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**INCULTURATION OF THE ZEZURU CEREMONY OF KUROVA GUVA: A CASE STUDY OF ARCHDIOCESE OF THE HARARE**

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**A Long Paper submitted as a requirement for the completion of a Bachelor of Theology (Honours) Degree**

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**25 JANUARY 2021**

**DECLARATION**

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment in the program of study leading to the award of the Bachelor of Theology (Honours) Degree is entirely my work and has not been submitted for assessment for any academic purpose than in partial fulfilment for that stated above.

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**DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this essay to my Mr and Mrs Masenda for their unwavering support. This couple has been an inspiration and a pillar of strength to me. This paper would not have been complete without their contributions.

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# ABSTRACT

Most practicing Catholics in Domboshava are taking part or contributing in the ceremony of summoning the spirit of the dead back home. This bringing back ceremony is called *kurova* *guva*. Christian authorities condemn this practice as diabolic and backwards, but despite their efforts, their congregants still partake in this ceremony. After a wide consultation, it is ostensible that the ceremony of *kurova* *guva* has no substitute in the Church, and so people in Domboshava feel that they have to practice it to take care of the lacuna. This apparent void is due to lack of understanding the tenets of Christianity and the Traditional religion. This paper argues for the inculturation of the ceremony and seeks to identify the factors that link culture and Catholicism. It investigates on the significance of this ceremony to the people of Domboshava and asserts that there are common eschatological grounds which allow for the inculturation of the ceremony in the Catholic burial rite. It also asserts that it will do much good to the people if the structure of the ceremony is not tampered with.

# INTRODUCTION

Inculturation is a dialogue between Christianity and a non-Christian culture with an aim to fuse the best from each. It is the nativity of Jesus in different cultures in this world. In *Slavorum* *Apostoli* John Paul II defines it as, "the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures and also the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church" (21). This process was given center attention by the second Vatican fathers, who realized that there are elements in different cultures that can assist people to understand God better. This call goes against the missionaries in the late nineteenth century to the late twentieth centuries. The missionaries vigorously pushed the Christian agenda by discrediting the peoples’ traditional religious and cultural practices in Zimbabwe. These missionaries conceived anything foreign to them as pagan, and for that reason unholy. Most religious and cultural practices that could assist the growth of Christianity were eroded during this thrust. Consciously or unconsciously, the missionaries presented some European custom as essential elements of Christianity. The results were a shallow Christianity that was diluted by a non-evangelized cultural base. The inculturation approach introduces Christ from the cultural roots and identifies his mission with, and as theirs.

There were some significant changes that came in by second Vatican council’s call for inculturation and the coming in of the native clergy on the scene. Some cultural elements and practices were introduced in the liturgy. Some attention on some controversial traditional practices, like the ceremony of *kurova* *guva*, brought in many debates. There were elements from these ceremonies which were introduced to the Catholic liturgy, but the larger chunks were left out because of orthodoxy. However, these practices are still in existence and those who profess Christianity practice them with enthusiasm. The people in Domboshava which is under the Archdiocese of Harare serve as an exhibit to this phenomenon. They take part not only in ceremonies held by others, on the contrary, they host and encourage others to do the same. “The Church is like a club that you join to be in touch with other people in the society. If you need to be in touch with you roots and the essence of your being, take part in this [*kurova* *guva*] ceremony”, The above statement came from an apparently ardent and devout Catholic in Musani, Domboshava. Does Christianity not make one get in touch with his roots and the essence of his being?

This paper proposes to find out the underlying reason Christians in the Domboshava area continue to practice the ritual of kurova guva despite its perceived incompatibility with the Christian faith. It shall probe into the apparent dichotomy of *kurova* *guva* and Roman Catholicism. The ultimate end of this enterprise is an attempt to fuse the *kurova* *guva* ritual with the Roman Catholic burial rite. The effort is to find participant perceptions on the meaning and significance of the rite of *kurova* *guva*. And to explore Catholic theology on death and afterlife and compare it to the principles of the Kurova guva ritual to find their points of convergence and divergence.

There are many ways of celebrating the ceremony of *kurova* *guva* among the Zezuru. I shall limit this paper to the practice to the one by the Zezuru in Domboshava. The details of the practice are sketchy because most of the elders that I interviewed displayed an interest in what should be done than in why it was done. In addition, some Christian faithful suspect the intentions of such investigations and hence they distance themselves from such practices or give inaccurate information. These limitations were compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic which restricted my range of research. Most of these limitations were overcome by the corroboration of the information from the field to expert opinions. This paper should contribute in enhancing the ceremony of *kurova* *guva* and in the light of Catholic theology. Those who read this work should appreciate the basic tenets of *kurova* *guva*. This knowledge should bring harmony between culture and religion and consequently reduce double standards in practicing both. The readers’ analysis of this what is presented in this paper should change their perception of the relationship between the *kurova* *guva* ceremony and Catholicism. Changing a perception ultimately leads to re-orientation on the cultural understanding and practice by aligning it to the Catholic liturgy

# Chapter One

## PRACTICE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF *KUROVA* *GUVA* CEREMONY

### Introduction

The *kurova guva* ceremony has much controversy surrounding it. Some think it is unchristian and primitive when compared to practices found in other religions like Christianity and Islam. This is because of the attention given to the cult of ancestors and practices done during the ceremony. There are those who believe that this ceremony is essential to the wellbeing of the societies that practice it. This argument stems from the conviction that the ancestors are the immediate spiritual beings responsible for the wellbeing of those in this world. This chapter aims at exposing this ritual in various stages of its practice. After looking at these stages, it shall bring out the theological implications of this ceremony to the bereaved family and the society at large. Thus, the principal aim of this chapter is to present the perception and appreciation of the *kurova guva* ceremony by the Zezuru in Domboshava.

### *Kurova* *guva* ceremony

The *Kurova guva[[1]](#footnote-1)* ritual is a rite of passage of bringing back a person’s spirit to his/her home as an ancestor in the Zezuru culture. The deceased’s family, relatives and friends hold this ceremony after the grieving period, which varies from families or communities. Some families take a year whilst other can take two or more years to bring back the deceased’s spirit to their homes (Chavunduka 26). This ritual is not peculiar to the Zezuru people because it is a practice that is common in other tribes in and outside Zimbabwe. Most of the Shona ethnic groups and the Ndebele practice this ritual. The Zulu people in South Africa have a similar practice that they call *umbiyiso*, which literally means bringing back (Tshuma 26). This ceremony has the same aim of bringing the spirit of the deceased person back home as an ancestor. Across the Zambezi, the Bemba people of Zambia also have a similar ritual called *ukupupa* which is a commemoration of the dead and calls them forth to come back and enjoy the food (*icikoloti*) they prepare for them. This is also a call to the spirits to join the society and protect it (Matandiko 55). There are slight variations in doing these ceremonies, but there are striking similarities. They do all these ceremonies a year after burial, and beer is one of the key elements in these ceremonies. In Europe, the Scottish Gaelic had a similar ceremony known as *Samhain* in which points out the relationship of the living and the dead. The fundamental characteristic of this ceremony is the offering of food to the dead by the living. A practice very similar to that in Mexico where the living offer food to dead to keep families’ ties after death. The Samhain exists as Halloween, which is a compromise between the Celtic tradition and Christianity. The Mexican Day of the Dead is a day of family and is highly valued by the Mexican people.

