

THE GOOD DEATH:
PERSONAL SALVATION AND COMMUNITY IDENTITY

I. *Introduction : The Concept of the Good Death*

In Portugal and Brazil, Nosso Senhor do Bom Fim, or Nossa Senhora da Boa Morte, are addressed in prayer and have churches and chapels dedicated to them. This would seem to be the remnant of a much wider worship throughout the Catholic world, that in the Portuguese case takes a very concrete form, with statues and churches erected as symbols of the concern prominent in the Middle Ages of 'making a good death'.¹ In the area of Geres there are chapels dedicated to Our Lady of the Good Death (e.g. in Covide) and there are chapels to the same saint in the area of Guimaraes and Amarante as well. Villagers throughout the north often make dedications and *promessas* to either Senhor Jesus da Boa Morte or to Nossa Senhora da Boa Morte. The medieval notion of the good death involved resisting the temptation to despair or pride, together with sincere

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¹ Cf. Philippe Ariès (*L'Homme devant la mort*, Paris: Seuil 1977) for an account of attitudes to dying from the Middle Ages to the 20th century.

repentance for sins committed. Apart from the metaphysical aspects, there was also a very practical side to a good death; dying with good warning, in bed, enabled one to prepare for death with the appropriate, traditional ceremony and to do a public accounting - forgiving enemies, blessing friends and children, and paying off one's debts. Villagers in some areas of northern Portugal retain this total concept as a cultural ideal. It is considered a terrible thing to die away from the family, away from the village or as now happens, away from Portugal. Those who die suddenly, or in an accident, are especially mourned. A man should die in his home, surrounded by family and neighbours, and with time to settle his affairs, both spiritual and temporal. To receive the Last Sacraments, to establish the number of masses to be said for one's soul and the dedication of the masses to particular saints is still important to many villagers. Involved in the concept of the good death are a complex of factors, both spiritual and practical, that imply organising the end of life in strict accordance with the accepted religious and social norms that continue through life. Thus a man who dies after a long life, leaving industrious children, no debts, his land already apportioned to his heirs, with no dispute overhanging his property, and fortified with the rites of the Roman Catholic church, is thought by fellow-villagers to have done well and achieves a certain respect and even a little envy of his good fortune in arranging his end so satisfactorily. In this way the 'good death' constitutes a cultural ideal.

Dying well, like living well, is not a solitary activity; one needs partners, accomplices, witnesses. The 'good death' involves not just the principal actor but the supporting cast who must fulfil their roles on his behalf. Relatives who fail to fulfil the religious ceremonies of death, burial or the subsequent obligations can condemn their kinsman to an unhappy post-life existence. For a 'good death' one needs the co-operation of one's kin. Dying away from the village is regarded as an especial sadness and the dead or dying are brought back to the village for burial if at all possible. Most usually nowadays this means being brought from the hospital as a terminal case, but there have been instances of dying men being brought back from Lisbon or France or even Canada to die at home. Just as the children of migrants to industrialised Europe are returned to the village for baptism, so the dead and the dying are brought back from France to be buried at home. The kin group and the small community welcomes back its own, and in death, the family can be thus assured that the proper rites have been observed.

II. *Rituals of death*

The procedures followed when a death occurs have changed little

over time. Until recently, the church bell would toll out from the moment of death until the grave was closed - to remind others to pray; now it peals only for the time it takes for the body to be taken from the house into the church, marking the transition from the secular world to the religious, tolling an uneven number of peals for a man, and an even number for a woman. Usually, if death occurs at home, burial takes place the following day, and the intervening night is spent by the bereaved and their neighbours in a 'wake' at the house of the dead person. Close friends and neighbours, one from each house, gather together to pray, to cry, to eat and drink and to tell stories of the dead person's life and qualities. The basic ritual prayers are 30 Our Fathers, 30 Hail Marys and 30 Glorias. The atmosphere is one of restrained mourning; there is no singing and only village wine is drunk. Food is brought to the house by each visitor from the other houses in the village, even by those who do not stay the night, so that the widow or widower is free from daily chores for the day of the funeral and several following days, and can then spend all the time grieving. People say that food is sent in by neighbours to avoid 'frying the soul of the dead'. Cooking by the deceased's close kin is to be avoided. Any small children are taken from the house of the dead person into neighbours' homes and do not attend the 'wake' or the funeral the following day.

