

**THEOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF
NECROMANCY AND ITS PARALLEL
IN *DANGME* RELIGIO-CULTURAL
SETTING**

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a theological examination of necromancy in ancient Israel and its parallel in Dangme religio-cultural setting about the place of the dead. This endeavour is premised on the question: Was King Saul's encounter with the spirit of Samuel, rhetoric or realism? Why was necromancy considered a theological aberrant in biblical theology? What form or nature is life after death? Should theology identify rational grounds for accepting or rejecting the messages from the dead? The paper discusses the Deuteronomistic historian's narrative of King Saul's necromantic inquiry at En-Dor and its sensitivities in biblical history will as the background to the deliberation along with necromantic theories of the of the place of the dead and afterlife in Dangme religious and cultural settings. The paper

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concludes that in Dangme communities, necromancy is practised in spite of the presence of Christianity, which seems to relegate it to the background. There is always a division at the demise of a family member, who is a Dangme first before becoming a Christian. Should a diviner be consulted to ascertain his or her death, and seek information as to how the funeral should be conducted or not? This is not just a rhetorical question but a realistic one that calls for a dialogue between Christianity and Dangme cultures.

Introduction

Science and technology seem to advance the course of human life in the areas of food and medicine, shelter and clothing, life support mechanisms and ultramodern health care devices, transport and communication are amidst the innumerable advancements. Sports and recreation have assumed universal recognition and put people and languages closer than religious pilgrimages. These seem to satiate humans' material needs, thereby redirecting the world's desire to secularism with science and technology as the pillars that support the world today. Notwithstanding, in the deepest secrets of the human's heart is the fear of the unknown and the unexplainable realities surrounding human life, death and the afterlife.

All human societies have speculated about death and the afterlife because it is one of the mysteries that human understanding is still struggling to unravel. As Dyrness puts it "when the gods created man they passed out death to him. Life they kept in one hand".² Death is understood as part of creation hence it is the natural end of life on earth, yet it is not welcomed with smile even at fulfilled age; the visitation of death is always a misery.

² William Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1977), 237.

The thanatologist in his quest to study the medical, psychological and sociological aspects of death and the ways in which people deal with it, have not been able to disentangle the mystery of human death and afterlife. The question is, what happens when we die? The ideals, mores, myths and values about death vary with cultures and in different epochs. Culture's conception of death and afterlife goes beyond secularism, scientific and technological explanations, into the scope of philosophy and religion. The belief that the human being is not just a corporeal manifestation, but of soul and spirit permeate human cultures and religious beliefs.

“There are many, and often complicated ceremonies connected with death, burials, funerals, inheritance, and the living dead, among others.”³ This is due to the fact that the human being, dead or alive is a complex manifestation of entanglements.

This paper offers a theological examination of necromancy in ancient Israel and its parallel in Dangme religio-cultural setting about the place of the dead. This endeavour is premised on the questions: Was King Saul's encounter with the spirit of Samuel, rhetoric or realistic? Why was necromancy considered a theological aberrant in biblical theology? What form or nature is life after death? Should theology identify rational grounds for accepting or rejecting the messages from the dead? The Deuteronomistic historian's narrative of King Saul's necromantic inquiry at En-Dor and its sensitivities in biblical history is carefully engaged as the background to the deliberation along with necromantic theories of the of the place of the dead and afterlife in Dangme religious and cultural settings.

African Cultural Antiquity

Necromancy etymologically is from two Greek words *nekros* and *manteia*. *Nekrovor nekros* means ‘deadbody,’ and *manteia* ‘divination or prophecy.’ Necromancy therefore is a form of

³ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya Ltd., 1969), 149.

magical practice that involves communicating with a dead or deceased person's spirit as an apparition or bodily for the purpose of divination, in order to foretell future events or discover hidden knowledge.

Communicating with the 'spirit of the dead' is as old as human history and prevails in most human cultures. The belief in spirits of deceased persons permeates most cultures. Necromancy was widespread in primeval worlds with records of its practice in ancient Egypt, Babylon, Greece among other nations, and yet necromancers had not been an organised group. Practitioners exhibit special knowledge in the areas such as: speaking with the dead, identifying criminals, finding lost items revealing future events, and so on. Necromancy now describes manoeuvring the spirit of deceased persons by demonic forces to ascertain hidden information. *An Encyclopaedia of Occultism* states:

The art is of almost universal usage. Considerable difference of opinion exists among modern adepts as the exact methods to be properly pursued in the necromantic art, and it must be borne in mind that necromancy, which in the Middle Ages was called *sorcery*, shades into modern spiritualistic practice. There is no doubt, however, necromancy is the touch – stone of occultism, for if, after careful preparation the adept can carry through to a successful issue, the raising of the soul from the other world, he has proved the value of his art⁴.