#### Gata

The *Kurovaguva* ceremony begins with the inquiry on the circumstances around the death of the deceased. Inquiring is called *gata,* itinvolves a comprehensive inquisition into the circumstances around the death of the person of interest. Consistent with many African cultures, in the Zezuru worldview, death is deemed natural when one dies at an old ripe age. When one dies in circumstances that do not meet the society's expectations, his or her death is considered as induced by a human or spiritual agent. “Among the Shona people, illness and death cannot just happen without a spiritual force behind it. Even if the cause of death of a relative is uncontested and apparently clear, the Shona would still want to know the spiritual cause. They believe that science cannot fully account for a plethora of mishaps that trouble humanity” (Masaka and Chingono 76).

 This inquiry also investigates on the state of the candidate’s spirit. This springs from the belief that the form of death determines the state in which the deceased’s spirit transforms into. When one dies naturally, the sole desire of the spirit is to rest with the family as an ancestor. The spirit wanders outside the family for a while before it is brought back into the family as an ancestral spirit. If this spirit does not rest with the ancestors, it becomes a harmful spirit because of its restlessness. The ancestral spirits would not be happy if a spirit that is to join them is left wandering (Dodo 32). The essential point to note is that those who die naturally with no permanent grudges or unfulfilled ambitions are at rest when they die.

To make sure that the deceased person does not become a destructive force in the family, there is a need for consultation to the spirit medium. The family members make contributions towards the fee charged by the spirit medium by the deceased’s relatives. Contributing to this process is both a declaration of innocence and a nudge to the family representatives towards knowledge of the truth. The deceased’s close relatives go to a distance spirit mediumwho has an excellent reputation. Typically the father, uncle, sibling and some in-laws represent the different social parties in the family (Gelfand 71). The visit to a distant spirit medium is a way of giving credibility to the entire process. This stems from the belief that spirit mediums are an ambivalent force in the society. On one hand, they can be agents of good because they can heal many sicknesses and cast out evil spirits in a person or homestead. Their other role being arbitrators who punish the guilty parties who prey on the innocent. They can side with those who plan to do evil by killing or causing sickness to the victims. They can be manipulative as they can use their resources to trick or coheres their clients to paying them more than what is necessary (Masaka and Chingombe 208). This ambivalent role played by the spirit mediums explains why the Zezuru are skeptical of the local spirit mediums because they can be bribed or manipulated into falsehood by the interested parties. The integrity of the spirit medium is an important aspect of the whole procedure. This means that all the members of the family should approve of the spirit medium before consultations are done.

#### Brewing Beer

 Beer accompanies celebrations and is a symbol of unity for the Zezuru. Most celebrations are marked by drinking beer in communion. The ability of beer to make people happy and associate freely makes it a good social adhesive. One who becomes antisocial after drinking has *marambadoro* meaning one who is incompatible with beer (Choto 13). In addition, beer has a spiritual function of establishing, mending or perpetuating communion with spirits. In the *Kurovaguva* ceremony, they offer beer for perpetuating human-ancestral relations. It is for solidifying a bond that already exists between the ancestors and the to-be ancestor with human beings (Chibvurira 77). However, there is an element of entreating the ancestors to welcome the to-be ancestor at the same time entreating the one to be an ancestor to accept this honor.

The perception of the ancestors as good spirits entails that the offering should be pure. Purity in spiritual matters in the Zezuru culture revolves around sexual acts (Chavunduka 12). People are to partake in important spiritual activities or activities that require an active and constant presence of the spirits should abstain from sexual acts for a certain period prior to that activity. For example, men who are to go to war should abstain from sexual intercourse for at least two weeks. If one goes to war without abstaining for the minimum required time, he will die (Choto 51). With *Kurovaguva*, women who have reached menopause should brew the beer for offering to the spirits. They do this for two reasons, the first one is that the assumption is they are less sexually active and the second one it they are no longer going for their menstrual periods (Gelfand 73). Mensuration for the Zezuru is a period of ritual uncleanliness. Therefore to prevent the error of allowing menstruating women to brew the beer for offering, hence for precautious reasons only those who are in menopause are legible.

The preparation usually takes a fortnight and comprises two parts. In the first part, the kin of the dead take the sorghumfor use and present it to the ancestors as a way of notifying them (*kuteketera)* of their intentions. This act of notifying serves the purpose of offering, consecrating and honoring (Makaudze 97). Transparency is essential for the people who have gathered. In a society that is has spiritual warfare as one of its salient features, suspicion is rampant. After the consecration and formalities to the ancestors, they soak the Sorghum in water and dry it for seven days. They play drums and sing jubilant songs in honor of the ancestors and spirit to join them. After a week, the dried Sorghum is used to brew the beer that takes the central during the whole ceremony. This, however, is no ordinary beer because it has been consecrated for ritual purposes.

#### Vigil

Vigils (*pungwe*) mark the distinction between a casual celebration and a solemn one. A *Pungwe* precedes any event that specially involves the spiritual realm. According to Mudzuri, “a vigil is a period of waiting, welcoming and communing with the spirits and divinities. It is a symbol of unity of purpose among the people and a participation and communing with the spirits and divinities” (37). With *kurova guva*, the vigil is done with a focus on the ancestors and the spirit of the to-be ancestor. Drumming and singing are the key characteristics of such a vigil. In conformity with this, Chibvurira takes a less mystical approach and argues that the interconnectedness of the people celebrating this occasion is the interaction between people and divinities (88). For him, the spirit of oneness that people share in drumming and singing is what he identifies as the ancestors’ presence. However, Gelfand in his assessment of the activities done during the *pungwe* brings out a profound assessment when henotes that they often repeat the songs and sayings the deceased love. This brings his memory and personality to life not only mentally but concretely (79). In this way, the *pungwe* plays an essential role of bringing the ancestors and spirit of the to-be ancestor as the sole focus of those who are gathered.

However, there is a social dimension to this occasion that most modern writers overlook. The vigils allow adults to take part without obstructions. Children are part of these obstructions due, so it does not allow them to be there. This is because of cultural nuances that forbid children’s presence in elders’ meetings. This social factor goes hand in hand with this event being held around August. A period when there were no farming activities or weather complications. Thus, apart from the spiritual aspect, the event encouraged communion of the living (Machepa Interview). The singing and dancing are therefore not only for those in the spiritual world, but a celebration of life in common. We should not take this aspect for granted when considering the fact that the underlying factor for *ancestralizing* the person of interest was a good life among other people. Therefore, perhaps the purpose of the vigil was outreaching to all dimensions of the community’s life.

