

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

4

THE SOUTHERN SOTHO'S ULTIMATE OBJECT OF WORSHIP:
SKY-DIVINITY OR WATER-DIVINITY?

BY

FRANCIS LOBIANE CLEMENT RAKOTSOANE

SUBMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN THE SUBJECT

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

PROMOTER: DR. C. KWENDA

MARCH 26, 2001

ABSTRACT

The first missionaries to encounter Basotho were coming from the cultural background in which what was considered to be the Supreme Being was regarded as a celestial being or sky-divinity. When they discovered that Basotho called the object of their worship *Molimo*, they immediately concluded that he should be the same Divinity they had come to preach Basotho about and so adapted this name as a local name for their Christian God. This was done even though they had not carried out any systematic studies to find out more about the being called *Molimo*. They were so completely convinced of the universality of the existence of the Celestial Supreme God that they thought all they needed to do was to find his name among the Basotho. It seems that up until today no serious studies have been made either by the locals or foreign authors to find out how justified the missionaries' identification of their Christian God with this local deity called '*Molimo*' was.

This thesis is an attempt to find out how much justified the missionaries and some local authors are in identifying *Molimo* with their Christian God (Sky-Divinity). A critical analysis of various Basotho cultural elements and what the early Basotho told the missionaries reveal that *Molimo* as an ultimate object of worship in the traditional

religion of the Southern Sotho, is Water-Divinity, namely, Water Snake and not a celestial being or Sky-Divinity.

In its argument, the thesis makes use of whatever sources are available both written and oral including interviews in the field. It also employs Cumpsty's theory of religion to raise some questions about what might be expected given what is known of the pre-history of the people.

University of Cape Town

CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: BASOTHO'S SETTLEMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA	33
1.1. The Pre-History	33
1.1.1 Period of Upheavals	45
1.1.2 Wider Unification Process	46
1.1.3 Moshoeshoe Leaves Butha-Buthe for Thaba-Bosiu	48
1.1.4 New Threats	52
1.1.5 The Arrival of the Missionaries	53
CHAPTER TWO: BASOTHO TRADITIONAL RELIGION	55
2.1 Nature and History of African Religion in General	55
2.1.1. Nature of African Traditional Religion	55
2.1.2. History of African Traditional Religion	71
2.1.3. Views on Basotho Traditional Religion	82
2.1.4. The Basotho's Idea of Deity	95
CHAPTER THREE : BASOTHO'S INTERACTION WITH THEIR DEITY	128
3.1 Basotho Ancestors	128
3.1.1. Basotho's Notion of Death	139
3.1.2. Belief in Life After Death	146
3.1.3. The Role of Ancestors	148
3.1.4. The World of Ancestors	150
3.2. Basotho Rituals and <i>Molimo</i>	155

3.2.1. Different Modes of Prayer	159
CHAPTER FOUR : CULTIC FUNCTIONARIES AND REVERED OBJECTS	182
4.1 <i>Bothuela</i>	182
4.1.1. The Origin of <i>Bothuela</i>	185
4.1.2. Acquisition of <i>Bothuela</i>	189
4.1.3. Some Enigmatic Stories About Water Snakes	195
4.1.4. Completion of Training	201
4.2 Revered Objects	206
CONCLUSION	220
APPENDICES	225
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	231

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has been due to the guidance, advice, encouragement and support I received from different people that this work has become a reality. Their contribution deserves my gratitude for I could hardly have achieved anything like this without their help.

My greatest gratitude and thanks go to Rev. Dr. Lapointe who because of his love, interest, concern and curiosity in African cultures, instilled in me the love of my own culture while I was still at St. Augustine Major Seminary, at Roma in Lesotho. The same gratitude and thanks are in a special way given to Professor John Cumpsty for his general theory of religion which I found such a useful tool for understanding African world-views. I again wish to give my many thanks to Rev.Fr. Kantoro who apart from helping with the explanation of some of the difficult Sesotho words, was also never reluctant to give his constructive, precise and valuable criticism.

It is also my wish to extend my gratitude to all my lecturers in the Department of Religious Studies, particularly to Dr. Chirevo Kwenda for his course on African Traditional Religion which I found so enlightening and informative in relation to my

research and also for his critical yet encouraging guidance in this work as my supervisor. May I again extend my sincere gratitude to my late brother Ralekhotso my wife 'Maneo and Rev. Fr. Moloi for their moral support in my destitute moments. The same gratitude I also extend to Mr. Patrick Marabe who did everything within his power to assist me when I was in serious financial constraints.

It would be mistake to exclude in my gratitude my former fellow students and friends both at St. Augustine's Major Seminary and at the University of Cape Town who used to argue with me on some of the points thus helping me to deal with them in a more objective way. I am also deeply grateful to Rev. Fr. Thomas Manyeli, the Head of the Department of Theology and University of Lesotho for their unwavering support and encouragement during difficult times in the process of doing this research.

Last, but not least, I thank all the people who in one way or another contributed to my success. Among them I am most grateful to Mr. Eliase, Professor Ambrose and Professor Z.A. Matšela for supplying me with some of the necessary material for this research.

INTRODUCTION

The study of African Traditional Religion emerged from the shadow of African politics, history, sociology and anthropology and has become an academic field of study in many universities both in Africa and Abroad (Ray, 1976). Historically speaking, it has passed through four main phases each involving different purposes and perspectives.

First, were the accounts written by European travellers, missionaries, and colonial agents in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These, as Ray correctly observes, were often collections of haphazard observations and superficial opinions designed to appeal to the popular European mind. Most of them, as will be seen, revealed cultural bias of those who had written them as they turned the whole African religion into a mere morass of bizarre beliefs and practices (Ray, 1976).

Second, were more objective and slightly systematic fields of studies by trained anthropologists towards the end of nineteenth century. The best of these started in the 1930's and included some outstanding monographs written by authors coming from

both Africa and Europe. These had their own limitations. To start with, they were originally influenced by the then developing interest in the origin and evolution of human culture. That means, they were made mainly to support or illustrate the preconceived speculations regarding the origin and evolution of human culture. Secondly, the approaches used later on, in such studies differed according to the author's nationality. In their approach, the British anthropologists concentrated on the function of religion within the social system. The French anthropologists on the other hand, focussed upon the symbolic- philosophical order. Both the approaches have their own weaknesses. They fail to study religion in its totality. A right approach should encompass not only the existential and practical dimensions of religion, but also the phenomenology and morphology of religion (Ray, 1976).