Most African⁵ communities believe that the human being is not just a corporeal manifestation but has complex component

⁴ Spencer, *An Encyclopaedia of Occultism*, 286

⁵ African, here used in this paper, describes the second largest continent with its indigenous people, especially those that dwell south of the Sahara Desert. The African here refers to the black ethnic groups in the sub-Saharan region with interrelated culture, traditions, languages,

of immortality. The soul and the spirit of the human live on even if the mortal body perish in death. Death necessarily does not end the life of the African, rather when death occurs, the deceased person becomes a spirit being and can be invited into the affairs of the living. Death and the beliefs surrounding it raise religious and theological convictions in life after death. Africans believe that in the passage to death, God the Almighty, grants special power to the living dead for the sake of their families on earth.⁶ The deceased persons take on a spirit form and remain closely connected with the physical world spiritually. The spirits of the dead persons are communicated with as though they are still living. Among a West African people called the Dangme,⁷

⁶ Moses Matonya, *Real Power: Jesus Christ's Authority over the Spirits*, (Oasis International Ltd., 2008), 7.

⁷ Dangme are a West African people dwelling in modern Ghana and they are about the third largest ethnic group in southern Ghana aside *Akan* and *Ewe*. There are eight tribes forming the Dangme State and these are:

Adaa, Nugo, Gbugbla, Kpom, Sâ, Yilô-Klo, Manya-Klo and *Osudoku*; anglicised as: Ada, Ningo, Prampram, Kpone, Shai, YiloKrobo, ManyaKrobo and Osudoku respectively. The first four tribes are situated along the eastern coast of Ghana, sandwiched between the *Ewe* tribes and the *Ga* people. The other four are interior mountain dwellers also located between the Akan tribes; *Akyem, Akuapem* and *Akwamu*. They occupy the Eastern Region and the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The Dangme tribes predominantly have fishing, farming, weaving, and carving as their occupation and their language is Dangme. Dangme society in general is patrilineal, yet with a form of matrilineal. Patrilineal in short means: a child belongs to, enjoys first right and owes first duties to his paternal agnatic kin. In the patrilineal system of inheritance, emphasis is placed on legitimacy of the child's procreators, since descent is traced through the father. On the contrary, a relationship in which the essential marital rites are not performed, a child born out of that relationship is not an

worldviews, religious practices, historical experiences, social ideologies and many others. The researcher is not ignorant of the Arab nations occupying Northern Africa; such do not fall within the definition of African in this context.

illegitimate-child, since he or she inherits a kind of matrilineal inheritance. During the process of its development, Dangme suffered inconsistencies in its spelling such as: Adagbe, Adangbe, Adangme or Ada`me. Older manuscripts and books have these variant spellings.

whenever someone of minor⁶ age dies, it is understood that some mystical forces must have killed him or her. The respective inquiry as to the particular cause of death is hardly ever omitted in this case. They may ask the dying person himself or herself; they may as is normally done, consult a diviner. The diviner is believed to know the way of getting in contact with the spirit of the deceased so to inquire of him or her, the cause of the death.⁹

Thegbalô⁷ diviner or necromancer is able to consult the spirit of the deceased person to speak to critical issues such as what killed him or her, how the funeral rite should be conducted, finding lost items, revealing future, and speaking the truth about pertinent issues of concern to the family.

There are several ways by which the dead are summoned by the necromancers; at death, the deceased is asked of the cause of his or her death and there are some rites to be performed before the burial. On the other hand, after burial, the spirit could be consulted before the funeral rite is performed. Again, the deceased could be summoned after burial and funeral rites to tell about bothering issues of family and tribal concern. Thus the deceased person's spirit does foretelling and forth telling.

Biblical Prohibitions on Necromancy

For whatever reason, *Yhwh* the holy One of Israel prohibits the congregation of the marching Israelites from the practice of necromancy and to sever ties with people who practice such. There are several biblical references that emphatically stressed that

⁶ Minor here means an age may be up to seventy and more, depending on the person's physical strengths and social status at the time of death.

⁹ Hugo Huber, *The Krobo: Traditional Social and Religious Life of a West African People*, (Fribourg: St. Paul's Press, 1973), 194.

⁷ *Gbalô* is the Dangme word for necromancer, a diviner, soothsayer or a prophet.

necromancy and the likes must be abhorred by the congregation of Israel. The following Pentateuchal texts suggests that YHWH's explicitly warns the marching Israelites against diviners, necromancers, mediums, soothsayers, witches, wizards, sorcerers, even before they inherit the Promise Land. YHWH prescribed capital punishment to offenders of these stipulations.

