of burying. The result of this project demonstrates that all church members who followed the customs about death and still practiced these profane rituals came to understand the biblical teachings and thus will change their perception as well as their worldview. To deal with that missiological issue, the author suggests a theological response, a familial response, a ministry response, and a mass media approach that focuses on discipleship.

3. It is also a strategy to convince people who have other concepts about death to follow the Bible's guidance. An important point proposed by this research is to make people's view of death in line with the biblical view and to break down all barriers so that people are not bound by traditional practices.

## **Recommendations**

### **Local Church**

It would be good to continue all the prayer times whether in the morning or personal and especially on Wednesday evenings.

Many new converts are coming to the church, so it is very important to nourish them through biblical study.

We should promote the baptismal class and encourage it to work.

Each church must have a mentor for newly converted to teach and guide them in their spiritual life.

Each church member must learn the Sabbath School lesson quarterly for 2022 which teaches about death.

### **District Pastor**

The district Pastor should be diligent in teaching the fundamental beliefs of the church especially the state of the dead.

The district Pastor should maintain the plans or the organization established in the district to take care of the grieving family.

The district Pastor should take advantage and continue to work with the responsible for the Radio in Ambilobe and conduct the program.

### **Local Field**

The Ambilobe North District needs a Pastor to have a good relationship with the tribe of Antakarana.

## APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A  
CORRESPONDENCE

**02 Extrait de votes pris lors de l'ADCOM – FMN du 08/11/19**

**19.98 VOTE DE PROJETS DE RECHERCHE POUR LES QUATRE PASTEURS ETUDIANTS**  
VOTE, que les sujets de projet de recherche proposés par les quatre Pasteurs étudiants en Master de la FMN à l'UAZ ont été acceptés, à savoir :

1/ « Strategy to improve the Spirituality of Antsiranana youth affected by Globalisation »,  
pour Pasteur R. Lovanomenjanahary

2/ « Church growth from book of acts applied Sirama's district », pour Pasteur Tombozara

3/ « Cohabitation: Theological and Pastoral approach in Antakarana environnement district of Antsiranana, Madagascar North Conference », pour Pasteur Rabearizara Patricien

4/ « A remedial approach to the local belief on death in Ambilobe North District, Madagascar North Conference », pour Pasteur Mbolatiana David Tsilavina.

**19.99 VOTE CONCERNANT LES QUESTIONNAIRES D'ENQUETE POUR LES PROJETS DE RECHERCHE**

VOTE, que les questionnaires d'enquête pour les projets de recherche établis par les Quatre Pasteurs, étudiants en Master de la FMN à l'UAZ (Pasteurs Mbolatiana David Tsilavina) sont faisables et ils peuvent commencer des actions relatives à ces points.

Les dépenses y afférentes seront à la charge de la FMN.

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Are you part of the Antakarana tribe?
2. Did you go through a baptismal class?
3. Do you have a daily prayer service in your home?
4. Do you have a daily Bible study in your home?
5. Do you understand the Bible truth about the state of the dead?
6. Do you believe that dead bodies bring benedictions to the rest of the family?
7. Are you still in a relationship with the dead who are already buried?
8. The family must expend a lot of money for the dead, why?
  9. Are there impacts on the rest of the family when they don't follow all the rituals done to the dead body?
  10. What are the impacts when someone decides not to do anything about the local death ritual

APPENDIX C  
SERMON OUTLINES

**Sermon #1**

Anger, source of Death

Genesis 4: 9

**Introduction**

One of the sad stories in the book of Genesis 4 is the death of Abel. Sin had indeed brought death to all generations. But despite this, there is a reason for this death which still leads to many deaths today. Jealousy led to anger and ended in murder.

**Development**

1. Anger led Cain to kill Abel (Genesis 4: 9)
2. Definition of Anger
3. Biblical counseling about anger

Ecclesiastes 7: 9

Proverbs 22: 24

Proverbs 29: 22

Ephesians 4: 26

**Conclusion**

One of the causes of the first death on earth was anger of Cain in accepting the command of sin. Look at what is happening around us, many are still dying as a

result of this anger. It is the family that kills one another when such anger goes unchecked. The Bible says: Ephesians 4: 31 take away that which is weak.

## **Sermon #2**

Buried well

Genesis 35:8

### **Introduction**

A popular Malagasy saying in the context of death: "The dead is well buried." This expression leads us to think that burial is a way for a person to go through death. Funeral methods and forms may differ.