A third phase consisted of philosophically and theologically oriented studies written mainly by African authors. These were written as an attempt to correct what these authors regarded as the misrepresentations of African epistemologies by Western scholars. Here we are referring to the works of such authors as Kenyatta, Senghor, Danquah, Nyamiti, Kagame, Mbiti, Busia, Idowu and Okotp'Bitek. The problem with these works was their lack of objectiveness due to an apologetic approach of their

authors. They revealed more of the authors' feelings than the objective content of the subject. Some of these were "written in a furious, poetic, acid style rather than in cool, sober academic prose" (Horton, 1993 : 161).

The fourth and more recent phase consists of writings which try to amalgamate both Christian and African traditional religious values (Motlhabi, 1972; Sawyerr, 1970; Shorter, 1978; Taryor, 1984). Different titles are used by different authors to refer to this kind of work. The ones used most commonly, are: Black Theology, Contextual Theology and Liberation Theology (all of which are found predominantly in Southern Africa) and an Inculturation or African Theology (predominant in West and East Africa). The problem with this kind of work is that it does not treat or study African Traditional Religion *per se*. In other words, it does not treat this religion as a religion in its own right, but only as something to be used in order to enrich Christianity. It is therefore a very limited kind of work as it only focuses on what is regarded compatible with Christian ideas. All works referred to in African Ecclesial Review (AFER) belong to this phase. Most of the material written on Basotho Traditional Religion, as we shall see also belong to this phase of the study of African Traditional Religion.

FOCUS OF STUDY

The Southern Sotho, like most other Africans had a monistic world-view, which was a closed system of cause and effect. Because of this, they excluded chance in reality, hence everything that happened was understood to have its own specific cause within the same system. Like the rest of Africans they also had the symbolized life-world perspective to maintain the coherence of the cosmos to which they belonged. This is a kind of perspective in which, as Cumpsty explains it in his theory of religion, which will be used as basic theoretic paradigm in this research, important aspects of the life-world are separated out in order to give them a symbolic content or relationship (1991).

This is the kind of perspective that gives rise to a personal-impersonal nature of the Supreme Being. As a vital force it may be more manifest in ancestors than in kings, more manifest in animals than in inanimate objects etc. It would seem that in the case of the Southern Sotho, such a vital force was more manifest in *Khanyapa*. This *Khanyapa* is said to be a very huge snakelike beast which is believed to inhabit big lakes, rivers and seas. It seems to have very special relationship with almost all the Bantu-speaking peoples.

Most of the Bantu believe in natural and local spirits ... There are spirits of mountains and forests, of pools and streams, of trees and other local objects. There are numerous animal spirits and sacred snakes which may assist in rain making. (Parrinder, 1976:43:44).

However, such relationship is blurred by the secrecy in which it is at times shrouded. Amakhosa and other Southern African peoples call it *Inchanti* or *Mamlambo*. African traditional healers, especially *Mathuela*, have very special relationship with this kind of beast. We shall refer to it as Water Snake or its Sesotho equivalent *Noha ea Metsi*. According to Parrinder (1976) snake cult is a phenomenon found in Western Africa – the place from which as we shall see, Basotho originated as part of the Bantu-speaking people. According to him:

The snake cult is frequently associated with water, rivers and sea ... The snake is often connected with the ancestors and the underworld, sometimes it has the secret of sex Snake temples are found along the coastline and up the rivers. Famous temples are in Dahomey and in the Niger Delta (1976 : 51).

If it is true that the ancestors of the present Basotho once lived here, then perhaps it is here where they learnt snake worship. This focus of vital force is also understandable, if we take into consideration the fact that their greater chronic problem at the Western

part of Lake Victoria, which place it is said, they inhabited for quite sometime, was drought. It is reported by Iliffe that the concern of the Bantu speaking people of this area in their prayers was always a desire for rain and fertility (1989:29). Comparative studies of religion done in different parts of the world reveal that many ancient societies attributed rain and fertility to snake-god and that they even regarded rain as snake-water (Eliade, 1997). Thus the ancient Basotho were no exception to this.

The purpose with this piece of work is to discuss this kind of a deity who for a long time, has been given a wrong identity- a Christian God identity and to show his Supremacy in Basotho Traditional Religion. I am aware that there are some authors who have already written something on Basotho Traditional Religion.

Appreciable as their work is to me, I am nevertheless, not fully in agreement with what they have written in as far as the identity of this deity is concerned. It is also my feeling that because of writing from their own different backgrounds (e.g. historians, educationists, anthropologists, linguisticians etc), they have not engaged deeply enough with the topic. Here I am referring to such people as Casalis (1861), Widdicombe (1891), Guma (1980) Ellenberger (1969), Machobane (1995), Sanders (1975),

Matšela (1990), Segoete (1981), Gill (1993), Ashton (1952), Khaketla (1947), Sekese (1983), Motlamelle (1985), Kuckertz (1981), Schoeman (ed.) (1991), Lagden (1909), Martin (1969), Sauer (1883), Tylden (1950), Germond (1967), Dunton (1929) and Hammond-Tooke (1981) all of whom deserve our gratitude for they have paved the way and have set the basis for further research into this religion. What has to be understood about these authors also is that many of them have not written on this religion as such, but have included it as one of the many sub-topics they have in their historical or anthropological writings on Basotho.

Some such as Pula (1988), Makara (n.d) and Maboe (1982) have written quite considerably on this religion. Their work has, however, been weakened by their desperate attempt to establish the existence of some traces of the Trinity in Basotho religion prior to the period of the missionaries. Setiloane (1976) has done good work, but he turns the religion of the Basotho into a mere Spiritism by speaking of *Molimo* as an intangible, invisible Being. What he says is in complete disagreement with what Casalis has written on the same issue. According to Casalis all the Basotho questioned on the subject of the nature of *Molimo* assured them (Casalis and his company) that it never entered their heads that the earth and sky might be the work of an invisible Being

(1861:238). The same is true with Machobane who maintains that:

Without a doubt, Basotho believed in the existence of a spiritual entity called *Molimo*, which dwelt in the sky When people died, they went to it in the sky, to dwell there in a kind of peace that was otherwise unattainable on earth ... the entity was inconceivable in substance and, in fact it was invisible (1995).

While Machobane has undoubtedly succeeded to identify some of the problems surrounding the study of the Basotho religion in the work quoted above, one fails to see the facts upon which what he says in the above lines is based. His major problem has been to rely almost exclusively upon missionaries and other European authors for his sources, apparently forgetting that sound knowledge of Basotho religion as Casalis correctly observed, “remained unintelligible to all except initiated persons (1861:238). A closer look at some of the sacred songs of initiation which, as he (Machobane) puts it, “played a pivotal role in the transmission of culture and religion,” (1995:19) and the plenty of other Basotho oral literature, locate the place of *Molimo* of Basotho in the bowels of the earth and there is no single incidence where *Molimo* is ever portrayed as a spiritual entity dwelling in the sky.