The following Pentateuchal texts suggest YHWH's displeasure with practitioners of necromancy:

“Do not turn to mediums or wizards; do not seek them out, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God. (Lev 19:31)

If a person turns to mediums and wizards, playing the harlot after them, I will set my face against that person, and will cut him off from among his people (Lev 20:6). A man or a woman who is a medium or a wizard shall be put to death; they shall be stoned with stones, their blood shall be upon them (Lev 20:27).

There shall not be found among you any one who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination, a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer (Deut 18:10-11).”⁸

The Pericope

The fulcrum of any theological discourse on necromancy in Old Testament scholarship is the Deuteronomistic historian's narrative of King Saul's encounter with the deceased spirit of Samuel at Endor (1Sam 28:3-19). In 1 Samuel 28:3-19, the *locus classicus* for any examination of necromancy in the Hebrew Bible, Saul goes to a necromancer, a “spiritist,” in order to conduct a séance in which he converses with the deceased Samuel.⁹ The role of Samuel in the religious and political history of Israel is enormous. He was a priest, seer, judge, king maker, custodian of the monarchy and an author of the books that bears his name. But

⁸ The biblical texts are not analysed exegetically since that is not the focus of the paper. They are cited to buttress YHWH's strong detest and severe condemnation for necromancy and the likes.

⁹ Bill T. Arnold, “Necromancy and Cleromancy in 1 and 2 Samuel” *CBQ* 66 (2004), 200.

the fact that Samuel is regarded as the author testifies to his stature as the most important person in the Old Testament after Moses.¹⁰

1 Samuel 25:1 (*wayyamots^emu'el*) and Samuel died.... Thus the text reports the death and burial of Samuel at Ramah. The sad event of Samuel's demise has been emphasized at the beginning of the pericope as a lucid explanation (*usemu'el mot...*) The Samuel had died... (28: 3a). The preceding text is not too clear and contains many gaps that give no cues to understanding of the pericope. For instance, when and why did Saul had put away *spiritists* and necromancers out of Israel (28:3b)? Was Saul suspicious that some *spiritists* will be hiding in Israel? Has his servant ever consulted the witch at En-Dor and how did he get to know of her? The final literary form of the text contains numerous "gaps," more than are customary even for ancient Hebrew narrative, in which such gapping is a standard feature.¹¹ These gaps are many and raise critical questions such as: has Saul ever engaged the service of a necromancer? As if he knows exactly what to do (28:8b). Why did the necromancer fear she will be put to death (28:9)? Why did the necromancer cried out when Samuel appeared (28:12)? How did Samuel's appearance divulge Saul's identity to the necromancer (28:12)? Are the dead still in the ground (28:13)? Are the dead clad in the shroud they were buried with (28:14)? Did the spirit of Samuel really recognise Saul (28:16)? Can the dead remember all that happened during their life on earth (28:17-18)? Does the spirit of the dead predict the future (28:19)? Then is necromancy efficacious?

Textual Analysis

The pericope re-echoed 'and Samuel died' (*us^amuel mot*). Samuel, the prophetic source of divine guidance and the custodian of the monarchy is no more. Arnold opines that the re-announcement of

¹⁰GbileAkanni and Nupanga Weanzana, "1 and 2 Samuel" in TokunbohAdeyemo (Gen. Ed.) *African Bible Commentary* Nairobi, (Kenya: Word Alive Publishers, 2006), 325.

¹¹Arnold, 200.

Samuel's death is the narrator's way of *reorienting* the reader and preparing for what follows.¹² Earlier, in his reign, Saul had expelled the mediums from the land (*w^esa'ulhesirha'obotw^e'ethayidd^e 'onimmeha'aresh*). Two terminologies (*ha'obot*) 'the mediums' and (*hayyidd^e*) 'the spiritists' projects Saul as subservient to Pentateuchal stipulations, oriented towards the sanctification of the congregation of Israel. But when Saul saw the Philistine army, he sought YHWH for assistance but everywhere seems silent, hence Saul lost every channel with the YHWH's guidance and direction. He could not go to the priests for Doeg the Edomite had killed eighty-five priests and also struck the priestly city of Nob at Saul's command (cf. 1 Sam 22:16-19). He knows that Samuel dwells in 'shades of sheol.'¹³ But how was he to meet Samuel? By necromancy – that is by devilry! At En-Dor, there is a woman possessor of an *Ob* or the spirit by which the dead can be conjured up to whom Saul commanded (*w^eha'ali li 'et 'aser-'omar 'elayik*) 'and bring up for me the one I shall name to you'!