The burial procession follows a set procedure. It is always led by the village *Procurador*, carrying the large crucifix from the Parish church. Like a church warden, the *Procurador*'s other duties include ringing the bell for mass each week, collecting Easter dues and looking after the collection money. It is an office that rotates between the married heads of houses each year, and refusal to serve carries the penalty of a fine. Behind the *Procurador* comes another household head, carrying the church's banner; then the coffin, carried low by six men including the President of the Parish/Village Council (*Junta*) with one man from each house following on behind. After them come the parish priest and the women. No children walk in the funeral procession, nor do immediate family of the dead person go to the church for 'only those who can trust themselves not to weep go to the church'. As the body is lifted to leave the house, wailing women, relatives and non-relatives of the dead called in on a reciprocal basis, break out into screams and cries that echo through the whole village, as the door and windows of the house are flung open. This formalised wailing accompanies the procession until the funeral mass begins in church. Not everyone nowadays uses the services of wailers; some people feel that it is too distressing while others still think it is a fitting and proper tribute to the dead. Apart from the paid wailers (paid only in food) close female relatives sometimes take part in the 'keening' too. During the requiem mass the coffin is left at the rear of the church surrounded by candles. Although there are more women than men in the congregation - because of migration and conscription - at least one man from each house is present throughout the service. After mass, the whole congregation goes behind the coffin to the

cemetery as before, with the *Procurador* leading the way in procession and the priest bringing up the rear with the women. When the body has been interred with the customary Catholic ritual, the wailing breaks out again and continues until sunset.

After mass, small sums of money are given by relatives of the dead man to local beggars who wail outside the church, and small gifts of food - salt cod, bread or cheese - are distributed afterwards to those attending the service. The mattress and bed-clothes of the deceased are burnt. Funeral processions follow fixed routes to the church, so-called 'sacramental paths', that are the same that should be followed at times of baptisms, weddings and funerals. When people from outlying villages come to the parish church to bury their dead, wooden crosses or twigs mark the places where the coffin can rest on the way, and prayers are recited at each halt. The procession from Vilarinho to Campo, for example, was preceded by a woman who went ahead to the Campo church with an offering (*obrada*) 'for God', received by the priest. The *obrada* consisted of half a *raza* of corn and half a kilo of ham (*toucinho*). The woman who performed this service should not talk to anyone, even the priest, until the dead person was interred.

Burial is not the end of obligations to the dead. Each Sunday after mass anyone who has lost a relative in the previous twelve months goes to the cemetery to pray by the graveside. Nowadays, with the long absences of men from the villages it tends to be women alone who perform this ritual for their in-laws as well as for their own kin. The more recent the bereavement, the less restrained are the manifestations of grief, and newly widowed women will throw themselves prostrate on their husband's grave, eventually to be led away by a neighbour.

Each evening the church bell sounds for the recital of the *Trindades* (an evening Angelus) - three bells for three Ave-Marias plus two long strokes, one for the Holy Souls and the other for 'the sinners of the parish' (*os pecadores mais necessitados da freguesia*). People stop whatever they are doing, and pray for a few moments. Since the bell rings usually at sunset most people are in their homes before eating their evening meal, and traditionally the family prays together, aloud, by the open window, so that the sound of the prayers would be heard rising from all the houses. In recent years, it has become a more private ritual, but most people will still stop what they are doing, in the house or in the fields or in the street; in the cafe, however, life goes on without interruption.

The dead are thus remembered each day through the *Trindades*, and especially on Sundays. They are also commemorated by the wearing of mourning black by their relatives. The degree of kin or affinal ties is reflected directly in the period of time for which mourning is thought proper; as long as seven or ten years for a parent, and two to three years for an in-law. For a husband many widows decide to stay in mourning for the rest of their lives as in the rest of Latin Europe. Older widows also keep up the habit of wearing over their heads the *avental de costas*, a rough-

woven black woollen apron-style shawl. Children's deaths are not commemorated by any of these rituals. No one goes into formal mourning for children; although they receive a requiem mass, only immediate family are expected to attend. The stillborn are, traditionally, but to a lesser extent now than in the past, not even interred in the cemetery but buried in the floor of the *corte* below the house, where the after-birth is customarily buried.