#### Kupira

A solemn procession, which begins from the deceased’s homestead to the graveyard, begins. The spiritual head of the family, normally the father of the house or anyone who stands in his stead, leads the procession (Gelfand 79). The father of the house or his representative are the ones with the prerogative of communicating with the ancestors. If the father or uncles are unavailable, the eldest son takes charge. Since the Shona people are patriarchal, it is inconceivable to have a woman who acts as the bridge between the ancestors and the family. It is the responsibility of the head of the family to make offerings (*kupira*) to the ancestors (Mutasa and Chingombe 92). On this occasion it takes form in libations, done at various stages of the ceremony. They are done before, during, and after the visit to the graveyard. These libations are performed using the brewed beer and are accompanied by incantations to the ancestors. The incantations are basically appeals for success and help. Towards the end of the ceremony, the libations and incantations are for thanksgiving and welcoming the spirit of the new ancestor home.

There is a sacrifice of a goat that goes with the libation at the graveyard[[2]](#footnote-2). The goat’s blood and liver are offered to the ancestors by smearing them on the grave. What remains of the goat goes to those who were closest to the deceased. Usually the deceased’s mother and those close to her are the ones who receive the meat. When there is a small gathering, they cook or roast the meat for all those who are present. Tho who are affluent in society can replace a goat by a cow for the sacrifice. The essence of the sacrifice is animal blood is to give a gesture of respect and consideration. The living consider it disrespectful to eat and drink without offering some food and drink to elders of the family who are in the spiritual world. This is a celebration of those who are in the material world and those in the spiritual, hence the drinking and partaking together.

After they do the sacrifices, the women take turns to sweep around the grave amidst singing and dancing. The grave is still the temporal habitation of the spirit that is to be taken home at this point. The sweeping of the grave is a recognition of this and also a recognition of relations. This is because women who sweep the grave are the in-laws of the family. Customarily, the duties of cleaning and other house chores are theirs. Apart from that, one should put into consideration the aesthetic prospect of this practice. This is possible when one realizes the fact that there was bound to be dirt and vegetation on and around the grave. As they take turns cleaning, there is a distribution of beer to all who are present. After the cleaning and the drinking, the procession back home begins. When they reach the homestead, the spiritual head of the family goes to the door of the main house and pours down some beer to thank the ancestors and welcome the new ancestor home. He enters the house and the rest of the family follows in order of seniority. In the house, they present two big pots of beer to the new ancestor’s close friend (*sahwira)*. One pot belongs to him and other belongs to the new ancestor. He distributes his own first, and the one for the new ancestor is distributed last. The depletion of this pot marks the end of the ceremony.

### The Significance of Kurovaguva

This ceremony opens up the Zezuru cosmology and theology in a simple but profound way. Pathisani Moyo in one of his works on this ceremony argues that the ritual of Kurovaguva reveals the constant consciousness of the society to the spiritual world (6). In his explanation of this relationship, he points out that the people notice that the person who has gone into the spiritual world has become powerful. This brings out the notion that spirits are more powerful than human beings. For Pathisani, that God is spirit and all other divinities and spirits is a good foundation for this belief (8). However, this argument does not reflect the depth in the people’s thinking. Following Pathisani’s earlier assertions, one can posit that it is through the lived experience of witnessing the spiritual forces at play that could explain this assertion. Perhaps it is not only the “constant consciousness” alone but constant interaction with the spiritual world that brings this belief and ultimately ceremonies like *kurova guva*.

One participant I interviewed stressed on the fact that “without the practice of honoring the ancestors and cordial human-ancestor relationship, society cannot survive”. The ancestors according to his argument are the link between nature and divinity. The divine is central to all aspects of human life at all times. There is an assortment of interpretations of this statement, but one that should interest us at this point is the affirmation of God sustaining the universe. *Kurova guva* in this case is not limited to a human-ancestral relationship, but to God as the all-powerful being. Like most African religions, this ceremony maintains the link in the hierarchy of being in the spiritual world. Thus it is not only a cultural practice of with social utility but a spiritual exercise of communion with the divinities.

 To add to that, even though death is a transition from this world to the spirit world, the absence of a person from this world has devastating effects on some. The physical absence has a permanent print to the bereaved family or community. They often meet this absence with denial, which wears off after grieving (Dodo 31). Therefore, the time between death of the individual and the *kurova guva* ceremony is for grieving and accepting the physical absence of the deceased. The ceremony builds on this foundation by allowing the living to accept their beloved in the spiritual form.

It also serves to perpetuate the memories and deeds of the deceased person among the living. This has a twofold effect. In one way, they remember the deceased for the good deeds and the wonderful memories he left with the people. People testify on their experiences with the deceased and in this way refresh the people of the deceased’s personality and character (Chavunduka 17). In another way, it reminds people of the wonderful deeds that other people in the clan did. They often ascribe deeds to the inspiring spirit that led the person. Good deeds are deeds that brought peace, happiness and harmony in the society, and the ancestral spirits often inspire them. In giving testimony of the deeds of the deceased, there is often a reminiscence of the deeds by others who died earlier. This animates the personalities of the deceased and the ancestors as the memories bring their deeds to life.

There is what we can consider an ironic twist in the relationship between people and spirits. Some note that the spirits are more powerful than people. People enjoy the privileges of protection and guidance. However, with this ceremony we also note that the dead depend on the living. This ritual serves a purpose, rewarding the dead who lived well and inspires the living to live well. The choice of being a medium for good or evil is in the consciousness of the Zezuru people. There is deliberate emphasis on the consequences of one’s choices between good and evil. Since good deeds unites the community and ensure its progress and stability, it is what they expect all to choose. There is a guarantee for a place in the society for those who do good deeds after their transitions to the spirit world. Their good deeds give them a warranty of continuity in their clan, a continuity that surpasses thoughts and speeches but a spiritual presence that has a higher function in the society. In a society where family is the priority, the ancestral position is the greatest position that one can have. This means not only the continuity of the dead individuals, but a continuity of the clan through their benevolence in the spirit world.

The most significant function of this ceremony is its unitary nature. The contributions and the confessions that made ensure clarity in most of the grey areas. There is often suspicion when the cause of death is uncertain. Traditional beliefs often override scientific explanations. The Zezuru believe medical explanations are not accurate because there are limited to the physical. The explanation they need should be holistic, and this means that it should cater for both the spiritual and material aspects. They accept a spiritual ‘truth’ without the backing of a material explanation, but a material explanation is not acceptable to a spiritual backing. The spiritual exoneration done through the process of *gata* clears suspicion and gives people an opportunity to exonerate each other through their testimonies.

### Conclusion

The ceremony of *Kurovaguva* as presented in this chapter is apparently straightforward. The entire process begins with an inquisition that aids in clarifying the cause of death. Assuming that the results of the inquiry do not point to any malpractices that led to the death of the person of interest. And they brew beer, beer is for communicative and unitive purposes for different parts of the ceremony. Those gathered sing and dance during a vigil and visit the graveyard in the morning. From the graveyard, they bring with them the spirit of the person of interest. This exposition had the aim of bringing out the beliefs surrounding this ceremony and its psycho-social function, hence its significance to the family and society.