(*s^emu'elha'ali-li*) 'bring up for me Samuel.' The woman, possessor of an *Ob* said to Saul I see a god coming out of the ground/earth. (*'elohimra'iti 'olim min-ha'ares*). Commenting on the '*elohim* Edersheim writes:

The expression '*elohim*, here refers not to a divine but to a supernatural appearance, indicating its *character* as not earthly. But in that supernatural light, she has also recognized her visitor as the King of Israel. Verses 13 and 14 show that Saul had not himself seen the apparition. The question whether the vision of the woman was objective or subjective, is

¹²Arnold, 205.

¹³Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Apollos. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 288.

really of no importance whatever. Suffice that it was *real*, and came to her *ab extra*.¹⁴

Unfortunately, no text explicitly excludes necromancy from monotheistic or monolatrous concerns. Though necromancy is depicted as an act of disloyalty to Yahweh (Deut 18:13, for instance, an attempt to circumvent the limits he places on revelation; cf. Deut 18, Isa 8:16-20), this disloyalty could be a matter of mere disobedience and not necessarily false worship.¹⁵ Commenting on (28:3b), Toorn writes:

Necromancy being intimately related with the cult of the dead (it is conceived of as a consultation of the *ha'obot*, the departed fathers, in 1 Samuel 28:3), it could be seen as a form of divination legitimized by the ideology of family religion. In that capacity, necromancy was a potential threat to the stability of royal rule. The ancestors might inspire resistance to the leadership of national administration, or even format revolution. The suppression of necromancy was not an act of disinterested piety on the part of Saul, but an attempt to secure the state monopoly on divination.¹⁶

The account of Saul's visit to En-Dor assumes that Saul truly communicated with Samuel, consistently referring to the

¹⁴ Alfred Edersheim, *Bible History Old Testament* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Handrickson Publishers Inc., 2009), 504-5.

¹⁵ Hugo Enrique Mendez, 'Condemnation of Necromancy in the Hebrew: An Investigation of Rational.' An Unpublished Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Georgia in partial fulfilment for the Degree Master of Arts, Athens Georgia 2009, 54

¹⁶ Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel* (Leiden: EJ Brill Press, 1996), 318 - 9

(*'elohim*) raised by the medium as “Samuel.” Accordingly, one cannot assume the inefficacy of the practice from its condemnation.¹⁷

Dangme Religio-Cultural Setting

The Dangme are a religiously pluralistic people hence it is impossible to have a pre-westernized Dangme who is an atheist or one who does not owe allegiance to any deity. As African people, the Dangme traditional religions cannot be defined, but rather be described, because it has no limits and boundaries. The Dangme believe in *Mau*¹⁸ the creator God who is known among them as God or *Laosiada*.¹⁹ However, *Nyingmo*²⁰ could be the aboriginal name but it is rarely mentioned among them.²¹ Again the creator God among the Dangme has no priests, priestesses, prophets, prophetess nor its own servants. But this creator God is prominently commemorated and officially invoked during public worship and prayers. When the Dangme are offering public

¹⁷Mendez, ‘Condemnation of Necromancy in the Hebrew, 49.

¹⁸*Mawuis* the name of the Supreme Being among the Ewe speaking tribes. *Mawu* has an Ewe origin which means ‘the one who surpasses all, in wisdom, strength, might, glory, honour etc. *Mawu* is different from *etrô*, *vodu* etc. *Mawu* etymologically does not make any meaning in Dangme, the mother dialect of Krobo.

¹⁹J. Abedi-Boafo, *Dangme Nyaii: Classical and Idiomatic Dangme*, (Accra: Bureau of Ghana Languages, 1980), 85. *Laosiada* has been spelt as ‘*Lao Siada*’, and translated as ‘The Gracious Father; the Bountiful Giver’ *Laosiada* is an appellation used to qualify the name of the Supreme Being such as *LaosiadaNyingmo*, or *Laosenyingmo*.

²⁰*Nyingmois* found among the Dangme as the original name of God and *Nyingmo* is similar to the Ga name of God; Nyôgmô.

²¹J. Zimmermann, *A Grammatical Sketch of the Akra or Ga-Language and Some Specimens of it from the mouth of the Natives with Adan`me Appendix*. Stuttgart: J.F. Steinkopf, 1858. In this book *Mawu* is found as the name of God, may be because the Ga people also have *Mawu* in their vocabulary.

prayers, which is done by a priest of a deity, or a family head, they mention the names of the objects of worship according to their supremacy. It can be explained and defended that the Dangme has no religion, but a religious life brought forth from generation to generation as they attempt to interact with reality and truth. Traditional religions like cultures grow and when indigenous traditional religion encounters a modern religion, the indigenous religion is sometimes suppressed and killed. This has been the case of the Dangme in the light of its encounter with Westernization and foreign religions. Opoku views African Traditional Religion as one that:

Hardly needs pointing out, [it] is part of the religious heritage of humankind. Born out of the experience and deep reflection of our forebearers, it provides answers to the deep stirring of the human spirit and elaborates on the profundity of experiences of divine-human encounter based on the resources of Africa's own cultural heritage and insight. It also provides answers to the ultimate question posed by men and women in Africa, gives meaning and significance to human life; explains the origin and destiny of human beings, how everything in the world came into being and the relationship that should exist between them. In short, it is Africa's own way of coming to terms with reality.²²

In the excerpt, Opoku tries to describe what African Traditional Religion meant to the African. He writes an apologetic of African tradition religion calling it an ending heritage. In this regard, it is believed that there

²²K. A. Opoku, *African Traditional Religion: An Ending Heritage in Religious Plurality in Africa* in Jacob K. Olupona, and Sulayman S. Nyang (eds) *Essays in Honour of John S. Mbiti*, (New York: Mouton De Gruyter, 1993), 67.

can be no African traditional religion but rather, African traditional religious life. This is to say that every tribe in Africa has its own religious beliefs and cultures which define the tribe's being. The fact remains that no single tribe's religion can stand to represent the whole of the African continent. Africa practices traditional religion. Rather than it being just a doctrine, it is expressed well as Ojike adduces, "if religion consists of deifying one character and crusading around the world to make him acceptable to all mankind, then the African has no religion. But if religion means doing rather than talking, then the African has a religion."²³ It could be deduced that Africa's religions are more ritualistic than ceremonial and that is what Dangme traditional religious life stands to represent.

Another religious phenomenon that is unique to the Dangme is the worship of *Jemawô*²⁴. These cannot be called fetish; rather they are traditionally major deities so to speak. *Jemawô*(singular) and *Jemawôhi* (plural) can be described as supernatural forces. Field describes them as powerful type of intelligent *wô`*,²⁵ not specialized in activities but practically omnipotent and omniscient. *Jemawô* comes and goes like the wind.²⁶ Etymologically, it may be '*jemâ a wô*, which may mean the deities of this world. Huber explains the etymology as *dâemi* (in the world) and *wô* (deity) as the meaning of guardian hence he

²³M. Ojike, *My Africa* (New York: John Day, 1946), 18.

²⁴*Jemawô* has been explained as major deities, or traditional deity. See M.E. KroppDakubu, 'Dangme-English Dictionary Draft' (Legon: NYP, 2013), 41.

²⁵M.J. Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 4.

Wô` and *dâemawô`* are after the *Ga* spellings among whom the study was conducted. It is written *wô* and *jemawô* with modern Dangme orthography. Hugo Huber, however spelt it *dâemawôhi* (plural) and *dâemawô* (singular) with old Dangme orthography.

²⁶M.J. Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 4.

concludes that *jemawô* can be translated as ‘guardians in the world.’ From the translations, deity or deities of this world sounds more appropriate compared to ‘guardians in the world as translated by Huber. The question about the origin of the *jemawôhi*, almost always receives one response as God gave them to the Dangme to worship. Another observable fact in Dangme religious life is *wô*, a kind of deity as explained in the Pentateuch ‘and there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of men's hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell (Deut 4:28).

Dangme Ancestral Cult

Prominent to the religious life of the Dangme is the ancestral cult (the veneration of the dead). Dangme as an African society is made up of the unborn, the living and the dead; however spiritual power rests upon the dead –*ancestors*. “They exercise control over the living; all life exists under their surveillance. They are treated with awe, fear, reverence, respect, veneration, occasionally worshipped.”²⁷ The Dangme believe that in the passage to death, God the Almighty grants special power to the living-dead (ancestors) for the sake of their families on earth. With this power, the ancestors can mediate between God and the people of their families; thus the living and the unborn. They are believed to possess the power to bless and curse and they are the unseen hosts in every African home. Gyekye adduces that to be an ancestor one must qualify as a “moral paragon”²⁸ and not necessarily having children as some writers suggested.

In the public prayer²⁹ of the Dangme, ancestors are the third in the hierarchy of prayer and are immortalized by giving

²⁷David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movement*, (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968), 119.

²⁸Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*. Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996, p. 36.

²⁹Dangmes offer public prayers during social gatherings and in such prayers, the names of the deities to whom the prayers are offered are

their names to new born family members. They believe that once a child is given an ancestor's name, the child possessed the spirit of the person. Therefore, family members who have been corrupt, lazy, immoral, wicked and involved in other social vices die with their names.