III. *Death Rituals in Historical Perspective : The Religious Background*

Most northern residents are at least nominally Catholic, while outside the cities adherents of other religious faiths are of insignificant number, and the proportion of those actively participant in Catholic religious activities is very high indeed, in many areas representing over 90% of the local population. The district of Braga, whose archbishop was Primate of Iberia, was early on an important religious centre; the diocese was first created in A.D. 37.

At the Council of Braga in 411 the Lusitanian bishops, threatened with invasion by the German tribes, resolved to remove and hide church valuables, such as the bodies or relics of saints, the church silver and statuary, in remote places in the mountains, in caverns or grottoes, where in later centuries their reappearance gave rise to the foundation of shrines and pilgrimage sites.² Despite the Suevic occupation of Braga, the city again became Catholic in 563 A.D. with the conversion of the major Suevi residents. At the second Council of Braga in 610 A.D. the payment of *dízimos* or church tithes was ordered by the bishops, along with the injunction that churches were no longer to be used as burial places, but the dead were to be interred outside the wall of the church. By the eleventh century the dead were again being buried within the church, but it took over 1200 years for the ecclesiastical injunction to become public policy in the 19th century. By 836 the earliest known pilgrimage - to Rome to visit the tombs of Saints Peter and Paul - was again very much alive, and it is probably the origin of the continuing and current practice of rural Portuguese who go on *romaria* (pilgrimage), from the term referring to the ancient pilgrimage, *Romalia*.

Until 1835 there were no public cemeteries in rural Portugal:

² For references to the Bishop's records of hiding places see Padre José de Matos Ferreira, *Thesouro de Braga*, 1728 (Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, MS 583).

all burials took place in the floors or *adros* of churches, and in the private cemeteries of military hospitals and misericords. Only after the cholera epidemic of 1832 were some areas of land blessed for burial. The majority of Portuguese cemeteries are 19th-century or 20th-century in origin: in the rural north many date from the 1920s and 1930s. Church burial was then customary over a long period, and the Health Laws of the 1830s and 1840s provoked rural uprisings in protest against proposed changes in this practice.³ Death and burial practices are part of a value system, a shared world-view common in this case to a large area of upland, frontier Portuguese Galicia.

Religion within the village stresses the importance of local ritual, regional shrines and village pilgrimages, in all of which the priest's presence is important as public functionary. The influence of the national Church or its hierarchy is very low in this area; local attitudes to the Church as an official institution is rather one of opposition, as shown in the hostility to clergy when they refuse to perform traditional services. Local rituals are mainly concerned with protection of the household, cattle and the agricultural enterprise, and are still performed despite the decreasing importance of animals in the local economy and the increasing reluctance of priests to perform them. The strength of local religion in opposition to the national Church is not just provincialism or a quaint survival of 'folkness', but must be seen as integral to the belief placed in the family and the community as a valid religious unit as well as an economic and social unit.

The link between the concept of the 'good death' and other parts of the belief system is clearly seen in the case of the 'wandering souls', those unfortunates who did not have time to settle their accounts before they died, or whose relatives did not fulfil the customary religious requirements regarding burial. 'Wandering souls' who appear as ghosts (*aventesmas/sombras*) or as tormented souls (*almas penadas*) can be encountered at night either outside the village or around the cemetery (which is usually situated either within the village or very close to it), or they appear in dreams at night to a close relative. The three main reasons given for the 'appearance' of 'wandering souls' on earth are that they were left unburied, and so have no resting place, and cannot enter heaven until they have had a Christian burial; or that their kin failed to fulfil the customary ritual; or that they committed some injustice that was not remedied before their death. The most common injustice cited is that of moving boundary stones, so cheating their neighbour of an extra two or

³ See João de Pina-Cabral and Rui Feijó, 'Conflicting Attitudes to Death in Modern Portugal: The Question of Cemeteries', in this issue of *JASO*; also in Rui Feijó, Herminio Martins and João de Pina-Cabral (eds.), *Death in Portugal: Studies in Portuguese Anthropology and Modern History*, Oxford: JASO 1983.

three feet of land; the area involved is always trivial, but the land holdings are small too.