We have to be also aware that prior to the phenomenon of *Bothuela* (a form of

spiritism), which is quite a recent cultural element imported from Nguni cultures, Basotho did not speak of spirits. This is a fact alluded to in the following words of Casalis, the first missionary to encounter Basotho in 1833:

It would perhaps be asserting too much to say absolutely, that they believe in the existence and the immortality of the soul ... They allow that man is endowed with sentiments and faculties which the brute does not possess, and know that something of him remains after death. They place the seat of life, feeling, thought and will in the heart, and this is almost the only word their language possesses to designate the rational being in a synthetic manner

The natives invariably say of a person who has just expired, "His heart is gone out," of a sick person who has been at the point of death, but who has recovered, "His heart is still there; his heart is coming back" – unexceptionable proofs that the heart is, in their eyes, something more than the physical organ called by that name (1861:244-245).

I am not aware of any traces of spirits even in the sacred songs (*likoma*) which are one of the oldest and the main sources of Basotho religious heritage. It is therefore most likely that the concept of spirit among Basotho came with the phenomenon of *Bothuela* if not with the missionaries. I cannot find any instance outside *Bothuela* where the ancient Mosotho ever spoke of spirits. This casts a cloud of doubt over Mbiti's generalizing statement that there are no physical representation of God by African

Peoples and his rushed conclusion that they therefore all consider him to be a Spiritual Being (1983:34).

Manyeli, though he has done a good job and raises very interesting considerations, has been let down by his failure to find a better and convenient etymology of the word *Molimo* as an appropriated Sesotho Name for God. Because of this, he has separated God from ancestors (*Balimo*) by placing him in the sky while the ancestors and their world remain underneath. In Sesotho culture, the king does not live separately from his subjects, but he lives among them and from him they receive orders and guidance.

Pula and Lapoite, on the other hand, although they do not always agree with each other, have established according to my judgement, the right track which can safely be followed by those who want to take their discoveries further, especially, regarding the location of *Molimo*. I should, however, remark that Pula is very much opposed to the idea that *Molimo* can be responsible for human death, an idea which is opposed in my thesis. The only person therefore, whose understanding I share almost completely is Lapointe. Although he does not come up with any new proposal, he rejects any attempt to locate the Basotho deity in the sky.

My contribution on the subject, however, will be different in the sense that none of the authors cited above seems to have been aware of any religious significance of water snake in this religion. Contrary to a common view, that prior to the period of the Christian missionaries Basotho had Sky-Divinity as their supreme being, it will be argued and demonstrated that they had a Water-Divinity as the Supreme Being in their traditional religion. Therefore this thesis will be the first written work to have brought to light such significance in a detailed manner.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Basing himself on the critical analysis of various Basotho cultural elements, the researcher will be guided by the following hypothesis:

The ancient Basotho's religion centred around Water-Divinity (snake) as the ultimate object of worship.

METHODOLOGY

Due to its unique history, African Traditional Religion is not an easy field to research on. This is the kind of religion that was never given a fair chance of expressing itself as it was regarded as a threat to Christianity by many Western Missionaries. As it

received very little attention from the authors of the pre-Christian and colonial eras, it mainly remained part of the oral tradition which is today found embedded in African proverbs, myths, legends, folk-tales, rites and rituals, customs and traditions, art symbols and linguistic expressions. This means that to get to the real or genuine African religious thought today, one should, as a matter of must, consider these cultural elements which are in my opinion the only source of African Traditional Religion in which Christian influence is to a large extent non-existent. Many of these have, to this day, remained intact. Basotho sacred songs known as *likoma* or *lifela* (hymns) are a good example of African cultural elements which have managed to retain their purity amidst many missionaries' attempts to either trivialize or mock them.

Although these are, as we have said, the best sources in as far as tracing genuine African religious thought is concerned, a serious problem is encountered when one has to find and analyze those which are shrouded in secrecy such as those associated with initiation in the case of Basotho. The whole situation leaves one with a very limited choice of a research method. Survey research method which normally involves 'the administration of questionnaires to a sample of respondents selected from some population' (Babbie, 1995:276) cannot be used. To use it would be to scare the

informants who may not be willing to reveal the secrecy. For the same reason, field research method “that involves the direct observation of social phenomena in their natural settings” (Babbie, 1995:303) cannot be opted for. The impossibility of applying this method also lies in the fact that the religion under discussion no longer exists in its coherent form. Even where it may manifest itself as bits and pieces scattered in various cultural elements, it is very distorted due to the influence of both Christianity and modernity.

In general any research method that involves observation is not likely to succeed in such a research. This is because “methods that rely on observation attempt to describe and portray behaviour as it occurs. But some aspects of behaviour are not directly accessible to observation, particularly those having to do with people’s values, beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, motivations and feelings. Further, individuals may be willing to report but not permit researchers to observe some of their private behaviours, particularly their sexual activity, religious practices and drug use.” (Vander Zanden, 1990: 20-21). What is said above matches exactly with what one finds in *Basotho* culture. Most of the cultural activities in which their traditional religion manifests itself are not only open to a chosen few to watch, but are also a taboo to talk about

(Machobane, 1995). In fact, most of them are open to those who have undergone a traditional rite of initiation only. Those who disclose them, do so at the risk of being mad or being severely punished for being unfaithful to the initiation secrecy or confidentiality which is to be kept by all people who have undergone the rite. Nobody is to be seen near to any places (*Mephato*) where those undergoing the rite of initiation are kept unless he himself has undergone this rite. Even the early missionaries were very much aware of this fact as can be seen from the following words of Casalis :

Women, children and all foreigners belonging to a nation among whom the rite is not practiced, are carefully kept a distance. We have ourselves seen a missionary, who was otherwise much respected, pursued by armed men, for having dared direct his steps to one of these formidable places (1861:265).

Because the main source, namely, songs of initiation, from which almost all vital information will be drawn for our topic, seems to discourage, to a large extent, both participation and observation, the only research method likely to succeed in dealing with our topic, is one that does not require the researcher to intrude into whatever he or she is studying. That is, it should be one which favours or is appropriate for an unobtrusive research. There are basically three research method which fit the above mentioned kind of research. These are content analysis, analysis of existing statistics

and historical or comparative analysis. Of the three, the last two will not be given much attention for the mere fact that the existing literature does not offer much on the topic in question. Therefore, only the first method, namely, content analysis, will be given more attention. But this will not be done at the exclusion of the other two where applicable. "Content analysis methods may be applied to virtually any form of communication. Among the possible artifacts for study are books, magazines, poems, newspapers, songs, paintings, speeches, letters, laws and constitutions as well as any components or collections thereof." (Babbie, 1995:307).