### **Development**

Deborah's Historical Background	(Genesis 24: 59)
Deborah's character	(Genesis 24: 59)
Deborah's last life	(Genesis 35: 8)
Lessons from Deborah's life	(Revelation 2: 10)

### **Conclusion**

Deborah set a good example for us because she was faithful until her death. It also calls on each of us to trust God in His fullness so that our future will be bright. I may not know how you feel right now. But remember, you can become who you are and have the right to be successful if you are faithful to God.

## **Sermon #3**

### **Do not slander God**

#### **Introduction**

In general, every human being, even though they have different cultures, appears to be the same when it comes to the cause of death. This view allegedly says that God the Creator is the only killer of mankind. Even the Malagasy in this northern region already have a saying: "God gives and then He also takes." Is this statement true? Is this view in harmony with the Bible?

#### **Development**

Nature of death – Genesis 3: 3, 4

Satan and death – John 8: 44

God and death – 2 Samuel 14: 14

#### **Conclusion**

Paul was insisting that death was the last enemy to be defeated. The question is: Whose enemy, is it? It is the devil who brought sin which provides death to God's enemies and also ours. Therefore, He will never act like a foreigner pretending to fight, as the Malagasy language says, but it is a fact that death is an enemy of God and must be defeated to the end.

## **Sermon #4**

70 or 80 years

Psalm 90:10

### **Introduction**

All human beings from the days of Adam to Noah have lived long. Most of them died over 900 years ago, for example, Methuselah. It ended in Noah, even though the name means rest. After all, the human age was declining.

### **Development**

Contextual Analysis of Psalm 90: 1-12

Human thinking of Psalm 90: 10

- a. Vanity of humanity
- b. Limit of humanity

Human solution – Psalm 90: 12

### **Conclusion**

I conclude with Jesus' parable of the man who amassed riches in Luke 12: 13-21. But that same night, according to the parable, he would die.

## **Sermon #5**

Jesus cried

John 11:35

### **Introduction**

The Bible records that He was found two times weeping in the New Testament. There is a reason for all these things that made Jesus weep and they are all well thought out but here we are going to focus on John 11 which is one of the two mentioned above.

### **Development**

General historical view of John 11

Jesus' view about Lazarus' death

Death is like a sleep, John 11: 11

He has power over death, John 11: 25

Jesus wept in front of Lazarus' death, John 11: 35

Death Can Be Overcome John 11: 43

Conclusion

The tears of Jesus that fell at that moment bring hope to all mankind that He is not responsible for death. It also confirms that He still cares about us. Maybe many of our relatives have died, making us shed tears, but there is still hope that the Lord will come soon. They will rise, we will see each other again, and be together forever.

## **Sermon #6**

Tears made us blind

John 20

### **Introduction**

The eye plays an important role in all living things, including us humans.

Just a little accident can ruin them and you need to be very careful because if you have an injury, it can lead to blindness. There are so many things that can blind our eyes and we sometimes stare in the dark.

Here we will see that sometimes even the tears that come out of our eyes can bring blindness to them.

### **Development**

General historical view, John 20: 1-18

Mary Magdalene, John 20: 11-15

Misunderstanding of the Scripture

She wept

She went blind from her tears

Jesus was raised, John 20: 16-17

### **Conclusion**

Many of us do not believe it when tragedy comes because it causes us so much misery that we do not focus on the fulfillment of the Scriptures but look at the tribulation and weep for it. All of those hard situations blind us. Don't forget, He wants us to always be happy, so let's believe it and go back to the Scriptures that we can still hold fast to this day.

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## VITA

First Name: MBOLATIANA

Middle Name: DAVID TSILAVINA

Marital Status: married

Date of Birth: 22nd January 1991

Gender: Male

Nationality: Malagasy

Telephone Mobile: +26134146043

Email: d.blacko@yahoo.fr / mbolatianad@aua.ac.ke

Address: F.M.N RUE SILVAIN ROUX TANAMBAO CENTRE DIEGO BP 399,  
MADAGASCAR

### **Education**

Bachelor in Theology, Sambaina, UAZ, 2012

Baccalaureate degree, Antananarivo, 2008

### **Work Experience**

Youth and Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries Department Director of Norh Malagasy

Conference: 2022 – Present

District Pastor in Sirama: 2019 - 2022

District Pastor in Ambilobe: 2015 - 2019

District Pastor in Ambanja: 2014– 2015

Pioneer in Tsararay and Belobaka: 2012-2013