Men do talk of having contact with such souls. *One soul appeared one night to João da Redonda; he recognised it immediately as his dead uncle, who asked him to get out of bed and go with him to the fields. This he did, and once there, his uncle asked him to move a large boundary stone about a metre's distance, so as to satisfy his conscience, for he had moved it in his favour many years before. João did as he was told, and the soul thanked him and disappeared.*

People who see witches or evil spirits are thought to be those who did not have 'proper' baptisms, where some of the words or ritual were missed out by accident, or where words were spoken incorrectly. Conversely, those spirits who wander about on earth are the unhappy dead, or those whose burial ritual was incomplete. These beliefs, though not currently supported by the Church, clearly originate in a period where ritual orthodox observance was heavily stressed, and bring so-called 'pagan' spirit or witchcraft beliefs within the same tradition as more commonly held 'Catholic' beliefs. Animals too could be ill omens if encountered at night: dogs, cats, goats, pigs, cocks, hens can all take on the manifestations of evil spirits at night. As a defence one should carry a mirror, a cross or a rosary at night on the road, and avoid looking at an animal encountered out on its own at night.

Accidental or violent deaths on the mountains also cause unease as it can be several days before the body is recovered, and, apart from possible ravages by dogs or wolves, it means a delay in proper burial that normally would take place on the day following the death. In these cases it is the fact that the proper ritual and order of events has not been observed that causes disquiet; the living continue to have an obligation to the dead, and chief among their obligations is the duty to ensure customary burial.

Belief in life after death is the basis of belief in the suffering souls that haunt the earth, usually because of improper burial, or because of some injustice committed by or against them during their lives. Belief in the Devil, and in the efficacy of exorcism (only recently condemned by the Church) is the orthodox basis for a very strong belief in the more generalised power of evil and the multiplicity of evil spirits. Although the forces of good are commonly believed to appear in physical form with some regularity in the Portuguese tradition - miraculous statues, springs, and the apparitions at Fatima, all with firm credentials from orthodox Catholicism - there is nothing inconsistent in an equally strong belief in the physical manifestations of the forces of evil. And if the forces of good have their human representatives in the saints, priests and *beatas* that function on all societal levels, then witches, as human representatives of the forces of evil, are their complements on the conceptual and the

practical level. Witchcraft beliefs in Portuguese villages, far from being some 'pagan' residual element of an earlier non-Christian tradition or the sign of a 'folk-culture' operating on a different logical level from the main Catholic culture, are better seen as a firm part of traditional Catholicism, albeit somewhat 'medieval' and embarrassing to a Church anxious now to stress its modernity and intellectualism - or at least the more urban education of its younger priests.

Despite the long tradition of Catholicism in the north, religious attitudes are not standard and are not without their tensions. Even in areas where most residents would call themselves Catholic, and are believers and practicers, there are signs of anti-clericalism, not unlike that in parts of Catholic France and Spain. While largely believing and practising his religion, the Minhoto peasant is not 'priest-ridden'. Contemporary independence of attitude shown in religious matters has an echo in earlier documents taken from a parish in the Geres area of Braga.⁴ In the eighteenth century a complicated tussle ensued between the villagers of São João and the local parish priest over alleged abuses and his failure to perform his priestly functions, which was taken to the authorities in Braga by the villagers. In the ensuing correspondence the villagers accused the parish priest of taking over a piece of common land (*baldio*) for his own exploitation, as well as 'oppressing [us] at every turn, without any remembrance of humane sentiments'. The matter went to the court at Viana, when the villagers demanded the removal of the priest from his post. Correspondence between the legal bodies and the church authorities show the latter's reluctance to come to a firm decision on the matter, 'for fear of encouraging others'. The case dragged on for a period of years, during which the priest was accused of diverting village water to his own lands, and of taking over a further piece of common land for his own use.

Apart from these land disputes, there was also the question, relevant to our present discussion, of the priest's failure to provide the last sacrament to the dying, and his demanding more money from tithes to cover church expenses, such as the altar wine and oil, which the villagers felt he should provide himself from his existing income, instead of increasing charges on an already poor community.⁵ While the outcome of the litigation is unknown in this case, its interest lies in the fact that even at the end of the eighteenth century villagers were not ready to accept a priest who did not respect property rights and made unreasonable

⁴ See *Registos da Igreja*, 1540, A.H.U.M., Braga, MS N188, fol 28.

⁵ Processo de Padre Pires de Araujo e Silva, Abbade da freguesia de Sam Joam Baptista, *Desembargo do Paço*, MS M281-57 (1786), and M 171-86 (1797), Lisbon (Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo).

financial demands on his parishioners. In the opinion of villagers the priest had obligations too: the relationship between him and the parishioners involved reciprocal obligations and so if the parish was providing him with income in the form of tithes, he also had to provide the service demanded of him. This very modern approach to religious functionaries is perhaps surprising in this area at such a time, but it is one that is certainly reflected in the present-day village attitudes to the clergy.