In this thesis, Basotho's sacred poems or songs of initiation will be analyzed as the main source from which the material that will be used to test our hypothesis will be drawn. Among the Southern Sotho the rite of initiation is, as Machobane correctly observes, the cornerstone of the Basotho traditions, customs and religious thought (1993). For this reason it became the target of almost all missionaries who wanted to eradicate those Basotho traditional ways of doing things which they considered major pastoral problem in their work of evangelization. All these traditions, customs and religious teachings were passed on to the initiates in the form of *likoma* (sacred poems) which "were and still are, a very highly guarded secret" (Guma, 1980 : 116). These

likoma were sung by the initiates and it was the responsibility of their teacher (*mosuoe*) to see to it that they all knew them by heart. So as they were memorizing them they were at the same time memorizing the traditions, customs and important Basotho religious teachings enshrined in them. This being the case it becomes obvious that these poems or songs which Rev. Casalis and his companions regarded as nothing more than a mere “series of sounds which are agreeable to the ear, but without any serious meaning” (1861 : 265), are indeed one of the most important sources of the Basotho’s religious heritage. Their being “couched in secret language, with a secret vocabulary and concords” (Guma, 1980 : 117) has made them inaccessible, obscure and unintelligible to the uninitiated who have in one way or another managed to lay their hands upon them. Casalis’s failure and of those who wrote after him to identify and locate the Supreme Being in the Traditional Religion of the Southern Sotho can rightly be attributed to his rejection and trivialization of this important source of the Basotho religious heritage.

At this stage the important question is: Since *likoma* are said to be shrouded in secrecy, how does one who is not initiated hope to get access to them for analysis? To answer this question we must make it clear that while it is an undeniable fact that these

initiation songs or poems are kept profoundly secret, it has been possible for some missionaries and foreign authors to have access to them despite the fact that they were not initiated. Most of those collected by the missionaries have not been published in any form, but have remained as mere bundles of papers kept in their archives without any explanation as to how they have been collected. Some missionaries do have small portions of these scattered in their various writings in contexts many of which have very little to do with religion *per se*. Of such missionaries we may mention Casalis (1861), Laydevant (1952), and Ellenberger (1969).

In as far as the foreign authors are concerned, the only person who has written quite considerably on these is Guma in his two books, one of which bears the title "*Likoma*."

In this small book, published in 1966 and written in Sesotho, Guma analyses these sacred poems with special emphasis on their content, literary structure and typology in relation to other literary forms found in Basotho oral literature. In the introduction of the same book, Guma claims that he got these poems from several old Basotho people found in different parts of Lesotho. He also tells us that they are still in their original form as he has not in any way attempted to alter them. He claims that all he has done has been only to write them down. This claim seems to be genuine because he has

written exactly what the missionaries have also written in their unpublished collection of these poems. There is, therefore a good reason to believe the authenticity of his collection.

Guma does not give us the names of the people from whom he collected these sacred poems. Judging it from our knowledge of Basotho culture, we can only infer that his informants chose to remain anonymous. He also does not tell us how he obtained these important information from these people except that in the second of his books mentioned above, he tells us that these “have been painfully collected...” (1980 : 116). Guma also seems to have a feeling that he has betrayed his informants’ trust in him by publishing this information which he probably had promised not to disclose to anyone. This is something that can be inferred from the following disguised form of apology:

Revealing them here in the interest of objective study and scientific truth, is not in any way an affront to the Basotho among whom the present writer grew up, and whose sensibilities he knows and appreciates. Rather it is a genuine attempt at preserving for posterity the little that can still be salvaged pertaining to a valuable national heritage that may soon be lost for all time (1980 : 116).

Apart from the Western missionaries and Guma, another person who has published

likoma is Makara, a Mosotho Christian who had himself undergone the rite of initiation. He probably felt morally justified to explore and use these in his arguments against the then prevailing prejudices against not only *likoma* which some missionaries were trivializing, but also against the whole rite of initiation which had for a long time been seen as “the chief hindrance to the Gospel, to learning and to progress in any sense” (Machobane 1993 : 17) by the missionaries. Makara is, in fact, the only person whose role of providing some vital information on *likoma* has been acknowledged by Guma probably because he himself had already used them (thus exposing them to the uninitiated) in his book we referred to earlier in this thesis. He even refers to him as his best informant. Reading through the works of these two authors (Guma and Makara), one finds it not surprising for Guma to call Makara his best informant. His understanding or interpretation of these sacred poems is exactly that of Makara. Thus his work can rightly be seen as nothing more than a mere duplication of Makara’s understanding of these in terms of their interpretation in relation to the Basotho religious thought.

The same thing is observed in the works of both Professor Matšela and Rev. Laydevant of the Roman Catholic Church. They too seem to uncritically duplicate Makara’s

understanding of these poems in their interpretation of them. It is important to note that for a long time no author, whether African or Western has tried to deviate from Makara's understanding of these *likoma* in terms of how they have to be understood and interpreted. Because of this, some people may end up thinking that what Makara has given as the interpretation of these, should be the only interpretation. He has also not been challenged probably because he appeared more credible than others since unlike other authors he had the first hand knowledge of *likoma* as he had himself undergone the rite of initiation. But looking at his work closely, any careful observer is likely to realize that this author was very much influenced by Judeo – Christian ideas in his interpretation of *likoma*.

Influenced by Rev. Casalis opinion that Basotho were probably part of the lost tribe of Israel and Rev. Laydevant's detailed account of what the Basotho and Israelites had in common in his book, Makara enthusiastically gathered all sorts of *likoma* which could support these missionaries' opinions and used them to demonstrate that Basotho knew of the Trinitarian God, before the arrival of the first missionaries in 1833. In short, what Makara and those who followed him did was to interpret these *likoma* in the light of what they had been taught by the Christian missionaries and not in the light

of what other related aspects of the Basotho culture in whose context alone the interpretation of such poems would be sensible had to say. They found in them the meaning they wanted to find and not the meaning they actually contained. To understand what has been said above, about the interpretation of Basotho things in the context of religion, we need to take into consideration what Professor Machobane makes us aware, namely, that: There was always a danger that Africans might choose to tell missionaries what missionaries wanted to hear and not the actual facts (1995:18).

I strongly believe that if the Christian interpretation was not forced upon these poems and were allowed to speak for themselves, a different conclusion could have been reached about their meaning in relation to the kind of the supreme being Basotho had in their religion.