The Cult of the Dead

'*Gbogboe hi a je* or *Gbeje*' literally means the world of the dead. The same name will mean *sheol* in Hebrew. The Dangme believe that it is the human body that perishes at death, but the soul goes out in the form of *mumi* (literally meaning spirit or breath) to a place where another form of life exists. At death, the soul departs in a form of spirit or breath to *gbeje*, a stopover kind of place. At *gbeje*, the soul is known as *kpade* (revenant) and waits a form of judgement from the *Nimeli*(ancestors) who are just in their verdict. The revenant hovers between 'the land of the dead' and 'the land of the living' as it awaits the jury's verdict. They believe these two worlds are in constant interaction with each other; hence the dead are always invited into the affairs of the living. The Dangme culture considers the knowledge of the dead to be infinite and their counsels are based on their previous experiences and knowledge acquired in life.

There are several ways by which the dead are consulted. The very commonest is through incantations during libation and through necromancy, where the soul or spirit give information about what killed them, and how their funeral should be conducted.

When death occur, the *nôpulô* (the one whose duty in the family is to bury the deceased person) is informed and

mentioned in a hierarchical order as: *Nyigmo Mau* - the Creator God; *Nyigmozu* - the Earth Goddess; *Jemawôhi* - Territorial deities; *Nimeli* Ancestors or the Living Dead.

he³⁰ summon all people concern for a meeting. At that meeting, three or more men are chosen and send with the instruction: *Nyâyagbanânyâya bi ninâwa le nônâgbelâkânônâ e sanâwa pee!* (Go to the necromancer and inquire of him what killed him/her and we should do?). This happens at a death of someone whose death was unexpected or a younger person. Huber writes: If death thus comes to a person at old age, it is rather taken as something unavoidable, natural, *e be su* (his or her time has come). But whenever someone of minor age dies, it is understood that some mystical agent must have killed him. The respective enquiry as to the particular cause of death is hardly ever omitted in this case. They may ask the dying person himself; they may as it is normally done, consult a diviner. The diviner is believed to know the way of getting in contact with the spirit of the deceased, so as to enquire from him the cause of his death.³¹ This means that necromancy is part of the traditional Dangme cultural setting. It is only with a strong Christian presence that necromancy is omitted. This brings rift in the family as some opt that a diviner is consulted to hear from the deceased person's spirit, while others mainly staunch Christians also object to the proposal.

As part of preparing the corpse for burial, the deceased is washed and adored with specific items for diverse reasons. The corpse is adorned with a family bead and a piece of cloth from his or her family lineage. The purpose is easy identification by the ancestral community of his or her lineage to welcome him or her home. Again the deceased person is given gifts for other relatives. Further, the corpse is adorned with pricey apparel to give him or her, a worthy appearance when entering the ancestral community.

³⁰Thenôpulô is always a male and the head of a *we* (a larger patriarchal extended family). This is so because Dangme is a patriarchal society just like Israel.

³¹Huber, *The Krobo*, 194. Cf. J. E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, 'Dangme Biblical Hermeneutics: A Case of the New Testament in Dangme' A Doctoral thesis, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, 2015, 28-31.

The ancestors have the power to bless and curse, to save and to kill, to heal and to afflict with sickness; and whether to accept the deceased being sent to them or not. Geographically, they believe that *gbeje* is beyond *wo se*, the oceans or the seas. Therefore, when a person dies and is about to be buried, money and some items are put in the coffin of the deceased, to enable the departing relative pay the ferry charge so that he or she will be ferried across the oceans and live there with the items. But the dead can be at *gbeje* and oversee the world of the living.

They can be called to help the living solve problems, through a necromancer. It is often heard in Dangme prayer to the dead that: *Ke o ya a n̄o ya da wo kpongun̄n̄o gbaaw̄*³² [When you get there, stand on an Isle in the sea and bless us]. After the judgement from the *Nimeli*, the soul passes to the next stage, *An̄ we* or *Boso we*.³³

Theological Examination

In the light of the above premise, it is possible to critically examine the theological parallel in the pericope and that of Dangme religio-cultural setting.

What Form or Nature is Life After Death?

In 1 Samuel 28:13-14, Samuel obeys Saul's summons; and unmistakable, he appears, as he was wont in life, wrapped in his prophet's *meil* or mantle. The woman sees the apparition, and from her description Saul has no difficulty in recognising Samuel.³⁴ It is not too clear what really happens when death occurs, but from the pericope, Saul, the desperate King says 'bring up the one I require...., bring up Samuel. The necromancer says 'I

³² T.T. Terkpertey, *Dangme BleboN̄o: Dangme Culture* Volume One, (Odumase-Krobo: Universal Printing Press, 2004), 15.

³³ *An̄we aloo Boso we*; this means *An̄'shome* or *Boso'shome*. This rhetorical question is asked by mourners and sympathizers when someone dies, as to where the person's soul will spend eternity? It is not too clear which place represents punishment and which is for reward.