Given the early implantation of Catholicism in Minho, it is hardly surprising that contemporary rural religion has retained many of the practices that were common to medieval - or earlier - Catholicism incorporating some pre-Christian beliefs and practices in its orthodoxy, which are now disowned by the present 'modern' Church. This change in the Church's tolerance for what may seem to many to be 'folk' practices, coming as it did later in Portugal than in other western Catholic countries, has introduced a new element of tension and dissension between clergy and parishioners. While parish priests are happy, and indeed obliged, to continue performing the main religious rituals of the Catholic faith - baptism, marriage, burial, and the weekly Mass - they are increasingly unwilling to take part in or condone other religious events that seem to the villager to be just as important. One priest, in the 1920s, comments on how canon law now frowns on local customs, disapproving of Corpus Christi processions, *romarias*, *ladainhas*, *cereos* and village festas, all of which are dying out, due to 'the presumptuous and fanatical spirits of the intellectuals' (*'espíritos fanáticos presumidos de sábios'*).⁶ Most of the rituals now disapproved of by the Church centre on agriculture, the family and the community - three concepts totally integrated in the peasant's world view. Many of these rituals are common to villages in a wide area of upland Minho: I shall here look only at rituals surrounding human death itself and omit agricultural rituals designed to ward off disease, illness and death in plants and animals.

Rituals outside Catholic orthodoxy involving the village community as a whole have disappeared from village life during this century. Two practices, presently remembered only by the middle-aged and elderly, called for the participation of all village adults: the *'encomendação das almas'* was a public gathering in the church each day during Lent when the dead members of the village were named individually, house by house, and commemorated in prayer for their souls - a ritual that lasted about an hour. Today there is still a gathering in the church each day during Lent when the Rosary is recited for the souls in Purgatory, usually without the presence of the priest and led by a rota of women. It does not now draw all village members and tends to be attended mainly by women. The other community ritual remembered only by the elderly (suggesting that it stopped before 1920) was

⁶ Padre Francisco Manuel Alves, *Tras-os-Montes*, Lisbon 1929, p.20.

the *rezadas em comum*.⁷ Here the villagers would meet in the open air to pray to Saint Sebastian on January 20th. Married men presided in order of their marriage each year; each individual present was called forward to say a prayer '*em louvor do mártir São Sebastião*'. As long as the prayers continued, the day was considered a holy day, and work could start only when the ceremony had ended.

While some community rituals have dropped away, others have been abandoned by the priest, much to the annoyance of parishioners, and this reluctance to keep up the old rituals contributes somewhat to an increase in anti-clericalism. Previously the priest would perform the prayers for the souls (*reza das almas*), which involved walking around the outside of the church with a representative from each house that had a death to commemorate, doing the *obrigacoes*. The practice has been abandoned but the clergy still receive payment for it. Masses for the dead are not free and in 1972 cost 50\$ (about £1 sterling). Given the contraction of parishes, and the need for a priest to cover many parishes there are not enough days to perform individual masses for the dead, with the result that priests combine them and perhaps celebrate three or four in a day. From the villager's point of view this is another area where he is being short-changed: the priest who in 1972 was getting 150\$ daily just in masses for the dead was already receiving the equivalent of a manual worker's daily wage.

While many traditional community rituals have disappeared with or without the Church's aid, people still commemorate the dead every day; there are *alminhas* - small painted niches - in the house walls, and each time one passes one is expected to say an Our Father for the souls in Purgatory. Crosses and calvaries (*cruzeiros* or *calvarios*) are also daily reminders of death, although they also have political significance - the cross on top of the pillory (*pelourinho*) marking the limits of judicial power or the territory of a church or parish limits.

Stone cairns in the hills or by the roadside are put, stone by stone, by passers-by praying for the person killed in an accident or by violence. Wooden or stone crosses on the roadside or in the fields mark places where death has occurred: and one is expected to stop and say an Our Father for the souls of the dead in Purgatory. Villagers then have daily reminders of death in their working environment. Beliefs surrounding death are but a part of the religious system sustained by the Minho villager.