Equally important as our source of information to be analyzed will be various oral prayers and myths as are known to almost every Mosotho who has been born and nurtured in Basotho culture and also as recorded in limited available literature written by local and non-local authors. In fact all *likoma* will be interpreted in the light of what

these (prayers and myths) have to say and vice versa. In addition to this, any kind of information which the writer, as somebody who has been brought up in Basotho traditional way in rural areas, may recall to mind and deemed it likely to shed some light on our topic, will be referred to.

To supplement whatever information we will have come out with in our analysis of the above mentioned cultural elements, some cultic functionaries will be interviewed. Our target group will be *mathuela* (sangomas) because of their connection with water snakes. But even here it has to be mentioned that gathering this kind of information (*sangoma*-snake relationship) will not be an easy task. Many *sangomas* are to-day very much reluctant to give a detailed account of their connection or relationship with water snakes. This is because there is a general tendency in Lesotho today to identify with satanism anybody who has dealings with water snakes. This comes after some members of a satanist group known as *Hlahlahla*, who have now for one reason or another abandoned their movement have made some claims that their master (satan) disguises himself in different forms including that of the water snake which, as they say, deceives many *sangomas* in different ways.

Before this kind of a claim was made, Basotho *sangomas* used to be very open about their dealings with water snakes. But today, although they still do not regard it as something secret to have a special pool where they meet their snakes, they tend to prefer anonymity or confidentiality when it comes to saying exactly how they deal with these snakes.

I have to make it clear, however, that we are not going to make any judgments as to whether or not what these satanists say about water snakes has anything to do with water snake as the ultimate object of worship in Basotho Traditional Religion. Furthermore, this question of *mathuela* has come here only as a supplementary material mainly because it has not been always part of the Basotho culture. It is, as will be seen, a cultural element imported from the Nguni people of Southern Africa. Here it comes into the picture because it will probably help us understand more what our main sources will have revealed to us about water snake being the ultimate object of worship in Basotho Traditional Religion. Another reason is that these are the people who are today the only active cultic functionaries in as far as the Basotho Traditional Religion is concerned.

To be more precise, what we will be doing will be to demonstrate through these people and their dealings with water snakes that what *likoma* and other Basotho cultural elements, which will be used as our main sources, reveal to us as the position of water snake in Basotho Traditional Religion, is not something which the researcher is trying to read into these various cultural elements, but that even today some Basotho adherents or followers of this religion, namely, *mathuela* still attach great religious significance to water snakes.

The intended sample size is twenty (20). In order to obtain the sample non-probability sampling method will be used and this will be snowballing. According to Bailey (1987) snowball sampling is carried out in stages. In the first stage a few persons having the requisite characteristics are identified and interviewed. These persons are used as informants to identify others who qualify for inclusion in the sample. The second stage involves interviewing these persons, who in turn lead to still more persons who can be interviewed in the third stage, and so on.

The most targeted areas will be those areas of Lesotho where many people are still

leading traditional life. These areas are Mokhotlong, Butha-Buthe, Qacha's'Nek, Quthing and Mohale's Hoek. A minimum of five *mathuela* will be interviewed in each region. Apart from the information that will be received from these, any other information received from any individual persons on *mathuela* will be considered as long as it sheds some light on our topic.

To make my informants feel more at ease and also due to the complications identified above on the issue of snake-human relationship, no formal questionnaire will be formulated lest they be scared by it. Therefore an informal way of getting information by engaging in informal discussion with them will be adopted, but at the same time having a set of questions in mind which will structure the information received.

Content analysis as a research method has some advantages over other methods. Being unobtrusive by nature, it allows a researcher's minimal effect on the subject being studied. It is economic in terms of both time and money. That is, it does not require a large staff or any special equipment, but may be carried out as long as one has an access to the material to be coded. It is also safe in the sense that it is easier to repeat

a portion of the study without having to incur burdensome expenses or fearing that the information may not be available any more. Generally, there is no need to repeat the whole enterprise when an error has been discovered with only a portion of the collected data. Furthermore, content analysis allows one to study process occurring over a long period of time.

This method, however, does, also have some disadvantages. “For one thing, content analysis is limited to the examination of recorded communications. Such communications, may be oral, written, or graphic, but they must be recorded in some fashion to permit analysis.” (Babie, 1995:30). The second disadvantage is that omission or inaccurate records often make it impossible to have an adequate test. “And when material is available, it is frequently difficult to categorize in a way that gives an answer to a research question” (Vander Zanden, 1990:24). Our approach in this method will be, to a great extent, both expository and analytic. That is, we will most of the time expose as faithfully as we can, the various cultural elements identified above and analyze them in the light of what we know of the Basotho religious life and other related aspects of culture in which alone the religious interpretation or understanding of such cultural elements will make sense in order to support our arguments.

There is, as we shall see, much evidence from the sources which are likely to be the oldest, that for the Southern Sotho God (*Molimo*) was most often in mind when the *Balimo* were addressed, and that they even addressed (in the prayers) and dealt with *Molimo* directly as Water Snake (for example when they put the entrails and dung in the water courses). Nevertheless *Molimo* remains very much with the *Balimo* and very immanent. There was clearly a tendency toward transcendence but the situation does seem to fall between the extremes of the settled and the consciously migrating. Which according to Cumpsty (1991) would tend to confirm our view of their pre-Lesotho history as one which would generate this consciousness. As in most cases Basotho seem not to be in a position to explain certain aspects of their culture, the interpretation of the collected data will be virtually the researchers' task which, as said above, will be done not in the light of what Christianity has to say, but what certain related aspects of Basotho culture have to say. The fact of the Basotho's reluctance to explain certain elements of their culture is attested to in the following words of Dieterlen:

If you ask the Basotho the why and wherefore one of these customs they cannot tell. They do not indulge in reflective thought. They have no theories and no doctrines. The only thing that matters they think is carrying out of certain traditional acts, preserving contact with the past and with the dead (Tempels, 1969:21)

But this is a very exaggerated view which cannot be left unchallenged. It is true that Basotho as I have said, are not ready to explain most of their cultural practices, but that does not mean that they do not or cannot indulge in reflective thought as Dieterlen seems to suggest. The fact of the matter is that their apparent inability, or reticence to explain these has more to do with the nature of their etiquette which does not allow young people to ask the question "Why?" when they are told to either do or omit something by their elders than their ability to think. If they ask such a question, they are simply told that it is the custom (*ke moetlo*). Once this has been said, he will never dare to ask any further question lest he be regarded as challenging the ways of ancestors, the founders of such customs. This has always been the attitude of the elders towards young people's curiosity regarding the rationale behind many of the customs that they find in existence. When one tries to persuade them to explain such customs, the kind of explanations they offer vary so much that one ends up being more confused than enlightened.

ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

The whole work will be divided into four chapters. The first two will briefly deal with the Basotho's settlement in Southern Africa and views on Basotho religious thought in general respectively. The former is meant to place the topic in its cultural

context while the latter serves to justify our approach. The remaining chapters will focus specifically upon the topic as such.

VALUE OF PROJECT

There is relatively speaking more written on the traditional religions of the people of other African regions than is written on the people of the Southern African region.

Of the two major groups of black people found in this region, namely, the *Nguni* and *Sotho*, the *Nguni* still enjoys the majority of the written work. In spite of the growing numbers of universities that have included African Traditional Religion in their curriculum, very little has been written on the religious life of the *Sotho*, especially the Southern *Sotho*.

We live in a world in which the majority of the inhabitants of the planet live in a country that has undergone a social transformation in this century. Revolutions, revolutionary movements and social movements more generally have been key influences shaping the development of our societies. In this regard, Western revolutions have played a major part in influencing other regions of the world. This is eloquently put by Giddens as he says:

The American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789 are generally accepted as being the two prime happenings which set the stage for subsequent revolutionary endeavours. In the twentieth century, however, most revolutions have been influenced by Marxism, including Chinese Revolutions (1992 : 321).

The Southern African region has not been exception to such social changes. It is difficult today to read a news paper or view a television newscast without having a feeling for the powerful currents of change that continually encompass the Southern African region. Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Zambia, Mozambique, Swaziland, South Africa, Zimbabwe and currently Lesotho conjure images of boiling cauldrons of social transition and transformation. Political instabilities and power struggles have plagued the region. Unjust institutions, be they economic, political, educational, cultural, military and media that formerly intertwined and reinforced each other; that a small power elite through inheritance or recruitment, dominated the nation; and that these oppressive national structures combined to forge transitional systems of injustice, are no longer immune to challenge.

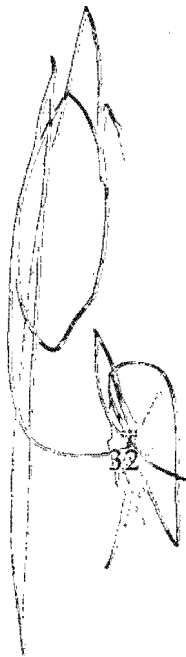
The ordinary people of Africa who have been deceived, exploited and plunged into economic and political chaos by selfish and uncaring pseudo-political upstarts who

dawdle in the parliaments of their respective countries can no longer remain silent. Homelessness, joblessness, increasing crime rates, the alarming number of refugees and scandalous cases of corruption which have today become the chief characteristic of the region have become the concern of all lovers of peace and justice of this region.

In the world of politics, the collapse of the Berlin Wall clearly marked the end of the Marxist-Leninist regimes in Eastern Europe. This radical change which originated in the Western World acted like a stormy wind that shook deeply the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa (Bujo, 1992). Dictatorial regimes whose legitimacy has never been questioned are now challenged for the first time in decades. The masses of African people who, for so long were governed by dictators, now insist on the adoption of multi-party systems and the unconditional restoration of democracy (Bujo, 1992). Such systems will hopefully revive an African sense of governance. In traditional Africa, the chief ruled in accordance with the wishes of his people. For this reason an African proverb says: a voice of the nation says it all (*Lentsoe la sechaba ke poho*). Multi-party systems represent the interests of a wider spectrum of the nation. Thus their voice is indeed, the voice of the nation. In addition to this, is their bold call for African Renaissance, the call which has taken the whole continent by storm. Central to this,

as understood by many, is the revival of the African cultural heritage by Africans. For such revival to be achieved there is a need first and foremost to revive what Africans traditionally cherished as core moral values for the maintenance of the moral fibre of their societies. This can only be found in their religion.

Any renaissance therefore that ignores the religious life of the people will be failing to reach the heart of an African life since it will have missed the very values which formed the core of all African traditional societies and held everything together in such communities. As a necessary step towards a successful African Renaissance, the study of African Traditional Religions is of a vital significance. This being the case, it is my belief that this project will hopefully contribute to the development of the study of the Southern Sotho traditional religion in particular and of African Traditional Religion in general.



CHAPTER ONE: BASOTHO'S SETTLEMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA.

1.1 THE PRE-HISTORY

Basotho are part of the Bantu-speaking people found in Southern Africa and who are believed to have come from the eastern part of Africa (Tanzania). It is generally believed that before they moved to Tanzania the Bantu-speaking peoples lived in Cameroon (Legum, 1961; Vansina, 1995; Shillington, 1995; Curtin *et al*, 1978). According to the linguist, Greenberg, and the social anthropologist, Murdock, Bantu-speakers of the Cameroon acquired the new South-East Asian food crops from East Africa along with iron farming tools. With these they entered the forest regions of the Cameroon, Gabon and Congo, increasing rapidly in numbers and displacing the hunting and gathering Pygmy peoples of whom a few scattered remnants survive today.

This movement extended from the central tropical forests into East Africa, penetrating Bushman country to the south displacing them as it had earlier displaced the Pygmies. Cameroon, therefore, can be considered as the main cradle area for this explosion of Bantu-speakers from Nigeria to the Cape of Good Hope (Fage, 1995; Olaniyan 1982). As to why they emigrated, there seems to be no clear reasons given. Therefore we may only infer that they somehow experienced some chronic problems of some kind in one

way or another. These “Bantu-speaking, iron-using cultivators who came from the west during the centuries immediately before and after the birth of Christ ... were settled in the modern Bukoba district west of Lake Victoria by about 500BC” (Iliffe, 1961 : 7). It is said that people living here measured out their lives in famines. The whole region was characterised by scarcity of water, due less to low rainfall than to its irregularity.

I must mention, however, that the idea that all the Bantu-speakers found in Southern Africa are Iron Age immigrants into the region is very much contested by David Beach (1994). Basing his refutation of the idea on a fairly complex archaeological evidence, Beach argues that this is a mere misconception. Without being in any way prejudiced against his argument, I think it is important to be aware that while what he proposes on this issue may be true of other Southern African peoples, it is not necessarily true of other peoples of this region. In as far as Basotho are concerned there is much evidence from both sacred songs (which in some incidences speak of places found in Eastern Africa) and what some Basotho told the early missionaries about their origin that they came into the region from the North.

It is reported that the whole country of Tanzania was full of rainmakers whose function was to pray for rain and fertility. Thus Iliffe writes:

Over large areas of the western plateau a single rainmaking tradition appears to have existed ... Four areas possessed territorial shrines, normally in caves associated with water, where hereditary priests sacrificed for rain and fertility to a god (often symbolized by a python) whose authority extended over all who lived in the region, whatever their ethnic identity ... Heads of descent groups made annual pilgrimages for rain and fertility medicines, bringing black beasts, the colour of rain clouds. The god communicated by possessing a resident medium. Further west, on the face of the escarpment above the Kilombero, was shrine of chanzi 'the beginner', again apparently associated with some subterranean water movement interpreted by priests (1961: 29-30).