# Chapter Two

## THE CEREMONY OF KUROVA GUVA FROM A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

### Introduction

The previous chapter was an exposition of stages of the kurova guva ceremony. The focus was on the way they celebrate it and the underlying values of the celebration. It was an attempt to bring out the significance of this celebration to the participants and the society. In exploring the kurova guva ceremony, the Zezuru interpretations of the afterlife were mostly sketchy and rough. This chapter aims at inspecting the thought behind the kurova guva ceremony. It wants to address questions that have to do with what happens on the other side of life. As a way of addressing most of the Christian concerns on this topic, there shall be a parallel exposition of Catholic theology and the Zezuru’s beliefs of the afterlife. The reason for these expositions is to draw out the main thoughts behind these beliefs and test them accordingly. This chapter is an analysis of the kurova guva ceremony with through Catholic lens.

### The Roman Catholic Theology of Afterlife

#### The Nature of Human Soul

The concept of the soul is imperative in understanding catholic eschatology. The catholic doctrine hinges on the belief that the soul is immortal. Scripture present the soul as human life or a holistic union of the body and soul (Matthew 16:25-26; John. 15:13; Acts 2:41). It does not give an impression of the two distinct elements functioning together. Martin Luther argued that the soul is inseparable from the body. This derivation is clearly a rejection of the Platonist dualistic view of the distinction between the body and soul. For Luther, there is an intrinsic unity between body and soul such that one cannot be without the other (Singer 86). However, the Church teaches that the body and soul are distinct from each other in the Aristotelian sense of form and matter. The soul is the form of the material body because it animates it (CCC 365). However, there is a stress on their unity, “spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but their union forms a single nature” (CCC 365).

The soul is an “immediate” creation of God that does not perish when it separates from the body. The immediacy of the soul implies an ongoing act of creation on God’s part. This means that the soul is not a product of biological fusion but a direct and immediate act of God (CCC 366). Time and space have no binding on it because it is incorporeal. This incorporeality allows it to transcend corruption and renders it immortal. This aspect is essential to the Church because since the soul is the spiritual principle of a human being, it points towards his supernatural end. Meaning that death is not the end of a person’s existence. According to the Roman Missal, in the second preface of the dead, death is a transformation from one state of living to another. It states that, “that those saddened by the certainty of dying might be consoled by the promise of immortality to come. Indeed, for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended, and, when this earthly dwelling turns to dust, an eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven” (622).

#### The Destiny of Human Soul

The soul’s primary purpose is to know and love God, which means to seek and return to Him. Pope Pius XII, drawing from the Genesis of creation says “even when they abandoned their Creator, God did not cease to regard them as His children, who, according to His merciful plan, should one day be reunited once more in His friendship.” He also adds that God is the soul’s supernatural end “to whom all should tend; in the unity of means to secure that end” (SP 38). However, because of human freedom, the soul has an option to choose to follow or go against what God intends. This choice consequently determines its state in eternity, which is in God’s presence or absence[[3]](#footnote-3). According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the “place” God dwells is called heaven. This is also an abode of the angels and the souls of those who followed the God’s intentions[[4]](#footnote-4) (CCC 186). Heaven is therefore an experience of the eschatological glory where the soul beholds the beatific vision; a return to the source and a fulfilment of the supernatural end.

The soul’s opposition to its supernatural end is an act of rebellion which drives it away from God. The destiny of such souls is a place that is void of God’s presence, since God does not impose Himself on his creatures. This place where the soul is deprived of the vision of God Sheol in Hebrew or Hades in Greek (Philippian 2:10; Revelations 1:18; Psalms 88:11-13). The Catechism of the Catholic Church identifies it as hell and affirms that it is the place where Jesus descended after his death. “Jesus did not descend into hell to deliver the damned, nor to destroy the hell of damnation, but to free the just who had gone before him” (633). The souls in hell are called damned because they are beyond redemption because they deny acknowledging and embracing the will of God. Since they are defiant to life, they are dead in the sense that they do not live in the presence of God who is life itself. Hell is the eternal destiny of human souls that are antagonistic to God’s will.

#### The Relationship of the Soul and the World in the Afterlife

After the separation from the body, the human soul either maintains communion with the living or loses it completely. The capacity of the soul to commune with the living or not depends on the state in which the soul lies. If the soul is in heaven, it maintains a high level of communion with those in the world. The Church identifies itself with such souls and argues that biological death does not disrupt such souls from their connection with those in this world. Souls in heaven are the Church triumphant because of their testimony for Christ and their victory over the world through Christ. This Church triumphant is in communion with the Church in this world through intercessions. In addition, the Church believes that their intercessions are necessary for the well-being of the Church. The efficaciousness of their intercessory role is based on their relationship with God (LG 49; CCC 828, 956). In the prayers of final commendation, the spirit of the deceased is charged with the responsibility of praying for the family, relatives and friends. This act expresses not only the Christian belief of continuation of life after death, but also the permanency of social and spiritual bonds (ZCBC 37).

There is a temporary isolation from God’s glory for the souls in purgatory. However, these souls still benefit from the intercessions of both those in heaven and the ones on earth. The prayers for the liberations and the indulgencies that people in this world offer for them have a great impact on the duration is this state of purification. Even though the souls in purgatory cannot reciprocate the efforts, the Church teaches that the part played by the living in remembering them is an honorable deed. St. Irenaeus, argues that, “it is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins… Our prayer for them is capable not only of helping them but also of making their intercession for us effective” (Kempf, Beck and Ewig 22). The last part of the above statement refers to those in heaven who are in the presence of God. However, the same is not true for those who are damned because they are cut off from any avenues of communion. Christ is the basis of the communion between the saints in heaven, purgatory and the world. Those in hell have no part in Christ and it follows then that they cannot commune with others.

### The Catholic theology of afterlife and the practice of *kurova guva*

#### Zezuru Concept of Heaven and Hell

The Zezuru believe that a human being is a union of a corruptible body and an immortal soul. They also believe that these two entities separate at death. The afterlife is a continuation or fulfilment of one’s experiences and relationship with people, ancestors and God. The bond that one has with God allows for a perfect union in the afterlife. If one does not have a relationship with God in this world, he cannot have it in the next because the afterlife builds on the foundation of life on earth. The Zezuru equivalent for the beatific vision is the concept of a spiritual *dare[[5]](#footnote-5)* of God and the ancestors. This is an inclusive platform that accommodates an array of age groups with different social standing[[6]](#footnote-6). Every community had its own *dare* that was at an open space. Those at the *dare* sat in different clusters according to their social standing. The aged, married youths and boys sat in their respective groups. These groups were under the leadership of one called *Sadare* and the different clusters had group leaders who coordinated with the *Sadare*. One had to be respectable, dignified and knowledgeable to have this role. The purpose of these gatherings was to promote growth, unity, cooperation and collaboration. This was a maturing platform for men of all age groups.