Apart from those religious rituals that were once part of Church orthodoxy and are now largely discouraged by the clergy - and therefore to a greater or lesser extent abandoned by the faithful - there is the whole gamut of semi-religious practices and beliefs surrounding illness, curing and the occult towards

⁷ Tude de Sousa, 'Regimen Pastoral da Serra do Gerez', *Portugalia* [Porto], Vol.II (1908), p.7.

which the Church has long turned a blind eye, since they do not require priestly involvement. Here it is relevant only to say that the disapproval shown by the younger clergy is based on their dislike of the juxtaposition of acceptable symbols, such as holy water or the branches blessed at Easter, with the unacceptable symbols such as garlic, bramble-bush branches, or cow-dung; the same 'holy water' is used for blessings in orthodox ceremonies and in many of the curing rituals as one of the ingredients for infusions; olive branches, blessed at Palm Sunday, are another common ingredient for healing rituals; the sign of the cross is common also to both. When modern clergy dismiss these rural curing rituals as 'pagan' they discount the fact that they are ultimately both ideologically and ritually within the tradition of Catholicism, and are contained within the same belief system.

IV. *Social Aspects of Burial/Death Ritual*

Of the three life crises of individuals, while birth and baptism are regarded as a family matter, marriage and funerals conspicuously involve not only the family but the village households. The social identity of the individual is linked to his house, his name, his family and his land. Traditionally the rural farming family is producer, entrepreneur and owner of its own resource base, producing for its own consumption needs and hence with a high degree of autonomy and kin solidarity, as both livelihood and social identity depend on it. In the village, family rituals, mourning practices and the family shrine incorporate the dead and the migrant in the family unit, individually named and remembered at specific times of the religious year.

Rituals emphasise the importance of the house (*Casa*) and generational continuity: they also can emphasise village solidarity between the landowning families in the village. Each household of residents or *vizinhos* (literally 'neighbours') has the right to be represented at all village weddings and funerals - and conversely the obligation to attend and contribute. The individuality of households is mitigated and controlled by the economic organisation of the village that demands co-operation from all residents of the land-group and is symbolised by constant interaction in the ritual sphere.

Much of traditional ritual is designed to purify and protect the house - for example the *defumadas*, the Easter blessing with holy water, to protect the house and the family within from witches and evil spirits - and to emphasise the unity of the household and its separateness from other houses in the village. These recurring rituals of purification, protection and separation

reappear throughout Galicia, in Spain as in Portugal.⁸

All church jobs and chores, other than the priest's, rotate between household heads according to a fixed order; there is no controlling clique to organise *fiestas* or everyday rituals, and little extravagant expenditure in an area with limited resources, small surplus, and whose demonstration of faith through ritual is aimed at preserving and safeguarding the community of households.

The emphasis throughout local social organisation is on 'the house', the *casal* paradigm of Galicia. Sometimes this social reference group is coextensive with the family but not always. 'House' names are those most commonly used to identify individuals; surnames - called locally 'church names' - are used only on official occasions when dealing with outsiders. Men marrying into 'houses' of old-established village families take on the name of the house; men who start from scratch and create a 'new house' are known by their first name or family name. Actual houses in fact change hands quite often and most families in the village have lived in more than one house in the course of their family cycle. But for the older houses the names of the houses stay the same and couples moving into them are known by the name of the house and not by their church name. Alternatively, a man or woman sometimes carry with them through their lives the name of the house they have grown up in, even though they have moved out of the family home. So there is a certain social ambiguity at play despite the apparent rigidity of social organisation.

There is some variety in the significance that the *casa* or house and the family have in day-to-day village life. For some people, the building they live in and the house they are identified with has been theirs since time immemorial, and will continue in their families except through the bad luck of childlessness or the unwillingness of children to stay in the village. For others, such as those who married into a house and took on the name of the house, the strength of the self-identity varies. For others who made 'poor' marriages and who have never experienced or have lost the association with an 'important house', either fortune has come to them through luck and their own hard work, thus earning them their own status and recognition; or they have had poor luck and the children they might have been able to lean on have also let them down. Although on the ideal level the 'house' is the important determining factor in assessing status and prestige, in a situation where the values placed on land and continuity are changing because of the recognised low productivity of the land, and with the new alternatives provided by migration and education, even the status of 'the house' that before seems to have been firmly based on quantity and quality of land owned, as well as the good behaviour of those in it, has become fluid and ambiguous.