The above quotation, already manifests parallels with the Water Snake in the religion of the ancient Basotho. As we shall see later, this is more or less the way the ancient Basotho also prayed for rain and fertility. Even the pattern of their words of prayer reflect some similarities. For instance in the western plateau where the Bantu speaking people lived, in praying, a Nyamwezi chief poured beer on his predecessor's grave with the following words of accompaniment:

Here is your water
Give me rain!

Let it rain!
Why have you abandoned me?
Are you not still my master?
I inherited the office from you.
It was not stolen.
Yet you have abandoned me.
If you continue to abandon me, so that there is no rain
in the land, the people will depart.
See, here is your goat, and is your sheep! (Iliffe, 1961 : 28).

This kind of prayer reflects much similarity with the one which the Basotho recited in a more or less similar situation in terms of both form and content. It reads thus:

O! New ancestor, pray to the old one
Father see how thin I have become
I am thin, and my neck is like a string.
Can I state that I have masters being thus?
Can I claim to be the child of ancestor, being thus? (Laydevant,
1952:22).

I do not think such similarities can be a mere coincidence. There is more than an accident here. This to me implies a common origin that these people share. There is much that the people of Tanzania have in common with the Basotho. For instance, consider the following quotation from Iliffe about the people of Tanzania:

The most important spirit in Buhaya was Wamara, (lord of the underworld and supposedly the last Chwezi king). Other spirits included heroes (notable Lyangombe, Wamara's

herdsman), nature spirits (Mukasa, the spirit of Lake Victoria and Irungu, lord of the bush), and dead Hinda kings. Possession was restricted to priest-mediums who served each spirit and its ancestors were believed to live in Wamara's underworld kingdom and to return to communicate with their descendants (1961:31)

The question of Wamara, his underworld which is regarded as the ancestors' home, and patron ancestors also feature in the religion of the ancient Basotho as we shall see later. There is also strong evidence for this position in both the Basotho oral traditions and their style of life which reflects some similarities between the Basotho and other Bantu speaking peoples of Tanzania (*Tankanyika*). Among their sacred songs (*likoma*) of the initiation school, the Basotho have the following one:

Dinku dia lla
Dinku tsa Leboya
Di batla dikonyana,
Dikonyana tsa tsona.

The sheep are bleating
The sheep of the North
They want lambs
Their own lambs

The sheep referred to in this song have been interpreted as fathers or leaders of the Basotho nation (lambs) who are in the North, whose set patterns of life should be followed faithfully by the initiates (Matšela, 1990:56). The "northern" theory would

find support in Laydevant's view that:

...the Bantu race, from which the Basotho and the Batswana descend, is the result of the mixture of Hamitic people from Asia and Negroes from Central Africa. They were both herders and cultivators. They brought with them kaffir-corn, sugar cane and a kind of long-horned beasts ... (1952:2).

Evidence concerning the relationship between the Basotho and the Arabs, is found in the songs of girls at the initiation school. The following is one of such songs:

*Re bana ba Ramasoahile
Ba phokojoe e khoaba
Tanyane 'a tanya
Tank 'a boliba
Moriri eka bolele metsing*

We are the children of the
Swahili father
Of the black and grey fox
The one who copulates
At lake Tanka
His hair is like algae in water.

Tanka (Tanga) is a bay found in the eastern part of Tanzania. Swahili itself is a language which is almost universally understood in this country, and is very widely spoken. It is also a *lingua franca* for international African conferences in both East and Central Africa (Legum, 1961). The algae-like hair is a long and shiny hair.

When he speaks of this type of hair, Laydevant says:

Certain fables related by the old Basotho women allude to people of a strange race ... when they comb the long and shiny hair of the girl Tselane, long and shiny hair like that of the mealies, and whose parents travel in ambulating houses tied to animals' tails ... (1952:4).

Tanyane (Motanyane) is a person who tampers with the genitals of the initiates during circumcision. This is done in water, especially lakes or deep pools (*Malibeng*). This is one of the reasons why *Motanyane* is called the child of waters (*ngoan'a metsi*) in some of the sacred songs. The name *Motanyane* itself is a diminutive form of *Motanyi* which itself is derived from the verb *tanya* which means to copulate. Therefore *Motanyi* is the one who copulates. This ritual occurs even today in Lesotho where girls are still circumcised. This is explained by Manyeli in the following way:

The second ceremony, which formed the essential part of the initiation, was called the ceremony of *Malibeng*. It took place at the river or at a near dam from which the mythical person was said to emerge. It was also called the ceremony of *Motanyane* (another name of the mythical person). At dawn, the neophytes went to the river, where they were ordered to stand or kneel while matrons sprinkled them with water as long as they wanted. After this bathing ceremony, the neophytes were ordered to lie down. They prepared

themselves to meet *Motanyane* whom they were not allowed to see nor to look at ... While this mythical actor emerged from the water, as the neophytes were told, assisting women shouted and yelled in order to frighten them. (1992:75).

As we shall see sometime later, the human actor here is only a representational figure. The real *Motanyane* is the water snake that we will be speaking about. Apparently, he is the giver of fertility. By being in contact with the neophytes he transmits this fertility into them as this ceremony prepares them for marriage. This explains why prayers for both fertility and rain were addressed to this water snake by the ancient Basotho. If we can take this song in its literal sense, there is no doubt that it alludes to the sexual intercourse that took place between early Basotho women and the Arab people (who travelled in ambulating houses).

According to the Basotho teaching, sacred songs (*likoma*) contain the whole truth about the history of the Basotho nation. When a person is considered to be a man of truth and integrity, he is said to be the Mosotho of the sacred song, *ke Mosotho oa manneteakoma*, meaning he is a man who sticks to what is true and never compromises his integrity. Therefore whatever we get out of such songs needs our serious attention.

While they were on the shores of the great lakes, and after the beginning of their slow migration towards the south, these Bantu-speaking peoples were in contact with the strangers coming from the Red Sea or from the Persian Gulf and sailing down the East Africa coast (Laydevant, 1952:3). According to Laydevant, the Bantu-speaking peoples were very much culturally influenced by these strangers. In his words he explains this in the following way:

The first visitors whose influence had any importance on the eastern coast were very likely the Assyrians who, according to Hollingsworth (*History of the East Coast of Africa*) introduced the cult of the horn. All the native tribes of South Africa and more so, the Basotho have a great veneration for the horn, and for the medicines contained therein. This veneration is manifested chiefly in the principal circumstances of life: birth, initiation rites, war-time, starting of a new village. When it appears, the baby must wear around its neck a tiny horn containing protective medicines of babyhood. When the adolescent takes part in initiation ceremonies, when the young warrior leaves for battle, he is anointed with medicine from the horn preciously kept in a special place by the chief. When a new village is founded by a chief, his traditional doctor prepares the locality by planting sticks dipped in the powerful medicine from the horn. It is to strengthen the magical power of the horn that, periodically, the natives perform ritual murders (1952:3).