³⁴ Edersheim, *Bible History Old Testament*, 504-5.

see a god coming out of the ground.’ The idea that the deceased rises from the ground reflects the concept of Sheol as a place for the dead beneath the earth to which people descend at death. Johnston observe that:

Sheol is primarily the place of the unrighteous dead or those who die before their time as a result of sin (pp. 69-97). Thus Jacob speaks of going down to Sheol when hears of the premature death of his favoured son Joseph. However, when he goes to Egypt and is restored to his son there is no longer any talk of Sheol. Most biblical references where a specific destiny is described mention it as the place of the ungodly (Num. 16:30, 33; 1 Kings 2:6, 9; etc.). Others focus on it as a place of deceit or a place where all appear to go (Psa. 89:48; Eccl. 7:10). Hezekiah, Job, and Psaalm88:3 interpret Sheol, like Jacob, as a destiny because of divine judgment. Indeed, Psalm 88 and other Psalms (as well as Jonah 2:2) seem to portray the psalmist as in Sheol.³⁵

Sheol is an intermediate state in which souls are dealt with according to their lives on earth. In the Old Testament, Sheol is used in six ways:

- It is a place from which no one can save himself or herself. Once there, a person has no hope of returning to the realm of the living. There is no activity of work, planning, knowledge or wisdom (89:48; Job 7:9; 17:13-16 Eccl 9:10).
- A place where all people will go upon death ‘I will go down to Sheol’(Gen. 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31).

³⁵Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 2002.

- A place where the wicked go upon death ‘the steps and the house of an adulteress leads to Sheol (Job 21:13; 24:19; Ps 9:17; 31:17; 49:14).
- A place from which the righteous are saved and moreover Sheol has no lasting hold on the righteous because God will ransom from its power and He will not abandon the righteous in Sheol (Ps 49:15;86:13; Prov. 15:24; Hos. 13:14; Ps 16:10).
- A place over which God has absolute sovereignty and no one can escape from God in Sheol (Amos 9:2), because it is God who brings people down to Sheol (1 Sam 2:6).
- There are many other figurative expressions where Sheol is used as image of greed, murder, jealousy, troubles of life, near-death situations and great sin (Hab. 2:5; Prov. 1:12; 27:20; 30:16; Song 8:6; Ps 88:3; 18:5; 30:3; 116:3; Jonah 2:2).³⁶

Sheol therefore means a place of the dead, though not the final destination of the human soul but a transit kind of place where both the righteous and the wicked go from this earth. The above clarification about Sheol is similar to the Dangme orientation of *gbeje*. The Dangme believe there is a kind of life at Sheol where the dead can be invited into the affairs of the living.

Should Theology Identify Rational Grounds for Accepting or Rejecting the Messages from the Dead?

The question is: are the answers from the spirit dead of the dead true, factual, reliable? If yes, then it is possible that it can be an alternative source of knowing the secret mind of the things of the spirits.

³⁶W.A Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Second Ed.) Michigan: Grand Rapids, 2006), 1099.

YHWH's silence is an indication of sin and disloyalty on the part of Israel hence Israel's attempt to practise necromancy means their unreadiness to show penitence and ask for forgiveness. Whether the messages from the spirit of the dead are factual or not, is not the matter, rather the disconnection from YHWH. Considering the extract:

And Samuel said, "Why then do you ask me, since the LORD has turned from you and become your enemy? The LORD has done to you as he spoke by me; for the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand, and given it to your neighbor, David. Because you did not obey the voice of the LORD, and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek, therefore the LORD has done this thing to you this day. Moreover, the LORD will give Israel also with you into the hand of the Philistines; and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me; the LORD will give the army of Israel also into the hand of the Philistines." (1 Sam 28:16-19, RSV).

The extract substantiates that the messages from the dead spirits are true. The dead spirit of Samuel identified Saul and remembered their conversations during Samuel's time on earth. The spirit was able to predict the future events of Israel and Saul's family. The dead spirit of Samuel further, assured Saul that he and his sons will be at Sheol the next day.

It remains that countless Bible Commentaries concludes that the *elohim* that interacted with the ill-fated King Saul was an evil spirit from Satan; it is the position of this paper that the *elohim* was really the spirit of Samuel. Arnold accentuates: specifically in relations to the worship of ancestors, such comparative research has confirmed that the dead could be referred to as "gods" in an

attempt to describe some type of transcendent character that existed beyond the natural realm (the preternatural).³⁷

In the Dangme religio-cultural setting, ancestral veneration is an intrinsic aspect and the ancestors. *Nimeli*, are accorded same honour as *Jemawôômâ* (the major deities). The issue of accepting their messages is paramount on the grounds that rejection means disaster, usually death. Hence the Dangme is always anxious to hear from the *nimeli*.

Was King Saul's Encounter with the Spirit of Samuel, Rhetoric or Realistic?