⁸ For Spanish Galician house-protection rituals see Carmelo Lison-Tolosana, *Perfiles Simbolico-morales de la cultura Gallega*, Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno 1974, pp.101-2.

For each individual landowning household the death of the head of household means the transference of land from the old to the new landholder. Even when *partilhas* - land divisions - are done beforehand they are not effective until the death of the head of household. *Partilhas* are done where possible within the family or within the village, so as to keep lawyers and bureaucrats out of it.⁹ But the degree of litigation or rather litigious behaviour of a community varies within the north: land, and its satisfactory devolution, is of primary concern to heads of households, so it is more usually resolved well before death. From a sample of wills from São João the earlier emphasis of wills is on personal salvation. From the earliest parish records people have left money for masses to be said for their souls, often when they make no further provision or will. For example, Dionyza Dias, in 1709, left money for masses to each of six priests, to be said in the church and chapels of her parish, plus money for three sung masses to be celebrated in Braga. Several wills specify the number of priests wanted to recite the masses for the dead, suggesting both that relatively large sums of money were left to fulfil those death rituals, and also that there were many priests available at parish and commune level. One will of 1710 asks for masses of eight priests to be recited in the parish church, plus sung masses in Braga; one of 1716 asks for three *officios* of five priests each, plus 50 masses for the soul; in 1730, one will asks for 3 *officios* to be recited by nine priests plus two *officios* by ten priests, together with 10 masses to the saints of the parish and the Guardian Angels, plus a gift to the priest of 6000 reis 'for use in time of war'. Most masses for the dead specified for the earlier period, 1688-1800, are to be celebrated in the parish itself, but sometimes other churches or chapels are specified, including S. Pedro, Braga, (mentioned in wills of 1710, 1717, 1730 and 1750), Bom Jesus de Braga (1717, 1790), Nossa Senhora da Peneda (1718, 1748, 1790) and Senhora da Abadia (1746, 1780), the last two being important pilgrimage sites through the last five centuries at least. For the same period, where detailed provisions are recorded in the funeral registers, most masses are directed to particular saints or angels as intermediaries; most frequently it is the name saint or guardian angel of the dead person who is appealed to, but the following saints also appear regularly: St. John the Baptist, St. Michael, Our Lady of Mercy, St. James, St. Antony, N.S. do Livramento, Bom Jesus de Codeseda, N.S. de Remedios, N.S. da Peneda, N.S. da Abadia, N.S. do Rosario, and the Angels. Although since the nineteenth century and the institution of centralised state registers for deaths, such details are no longer registered in the archives, most villagers

⁹ Cf. Fatimá Brandão, 'Death and the Survival of the Rural Household in a Northwestern Municipality', in Rui Feijó, Herminio Martins and João de Pina-Cabral (eds.), *op.cit.*, pp.75-87.

still direct their appeals for supernatural intercession to these same religious figures.

Of wills made in the eighteenth century, before the inheritance law was changed to what it is today, such specific references to inheritance that are made seem designed either to contradict the prevailing custom of the time, or to resolve possible conflict in situations where there was no direct heir to property. For example, Custodio Martins, in 1709, left his inheritance from his mother, along with personal goods and a small cash sum (400 mil reis) to his betrothed, while willing that his grandparents should stay on his land. In 1716 an old widow left half her property to her granddaughter and the other half to the church - the only case in the three-hundred-year period for which records exists in S. João of any property being left to the church. In 1720, one man left land and goods to a cousin temporarily resident in Lisbon. Wills involving dispositions of goods and property were made, it seems, in exceptional circumstances; on the whole in the eighteenth century at least land and the house were passed on in the customary way to whichever child or children were selected and willing to stay and work on the house's land. Gifts and inheritances were accompanied by the obligation of prayer, whether in the form of masses for the dead to be said at regular intervals, over a period of years, or less formally by the observation of traditional customs and rituals by whose help the dead souls would rest in peace and eventually achieve paradise. Where no will is made it is often the son-in-law or the father-in-law of the deceased who pays the funeral expenses and the costs of the masses, perhaps a form of reciprocation for land received by his household through marriage. The inheritance of the preferential share of the patrimony imposes obligations on the recipient: the masses have to be said, the anniversaries of the death acknowledged, the priest paid. Usually seven days after burial the first mass for the soul of the dead person is celebrated, paid for by heirs or from the estate of the deceased. On the first anniversary of the death the village priest traditionally receives payment for the mass in the form of 14 *medidas* of cereal crop (rye or maize). Even after death, the deceased, especially if he had something to bequeath, is incorporated into community life. As with burial, any failure on the part of the kin to 'do things properly' is thought to jeopardise the soul's progress after death. Personal salvation is kin solidarity.