Participation in the *dare* was a pledge of willingness to bond and commune with others, which is sharing knowledge, experiences, and jokes and playing games. Its establishment and the participation of those in the community ensured stability, maturity and security[[7]](#footnote-7) for the entire community. There was an expectation for every male member of the community to be present. This expectation stems from the good that the *dare* conferred to all in attendance hence it was a shameful act not to be there for an unjustifiable personal reasons or being sent away for misconduct (Gombe 7). However, there was no coercion or punishments for those who did not want to attend. Isolating oneself from the others was a declaration of independence in an environment where independence was a precarious enterprise. It was like swimming against the tide or a fish jumping out of the water.

The image of heaven as a *dare* makes it necessary for the Zezuru to communicate with God through the ancestors. This is because when one is speaking, he has to turn to his immediate senior or junior depending on the direction of the intended subject[[8]](#footnote-8). Seniority is essential to the Zezuru practices, and it is particularly engraved at the *dare*. The highest good for the Zezuru is to be part of the spiritual *dare* which has God as the *Sadare*. Being in this position gives on the privilege to commune and secure their home under the leadership of God. Not being part of the spiritual *dare* is to be endowed with perennial destitution and isolation. The souls of evil-doers are like people who ignore the open invitation of the *dare* and choose to stay homeless. In the afterlife, those in the spiritual *dare* cannot commune with them since they are outsiders. This brings out the conception of hell among the Zezuru and the exclusion of evil doer regarding the principle of continuity.

There is a correlation between participation in the spiritual *dare* and one’s deed in this world. One’s deeds in this world create or deny him/her a place in the spiritual *dare*. To put this into perspective, people graduated from one group to another. For example, when a boy reaches the age of puberty or when a young man marries, they are automatically put in a group that is higher than the one they were taking part in. The same principle applies to those who have died in good standing with the community, they automatically qualify to sit in the spiritual *dare*; they have a place among the ancestors. Those who refuse to act according to the dictates of the community which came from the ancestors did not graduate to another level. The same happens to those whose deeds were at par with the good of the community. They have no place in the dare of the God because they disobeyed his authority that came through the ancestors. With this in mind, the *kurova* *guva* ceremony is an act of approval and petition from the lower *dare* (earthly) to the higher one (heavenly). It is an approval that the soul is clean and deserves the elevation, and it is a petition to correct what has been overlooked and accept the candidate they are sending.

There is an objection that the *dare* concept is distinctively different from the Catholic theology of heaven because it depicts an image of an equal enjoyment of God’s presence. The hierarchal concept gives a moderate experience of God as the later generations stay further away from God’s presence (Olupona 33). One may also add that it cannot take into cognizance various social factors like gender and other social constructs. However, the hierarchal presentation of the heavenly state is not peculiar to the Zezuru. Scripture points out this hierarchal structure (Psalms. 110:1; Matthew 20:20-23; Mark. 10:36, 40; Luke 22:69). The apostles were indignant with the brothers who asked to sit next to Jesus in the Kingdom. John’s vision of the twenty-four elders who sat next to God’s throne wearing golden crowns attest to the different rankings in heaven (Revelations 4:4).

To overcome the limitations of objecting the hierarchy and gender representation, one should understand that religious language should not be taken literally. People express spiritual realities using their human experiences and imaginations. Thus a Jewish idea of what it means to be in God’s presence is informed by the Jewish experiences. The same applies to the Zezuru understanding of being in the *dare*. Jesus at a point speaks of heaven as a wedding feast when he was teaching on the importance of preparation and attentiveness (Matthew 22:1). This imagery gives a picture of what heaven is like but does not exhaust everything. That is why Jesus had to give more examples of what the kingdom of heaven is like (Matthew 13:31, 44, 45; Luke 13:20). It is therefore unjust to expect the Zezuru’s imagery to capture all the dynamics of God’s presence. The *dare* imagery does not imply a patrilineal heaven, but it conveys that it is a place of communion, unity, collaboration and enlightenment. Dare as a place of living a communal life brings out the respect and veneration of God as the *sadare* of the all creation.

#### Christ-Ancestor Controversy

Jesus’ nature is fluid in his epiphany to different people and cultures. In his time, there were many speculations over his personhood and his identity. His question to his disciples, 'Who do people say I am?' betrays the people’s failure to grasp the essence of his nature and mission (Matthew 16:13–20; Luke 9:18–21; Mark 8:27–30). Jesus then asks his disciples who they say he is, a question that demanded a personal response to their experience of him. Beyers and Mphahlele argue that there is no umbrella answer to this question because each person or culture has to respond definitively basing on their experience of Jesus (2). According to them, the Sotho people in South Africa answer to this question by saying Jesus is an ancestor. Like the Sotho, the Zezuru answer in the same way because they believe that “through this familial relationship with God through Jesus, human beings can talk with God, through their Ancestor Jesus. Through consulting Jesus, human beings can follow the will of God” (Beyers and Mphahlele 4). For the Zezuru, drawing from his humanity and divinity, Jesus is both an ancestor and God. He is an ancestor in as far as he is human and shares a filial bond with humanity (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 2:10–18). His role as a mediator between God and people further justifies the concept of being an ancestor (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16).

The mode of operation in Jesus’ mediatory role fall under the Zezuru cultural practices. This means that there cannot be a direct approach to Christ as the firstborn of creation and the great ancestor. As mentioned earlier on in this chapter, for the Zezuru it is disrespectful and boisterous to approach one who is older or superior to you directly. To pass the intentions to Jesus, there is a need for those who are less divine and glorious, that is the ancestors. The eldest of the ancestors who comes before Jesus is the one that communes with him. Jesus, as the firstborn of all creation, then passes it on to the Father. This means that Jesus is the bridge between the Father and creation. In the Zezuru perspective, he is the intercessor of intercessors. This echoes Paul’s declaration that there is only one between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5). The ancestors take part as surrogates in Jesus’ role of mediation.

Scholars like Joseph Ratzinger argue against this synthesis because “in a wide segment of the history of religion, the ancestor cult absorbed people’s religious attention to an ever greater degree, finally pushing the high god of a tradition to the margins of consciousness where he eked out a miserable existence as a *deus* *otiosus*, dethroned and useless” (104). The central idea in this argument is that the ancestral cult overshadows and misdirects the people's attention from God. This happens because people focus on the immediate spiritual reality and distance themselves from the subject of focus. However, this experience is not foreign to the Church because there was a period where there was a disfiguration of worship of God because of the cult of saints. In this period there was a preoccupation with prayers to saints and the use of their relics for miracles (Kempf, Beck and Ewig 67).

The abuses or misdirection do not discredit the function and efficacy of the cult of saints. Essentially, there is no antagonism between the cult of saints and God. According to the council fathers, “if this relationship is understood in the fuller light of faith according to its genuine nature, in no way weakens, but conversely, more thoroughly enriches the latreutic worship we give to God the Father, through Christ, in the Spirit”. (LG 51). According to Gieseler, Augustine of Hippo says, “What is said to be done by the martyrs is done not by their operation, but only by their prayer and request” (37). The same argument applies to the Zezuru’s ancestral approach to God. The ancestors cannot do anything without God’s sanction, they are his emissaries to the people. If understood and applied correctly, the role of the ancestors does not obscure or diminish God's importance. Ratzinger’s argument discredits role of the ancestors but calls for vigilance and the prioritization of God over ancestors.