The pericope assumes that the encounter between Saul and the revenant at En-Dor was a reality rather than rhetoric. Arnold writes:

Beyond a military crisis, the occasions when some Israelites might turn to ancestor-related necromancy include especially the times when YHWH has ceased to provide much-needed information, which, I will argue, is precisely the canonical function of the episode at Endor as it has been edited by the Deuteronomistic historian. Thus far we have demonstrated that the narrative gathers as much terminology as was available to denote necromancy and does this repeatedly. The rhetorical effect is that the reader cannot avoid the conclusion that the king of Israel has indeed resorted to necromancy.³⁸

The argument is buttressed by the fact that it is possible to communicate with the spirit of the dead through séance. The fact remains that the act of necromancy was strongly opposed and prohibited by YHWH; however, it does not mean that the spirit of

³⁷Arnold, 203.

³⁸Arnold, 204.

the dead would not respond to any summons by the living. Also the pericope lends credence to the fact that necromancy and all other forms of divinations were obtainable in ancient Israel to allow them to acquire any spiritual assistance if the voice of YHWH is rare or YHWH has decided to be silent through His approved media.

The Dangme culture *perse* endorses necromancy and it is the advent of Christianity that has relegated the practice to be part non-Christian families. The irony is that at the demise of a staunch Christian, the family may opt to conduct séance if the family so wish.³⁹

Many Christians may reject necromancy not on grounds that it is demon summoning; the art of necromancy exists as a separate entity from demon summoning. Although necromancy is prohibited in the Bible, it is real along with other facets of mystical forces. Even though necromancy though exists, it should be rejected on grounds of inefficacy. It is very difficult to mention that necromancy may not necessarily be idol worship, though the diviner may be an idol worshipper, witch or magician. Dangme and Israel have many cultural identities and necromancy is one of such. In 1 Samuel 3:1, (ûdübar-yhwhhâyâqär) the word of the

LORD ‘was precious,’ and Israel might have survived the silence of YHWH through necromancy and the likes.

Why was necromancy considered a theological aberrant in biblical theology?

³⁹ Tetteh Fiorgbor’s father died on Friday, 19th March 2010 at age seventy-two and at the time he was the secretary to the Men’s Fellowship; my mother is a Catechist at her church; one of Tetteh’s elder brothers pastors a Fellowship in Southampton UK and Tetteh was in the final year at the Seminary. Irrespective of their strong Christian background, the first official meeting with the *nôpulô*, suggested that a séance be conducted ascertain the cause of the death. But the children strongly aborted the idea. His comment was ‘if something happens to him after the burial, you would be held responsible.’

There might be several reasons why necromancy was considered abominable act before YHWH. Kaiser in a commentary on Isaiah 1-12, suggests that condemnations of necromancy should be interpreted in light of the Levitical purity law that it is impurity emanating from everything connected with the dead; anyone who had traffic with the spirit of the dead also becomes unclean.⁴⁰ The proposal means that the Holy One of Israel required that Israel be a holy nation unto Him, because YHWH, the God of Israel is a holy God. Their being distinguished from all other nations by peculiar ceremonial laws and customs was intended to separate Israel unto God alone as a holy nation, entirely devoted to the worship and service of YHWH alone. Holiness is an attribute of YHWH that must find expression in the daily activities of the community. Based on this premise, YHWH warn Israel through Moses; saying “do not turn to mediums or wizards; do not seek them out, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God (Lev 19:31). Necromancy therefore is depicted as an act of disloyalty to YHWH because it is disobedience. In fact, it is not too easy to accept necromancy as false worship.

Hugo in his thesis stressed that; no biblical text explicitly links necromancy to the threat of cultic impurity. It is therefore safer to assert that the impurity attached to the realm of the dead does not seem to have a controlling concern in the prohibitions of necromancy.⁴¹ This explains that YHWH though expect holiness from the congregation of Israel, this holiness must be in the form of ‘being loyal’ to the ceremonial laws and customs. Hence the abomination of condemning necromancy is based on its link with disloyalty to the moral and religious codes presented to Israel in relation to being YHWH’s elect.

⁴⁰ Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*. The Old Testament Library. Tr. John Bowden, (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox, 1983), 201.

⁴¹ Hugo Enrique Mendez,

Conclusion

The Old Testament texts discussed in this paper has shown that act of necromancy was strongly opposed and prohibited by YHWH; however, it does not mean that the spirit of the dead would not respond to any summons by the living. In Dangme communities, necromancy is practised in spite of the presence of Christianity, which seems to relegate it to the background. There is always a division at the demise of a family member, who is a Dangme first before becoming a Christian. Should a diviner be consulted to ascertain his or her death, and seek information as to how the funeral should be conducted or not? This is not just a rhetorical question but a realistic one that calls for a dialogue between Christianity and Dangme cultures.

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