Despite the importance of the *casa* as a social unit and the existence of some wills, and the potential for social differentiation in the practice of burial (with the alternatives of burial either in the *adro* of the church or in the church itself), no clear picture of stratification emerges in the treatment accorded the dead. Taking the parish of S. João as a case example, from 1688 onwards there is no consistency in the burial pattern; while the majority were buried in the church itself, about 30% of interments took place in the *adro*. People who made wills - perhaps an indicator in some societies of greater wealth - appear equally represented in both places. Members of the same family are buried

in both places. While a day labourer (*jornaleiro*) - a Gallego to boot - was buried in the church, a local mendicant was interred in the *adro*, along with the parish priest.

The only indication that burial in the church itself might be thought to be of some social significance remains the burial of the sister of one parish priest, Padre Carvalho Coelho, who was buried 'near the church's arch, and near the altar of St Antony'.¹⁰ Neither money nor social status seems to have guided the choice of resting place before the new cemetery was opened in 1940. Since then a small charge has been levied on burial plots; people are interred individually and not in family vaults, and the memorial stones that have been erected in the past fifteen years are modest, involve no great display of wealth and are much alike. It would appear that even in death, the hill villager maintains his egalitarian ideal of himself and his community of landowning neighbours: the 'good death' aims both at achieving personal salvation and achieving or maintaining kin and land-group solidarity. The ritual itself shows the importance of village representation, with all landholding households participating in the loss of a neighbour. The secular aspects of the post-death ritual are sharply distinguished from the religious 'church' aspect: the wake, the keening, the gift-giving, the burning of the deceased's clothes and bedding mark both the separation of the individual from the community of neighbours, and register the neighbours' participation in his departure.

As children are marginal to the focus on land, so they are excluded from representation at the post-death ritual. Children are 'little angels' (*anjinhos*), and as such have no part to play either in the secular or religious aspects of death. They also do not figure in post-death land redistributions, so in a sense they do not need to be represented. The priest is essential as a functionary to perform part of the post-death ritual (giving the last rites, and performing the burial service), but as the Church's representative he stays separate from the secular aspects of the funeral. After the death of the deceased he does not enter the house for the wake; his place is not at the front of the funeral procession but towards the rear, just in front of the women; the keening stops when the church service begins and resumes when it ends. Death and funeral ceremonies can be a source of friction and anti-clericalism, with priests demanding high payments, or seeming to distinguish between rich and poor, or appearing to receive payments for services not rendered.¹¹ But given the importance attached by the villager to 'proper' burial, as a functionary the priest is essential if the soul of the deceased is not to suffer an unhappy post-death existence and

¹⁰ But St Antony is also the Patron Saint of Spinsters.

¹¹ Cf. Eugen Weber (*Peasants into Frenchmen*, London: Chatto & Windus 1977), at p.357, regarding Brittany.

return to bother the kin.¹²

V. Conclusion

The 'good death' illustrates concern with both property transfer and individual salvation. The economic integrity of the household has to be maintained by an acceptable transmission of the patrimony: heirs have to be encouraged to perform the rituals in order for the soul to achieve salvation. Spiritual debts to particular saints have to be paid, as well as human debts.

Death rituals operate on three different levels: for the individual the preoccupation is salvation, but the emphasis is on salvation in the sense of safety (freedom from torment in the form of Hell or Purgatory or return to life) rather than on ecstatic joy. For the individual and the kin, the land inheritance arrangements are also a preoccupation: kin obligations that fall on several individuals but especially on the heir/heirs stress the separation of the kin and the *casa* from the other landholding neighbours.

For the village community, death and burial rituals reconcile in death the separation (and competition) of individual *casas* in other aspects of their daily life.

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¹² Juliet du Boulay also mentions the importance of the rites of death in a Greek village, in connection with vampire beliefs ('The Greek Vampire: A Study of Cyclic Symbolism in Marriage and Death', *Man*, Vol.XVII (1982), pp.219-238).