### Conclusion

The Catholic theology of afterlife states that the soul continues to exist one’s biological death. The reason for this continuity is that the soul is immortal and an immediate creation of God. Depending on the soul’s relationship with God, it can either go to heaven or hell as a place of its ultimate destination. Heaven means life because it is in God’s presence and it also guarantees one communion with the living on in this world. The latter assertion being made in the period's context before the last judgement. Using these doctrinal values, this chapter made an assessment of the Zezuru belief in afterlife to satisfy Christian queries. Basically, there are no significant differences between a Catholic theology of afterlife and the Zezuru thought on the same. The differences are on the approach and areas of emphasis, but the basic principles in their thought are in sync.

# Chapter Three

## INCULTURATION OF THE CEREMONY OF KUROVAGUVA

### Introduction

The ceremony of *kurova guva* and its spiritual roots were dealt with in the preceding chapters. At this point we understand that the ceremony is a spiritual enterprise that summonses the spirit of the deceased to return home to rest and protect the living. It is an attempted to sustain family ties between the living and the dead for mutual benefits. The basis of this practice is the conviction on the immortality of the soul and the quest for eternal happiness in the company of God. The previous chapter harmonized the Christ-ancestors’ controversy and set a firm ground of the Zezuru’s belief in heaven and hell. It is on this ground that this chapter aims at developing a theological adoption of the ceremony to Catholic practice. The aim of this chapter is to point out the areas in the *kurova guva* ceremony that should be brought into Catholic practice. It aims at assessing these elements from both a cultural and Catholic points of view to see how they can be adopted without disrupting the basic intentions of the two. The ceremony will be divided into three stages for better explanation and clarity.

### Stages for Inculturation

To penetrate deep into the roots of the culture and traditions, the *kurova guva* ceremony should keep its basic structure. This is to show that the intention of the Church is not to condemn the people’s practices, but to purify them. It is from using what they understand and cherish that the message of Christ can easily find its home in their lives. This is in line with the call of the Second Vatican Council, the fathers said, “Anything in these peoples’ way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy and, if possible, preserves intact… as long as they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit” (SC 37). Therefore, nothing of the stages of *kurova guva* should be removed, but most of them should be subject to different interpretations. To achieve this, there shall be a transposition of elements between the Zezuru and Catholic cultures necessary for proper inculturation. This means that a rite should be put in place that will complete or partially fuse with it. The ceremony can be aligned with the celebration of a memorial mass or done separately.

### Preliminary Stage

#### Positioning

According to the Zezuru, November is a sacred month because it the ancestors’ sabbatical. They may not perform any spiritual activities that involve the ancestors. This includes activities that indirectly involve the spiritual realm like marriages, coronation of leaders or memorial celebrations for the dead (Mutanga 48). These restrictions impose a direct conflict with the Roman Catholic practice of remembering and praying for the dead on the first and second of November. To deal with this dilemma, it is imperative to note that “even in the liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not implicate the faith or the good of the entire community; rather does she respect and foster the genius and talents of the various races and peoples” (SC 37). Hence, the Church in Harare needs to align the November occurrences to days that are acceptable to hold the *kurova guva* ceremony. This alignment should put into perspective what the Church envisions in remembering and praying for the dead. Its teachings on the afterlife would be easier to grasp because they will correlate with a practice that already exists. This positioning reconciles the traditional beliefs with those of Christianity.

Perhaps this is an unnecessary and unreasonable request because the Church’s traditions take precedence over local cultures. It is not proper to divert a universal practice to cater for the particular need. A proper response is that “in some places and circumstances, however, an even more radical adaptation of the liturgy is needed, and this entails greater difficulties” (SC 40). Therefore, is not an unnecessary or unreasonable suggestion considering the fact that the first and second of November are the Church’s response to the Samhain practice. Catholic celebration of all saints' and all souls’ days came as a replacement of the Samhain celebrations. The Church was addressing the pagan influence in the relationship between the living and the dead. This was a success because the shift synchronized values and conveyed a level of respect of cultural beliefs in the celebration and remembrance of the dead (Kempf, Beck and Ewig 104). A similar adoption should be done regarding the *kurova* *guva* ceremony for a similar purpose. In fact, not shifting creates a psychological dichotomy which leaves a sense of guilt in engaging in either of the activities. To impose November as the month of prayer for the dead creates a conflict of values. On one hand, there is a valid and acceptable call to pray for the dead. Yet the cultural demands of the month doe not allow for an active participation concerning the dead.

#### Gata

When an acceptable time is set and the ceremony preparations are put in motion, the stage of enquiry over the state of the dead is salient. Spirit mediums take the center stage on this aspect and are an integral part of the practice of inquisition. Their relevancy in this ceremony is in describing the challenges that exist and those that are likely to be experienced. To avoid the impending doom, they act as the mouthpiece of the ancestors in giving solutions (Gombe 37). To the people, this means that their testimony has its authority from ancestral cult. The spirit mediums’ counsels and practice sway the Christological significance of the Christian message. There is a tendency to put much emphasis on the ancestral cult than on God.

To address this phenomenon, Roman Catholicism has to pitch an idea of a priest as a spirit medium. This does not mean that Catholic priests should invite the ancestral spirits to manifest through them or that spirit mediums should be priests. This is a way of presenting the priestly role in a way that is clear and understood by the people. The priest is a vessel of God, a person acting in the person of Christ. When a spirit medium is in *matare[[9]](#footnote-9)*, he/she is a medium of another spirit. This has a similar connotation with Catholicism because during the celebration of mass, the priest acts in *persona* *Christi* (SC 33). In his letter to the Philippians, Paul speaks of being possessed by Christ to show that his entire life is in the shadow of Christ’s life and mission (Philippians 3:12). The priest is a spirit medium of Christ because the Christ’s spirit overwhelms and enables him to impersonate him. The efficacy of this substitution lies in the authority of Christ and the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

The priest inherits not only the title but the role of the spirit medium; he has to give a definite reply to the questions about the dead and the spiritual world. His answers must not be irrelevant and impractical, but should be based on the truths and spiritual realities that are in line with the Church’s teaching. The convictions about the state of the dead; heaven, purgatory and hell must have good expositions in such encounters. For this to be credible, the Christian spirit medium should be truly a medium of the Holy Spirit and Christ. The presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit should give comfort and certitude to those who inquire over the state of the dead. These encounters are not for conjuring or practicing divination, but moments of prayer and consolation. They are a time when Christ and the Holy Spirit are in action in relation to those who are concerned about the state of the dead. The emphasis lies in making people encounter God in their time of uncertainty and confusion.

#### Brewing Beer

Material substances like herbs are modes through which the spiritual reality is enacted to the physical. “The material reality is the mode through which the spiritual realm communicates or manipulates the human person, and vice versa. Any mode or material is neutral as it allows manipulation for evil or good” (Mutanga). Making use of sorghum and its consecration serves a dedication that differentiates the beer from the recreational. The consecration of the sorghum is very significant as it distinguishes between ritual and ordinary beer (Gombe 17). The prayer said over the sorghum makes the beer good or bad. An evil and malevolent prayer makes the beer dangerous, and a good and benevolent prayer makes it good for those who drink it (Mutanga). In bringing this practice to Christianity, the sorghum as a fermenting agent should be a representation of the transformation Christ brought to the world. Christ, as the agent of change becomes the object in the sorghum and the subject of mediation. Thus, the sorghum becomes the symbol of Christ's presence in the world and the transformation of creation by his death. It will also be the channel by which his sacrifice and mediatorship finds its place in the Zezuru form of worship. These transformations find their expression in the joy and unity that comes from those who partake in the alcohol. The sadness that comes with life’s worries makes way for joy that is brought by the drinking.

Traditionally, the purpose of the prayer over the sorghum is to assure that they are acceptable to the ancestors. The plea for acceptability does not begin at the soaking, but at the collection and preservation. There is much care put in place to guard the sorghum against any form of moral or spiritual corruption. This is because of the beliefs in the purity of the ancestors and consequently of God’s holiness. A Christological dimension should be introduced, and so the prayer should have its destination to God through Christ. This serves the purpose of clarifying on the relationship of Christ to the ancestors. They can do the prayer following the ancestral hierarchy, but it should explicitly clarify that it goes to God through Christ. It is an exposition of the role and purpose of Christ whom the Zezuru acknowledge as God.

#### The Vigil

A vigil brings out an ecclesiological and eschatological dimension since it is the gathering of the people of God who are waiting for God’s action. These dimensions bring out the Church’s present experiences and those of the future. The present is an eager awaiting of the resurrection and the full manifestation of God’s kingdom. It is also a pledge of unity between the different dimensions of the Church (RM 677). The pilgrim Church gathers in solidarity with the Church penitent with the support of the Church triumphant. Understanding the vigil in this way stems from interpreting *kurova* *guva* as a community’s act of intercession to God. The intercession is an acknowledgment of human imperfection and the fact that there are human acts that prevent one from enjoying God’s presence. Thus the description of the Church in this world praying for the souls in purgatory with the help of the Church in heaven has a good hold in this case. This is a watch to remember the dead and begin the intercessions for an admission of the soul in God’s kingdom.

### The Substantial Stage

#### Procession to the grave

The procession to the graveyard is to collect the deceased’s spirit from the graveyard. It is a partial reversal of the burial rituals that commit one to the grave. Apparently, this reversal has a strong link between Christianity and the Zezuru practice. This link hinges on the temporary nature of committal of the dead. The Zezuru commit the person to the grave up to the time of bringing back the spirit (Chavunduka 13). Christianity commits the body to the grave in hope of its resurrection. This act of committing the dead to the graves has the idea of preparation for rest at its base. The concept of resting and home needs an interpretation from both Christian and Zezuru perspectives. It is interesting to note that concerning the dead, the idea of resting is contextual. The grave is a transitory place of rest in both the Christian and Zezuru perspectives. It is a temporary shelter of rest on the road to the ultimate destination, which is the actual home.

 For the Zezuru, the communion and reciprocity of love and help between the living and the death defines home. Home is primarily a place of cordial relations that conjure peace, unity, love and warmth in one’s life. The perception of the grave as a place of seclusion from one’s community causes the need to move one from the graveyard. The concept of home in this case is concomitant to the Christian heaven. Thus the act of bringing the spirit home should be from an analogical rather than a literal perspective. This means that the community’s act is intercessory by nature and its intentions are to bring one to God’s kingdom. The purpose of this procession reminds the living of their duty to intercede for the dead. Their prayers and indulgences are essential to the status of the dead in purgatory. The pilgrim Church serves a purpose of bringing Christ’s salvation to the world and those in purgatory (LG 49).

#### Graveyard Proceedings

These proceeding have a lot in common with the celebration of the all souls day. The graveyard as a place of burying the faithful is a sacramental. This means that it is a sacred place that demands veneration (CCC 1667). The Zezuru share the same perspective on the graveyard. It is a sacred place that calls for veneration. It is the duty of the living to guard the sacredness of the graveyard (Gombe 44). There is an objection of visiting the grave intending to communicate with the dead. The proponents of this objection believe that it necromancy and hence unholy for one to do so. This argument can only be valid if the prayers and ritual focus on the help from the dead. The object of all prayers in the Zezuru believe is God through those who are close to Him. These ancestors are an equivalent of the catholic saints who are as known as the Church triumphant.” The cult of saints does not presuppose some mythical omniscience by the saints, but simply the unruptured self-communion of the whole body of Christ—and closeness of a love which knows no limit and is sure of attaining God in the neighbor, and the neighbor is God” (Ratzinger 235). Death, therefore, does not alienate one from the community but entails a continuation of the bond in an additional dimension.

#### The sacrifice

Sacrificing an animal has various interpretations in both the Christian and Zezuru worldviews. They believe that smearing blood and liver on the grave point towards communion. This belief is that the blood and the liver are food and drink for the spirits. The sharing of food with the spirits is an affirmation of the continuation of the connection and relationship with the deceased. However, this has perception needs to re-interpretation to explain Christ’s act of redemption. Blood should be a sign of redemption through Christ, whose sacrifice on the cross brought salvation to the world (Hebrews 9: 11-14). This is a reminder that Christ conquered death through his death on the cross at Calvary. It is through Christ’s blood that our sins are washed away and we are born again to a new life. This is the new life that the Zezuru believe in, a life that among those close to God.

#### Broom

From a Zezuru viewpoint, sweeping around the grave is an act of respect to the place of rest. That this was a resting place for the spirit of the deceased makes the grave venerable. It is also an act of chasing away evil spirits which wonder at the grave. The weeds and dirt around the grave are a sign of the presence of evil spirits. Uprooting and sweeping on and around the grave of the deceased is both an act of remembrance and deliverance (Chavunduka 31, Mutanga). In this light, the intercessions of the community for the beloved is an attempt of delivering from the purge of purgatory. The community prays for the exoneration of the deceased, and this comes out from sweeping. The broom represents the community’s intention, and prayers are an effort to cleanse the deceased’s soul. From a Christological perspective, the act of sweeping brings in the significance of Christ’s redemptive act on the cross. Christ’s act cleanses one from sin through the Church in the dead's case. Sweeping around the grave is therefore Christ’s redemptive act and its influence of saving beyond the grave. Thus, Christ through his Church mediates for the dead and assists in their deliverance from purgatory (Arson 91).

### Concluding Stage

#### Procession back Home

This and the succeeding parts of this ritual are better understood as explanatory rituals. These acts explain the purpose of the ritual, particularly what transpired in the graveyard. This act of bringing in of the spirit from the grave back home is symbolic and expresses the human desire for communion. The dead are an integral part of the community of the living. The kingdom of God is the representation of home because that is where peace and communion are present. There can be no certainty of the time when one enters God’s kingdom, but through faith the community assumes that God in his bountiful mercy accepts the supplications of his children.

The symbolic act of carrying the spirit home thus becomes a plea and a statement. It is a plea to God to accept the soul of the deceased in his kingdom, and it is a statement that assures people of God’s love. The act might not be complete in the spiritual realm because it depends on divine judgment. However, the hope and trust the community of believers has in God makes one to assume that eventually the soul in purgatory will be in with God. Central to this act is an attitude of trust, confidence, and petition to God by the community. This means that the community trusts in God’s justice and is confident of his actions. The deeds of the deceased witness for him in God’s presence. The community understands that no one is perfect before God and that there are many things that can hinder one from being with God and therefore its prayers are important. This is in line with the doctrine of the Church. The dead cannot pray for themselves, they depend on God’s love and the prayers of those in heaven and on earth.

#### Home Rituals

The pertinent question at this point is how one can justify the act of bringing the soul from the grave to the house? How can such a practice find a place in Roman Catholic praxis? The ‘bringing of the spirit’ back home is an act that sensationalizes the spiritual world. This act is an exact interpretation of what transpires in the spiritual world but gives the basic idea. This idea is that when God pardons and accepts the spirit of the deceased, it unites with the family. The concept of home being the place of rest and communion is key to this belief.

In traditional Christian thought the eschatology of the soul is a state in which, during the course of history, brothers and sisters in Christ are successively united with him and in him. The idea of a family union of souls through death is not foreign to many African religions and offers the opportunity for inter religious dialogue with them (Theological Commission 49)

Home holds a double meaning because it refers to the spiritual *dare* and at the community of the living. Hence, this ceremony intends to bring out that the person has come home to the fullness of life. It is a celebration of the deceased’s departure from the world of the dead to join the world of the living. The temporary barrier of alienation that came through death has been overcome and the person is not a stranger to the living but part of their community. The act of welcoming one home is a sign of trust, confidence, and continuity.

#### The Pots of Beer

The act of sharing and distributing the two pots of beer in the house is significant in emphasizing on the element of unity. This emphasis is on the relationship of the dead to his family and friends. The two pots present in the house represent the social ties between the deceased and the sahwira. This explains deeply the continuity of a person’s existence after death. This is an opportunity to express the reality of the kingdom of God and its connection to this world. Those in the kingdom of God continue to have a connection with those in this world. Cherishing this relationship and maintaining it through a symbol of unity and joy has significant consequences. One of these consequences borders on the transformative and deterrence factors in the community. A relationship with a spiritual being demands certain moral standards. This means that the family and friends who depend on the intercessions of the deceased are bound by the new state to act in good ways for them to maintain the relationship. There is a cohesion to transform their behavior in order to uphold the privileges they have in the relationship with the one in God’s presence. Drinking the beer from these pots is therefore not just a sign of unity but a pledge of living a good and upright life. Here, it is a pledge to abide by the gospel values which the deceased’s presence in God’s kingdom attests to.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter affirms the possibility of inculturating the *Kurova guva* ceremony to the Roman Catholic practice. It points at the stages and elements in both practices that should dialogue to give clarity to the people. Incorporating Jesus’ resurrection and embracing his salvific act is key to inculturation. This chapter states that the kurova guva ceremony should keep its basic structure and instruments of communication. Through these structures and instruments, the Zezuru can understand the Christian principles vividly. The coding of Roman Catholic doctrine in the Zezuru culture should bring new interpretations. These interpretations must give traditional practices a Christological dimension that supplements or compliments them. There must be respect of both cultures because a successful transformation and re-interpretation of either depends on their reciprocity.

# CONCLUSION

At the core of this essay is the syncretic notion of flip-flop belief in kurova guva and Christianity. Its primary concern was to explore and expose these beliefs for a better understanding. This search was based on finding the lacuna in Catholicism that triggers the people of Domboshava to revert to their cultural practices. To achieve this, we explored the kurova guva ceremony and took cognizance of its significance to the Zezuru. Knowing this practice brought out the individual and collect concerns, which the kurova guva rituals address. Among these concerns are the happy repose of the dead and the peace and harmony between the living and the dead. This anchors on the belief of the ancestral spirits and the influence they have in the lives of those in this world. This expedition was to appreciate the practice and its place in people’s lives.

Proceeding from probing kurova guva, we explored the Catholic theology of afterlife. This examination had dual objectives. First, it was to trace for a void in the Church’s teaching regarding concerns of the Zezuru people in matters of life after death. Second, it was to identify elements that were identical in both the Zezuru and Catholic belief systems. The goal was to reconcile the accusations of religious deficiency that bring tension between the two belief systems, The Christians who take part in the kurova guva ceremonies believe Christianity is shallow. In their view, it lacks the qualities of reassurance on spiritual matters and communion with the dead. Christian authorities regard traditional religious practices as void of proper authority and hence they lack validity. The resolution on this issue is that there are no substantial differences because a there are good grounds for reconciling these beliefs.

In conclusion, the findings made in exploring the fundamental principles in which the doctrines of afterlife made it possible to establish an operational relationship between them. The different tiers in the ceremony of kurova guva can be fused to the Catholic doctrine in practice. Inculturation is giving Christ his proper place in this ceremony, in this context. The ceremony has a different trajectory whilst maintaining its structure. This explosion should nudge people into finding better ways of reconciling cultural practices and Christianity to ensure that cultures are evangelized.

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1. This transliterates to ‘striking the grave; a Zezuru symbol of opening the grave to gain access or grant exit to the grave owner. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Goat blood is not a waste as it a delicacy in the Zezuru culture. It is usually reserved for the elders who would usually give some of it to those who killed the goat. The offering of blood is not an offering of what people reject but an offering of respect and part of the delicacy. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This categorization deliberately overlooks the doctrine of purgatory since it is a transitory period of the soul that is under purification and awaiting its admission into God’s presence. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The souls that have bent towards the divine orientation are called saints and are believed to enjoy eternal bliss in God’s presence. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This is a word has a twofold meaning which hold contrasting implications. In one context, it means a place where men in a particular set up regularly gathered to commune. In another context, it is a juridical council convoked to settle grave matters. In the first context, this is a platform that is exclusive to men whilst in the second context it is open to both genders. It is important to note that this word can accommodate both flippant and solemn moods depending on the context. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The selection of *dare* as a place where men gather is to cater for the idea of communion which captures *Zezuru’*s intentions in conceptualizing the supernatural end. However, this does not mean that the other meaning is not implied. On the contrary, there is a frequent interplay of these words when applied to both the mundane and spiritual sense. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Under normal circumstance, man gathered every day in the morning before assuming other duties and in the evening after all work was done. The evening gatherings were also part of the watch against malicious and unruly individuals or animals that could kill people or destroy crops. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. If a youth wants is conveying a message to the *Sadare,* he has to turn to one who is his immediate senior and there is a knock over effect until the message reaches the *Sadare*. The *Sadare*’s response will come in from the direction it went. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Plural of *dare* and implies a place or moment of communing with the ancestors for the sake of deliberating on issues or receiving instructions or judgments of the spiritual *dare.* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)