The similarity between the Basotho and Assyrians is also observed in some of the

traditional attire of women during initiation. At initiation, the Basotho girls tie straw veils around their heads to cover their faces. They also put on heavy grass ropes wound around their loins. According to Laydevant, this manner of dressing is referred to in the Dictionary of the Bible (Vigouroux) in connection with a certain Assyrian woman spoken of therein (1952:3).

According to Ellenberger, even some words in Sesotho reflect some Semitic influence. For instance, the Basotho women who wear traditional dress, wear under it round the loins a girdle of twisted grass (*tsikitlane*) known as *thethana*. He suggests that the word *thethana* may be derived from the Hebrew word *thanah* (a fig tree), of the leaves of which Adam and Eve made themselves apron. (1968:15).

It may be taken for certain, then, that all the Bantu tribes come from one common source. The differences which exist between them today, in respect of type and language, may be attributed to various causes: such, for example, as intercourse with other peoples, Bushmen, Hottentots, etc., as well as to circumstance and environment. But all have in the main, the same usages and customs; the same form of government, the same or similar weapons, and many similar superstitions--- (Ellenberger, 1968:xx).

From the region of the Great Lakes of East Africa, many Bantu-speakers slowly moved

down southwards along the coast of Mozambique and crossed the Zambezi River and the Limpopo River to enter Southern Africa between 200 AD and 300 AD (Hall, 1996; Bryan, 1959; Beach, 1994). It is reported by one of the early missionaries that in 1904 a certain Mosotho, Benjamin, confirmed that his ancestors did cross the Zambezi in bark canoes (Laydevant 1952:2). Even in their stories the Basotho often speak of the place called *Mosi-oa-thunya* (smoke-puffing place). In fact, we are told by Phillipson that Victoria Falls are known to local people as *mosi-oa-thunya*, the name given to them by Kololo people and by which they were generally known before “Dr. David Livingstone gave them the name Victoria Falls by which they are today generally known.” (1975:1).

It is also maintained by Ellenberger that these Bantu peoples sojourned in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) for at least two centuries.

It was during the sojourning in Rhodesia that they threw off the numerous offshoots which in course of time came to occupy the whole of South Africa as far south as Keiskama River. These clans became in time important tribes, known to us by the names of *Amagwamba*, *Amathonga*, *Amashona*, *Amazulu*, *Amaswazi*, *Amahlubi*, *Amangwani*, *Amazizi*, *Amabaca*, *Amandebele*, *Amapondo*, *Amapondomise*, *Amakhosa*, *Amatamba*, *Amagcaleka* etc. (1968:XIX).

Around 1600, the Caldon River was being settled by the *Fokeng*, and by the end of the

century the northern stretches of this rich and fertile valley were inhabited by the *Koena* (Sotho group whose totem was the crocodile). A number of Sothonised *Nkuni* groups who, together with the *Fokeng*, had first settled the area such as the *Phetla*, the *Polane* and the *Phuthi*, inhabited the far south and central lowlands of present day Lesotho (Ellenberger, 1968).

During the period 1400 to 1700, the present northern and eastern Free State, as well as western Lesotho, were a region settled by the Southern Sotho who were divided into many clans and chiefdoms. These peoples enjoyed a relative stability and thus their culture flourished (Gill, 1993 : 16-25).

After this time, two of the guiding lights of the Southern Sotho, namely, Mohlomi and Moshoeshoe, were born. Mohlomi, the famous doctor who displayed wisdom in everything that he did and who was also the diviner of the *Koena* clan, was born about 1720 in what we presently call the eastern Free State. Moshoeshoe who was disciple (client) of Mohlomi, was born about 1786 at *Menkhoaneng* which is situated in the northern present Lesotho. This man, though he was born into a minor chiefly family, made a name for himself because of his courage, foresight and other outstanding

leadership qualities (Gill, 1993).

1.1.1 PERIOD OF UPHEAVALS

From the time that Tshaka ascended the Zulu throne until the flight of Moselekatse northward, the whole of Southern Africa was thrown into upheavals (*lifaqane*) which have no known parallel in its history for about thirty years. Whole tribes were exterminated, on one side, by Tshaka's Zulu mighty armies (*impis*), and on the other, by the Matebele hordes of Moselekatse. It was a concrete application of the law of the jungle: the survival of the fittest. Some of these tribes were partially extirpated, and so they ran helter skelter or at times united again to fight to the end. These feeble and vulnerable combinations were in every case defeated and brutally massacred wherever they faced the fighting. Tshaka dispersed all other smaller tribes who were settled on the Quahlamba or Drakensberg Mountains. They then wandered and ran hither and thither with only one concern—the saving of their lives (Molema, 1920).

Some of these destitute and scattered elements were collected into small tribes by their former and newly emerging leaders. All these tribes, together with all those who had

survived the spear of Tshaka, formed a mass of wandering humanity. But because of being distinct and ununited, they were often times victims of both Tshaka and Moselekatse.

1.1.2 WIDER UNIFICATION PROCESS

Moshoeshoe, one of the greatest and outstanding of African leaders, but about whom African authors are silent, deemed it pertinent at that particular moment in time to collect all scattered remnants of tribes to build out of them a unified strong nation. He incorporated with them also all those peoples who had escaped Tshaka's atrocious and bloody yoke.

In this way, Moshoeshoe had founded a relatively stable nation of Basotho. He also established the Basutoland which prior to this time was a region inhabited by a few Bushman tribes such as the *Bataung*, and the *Baphuthi* of Monaheng, who were a direct offshoot from the *Bakoena* (the crocodile people).

He welcomed all those tribes who voluntarily expressed their will and desire to join

him whether of Bechoana or of Zulu stock. He welded all into one Basotho. As the Bechoana element predominated, it absorbed the lesser Zulu and other elements with some modifications here and there. In this way, a new language, which, in fact, was modified Sechwana, was born, and this was then called Sesotho (Molema, 1920). Therefore in summary form, to borrow the words of Gill, Basotho are:

... people untied under Moshoeshoe I during the first half of the 19th century (singular = Mosotho). Basotho generally speak the language Sesotho (although some speak *Sephuthi*, *Xhosa* or *Zulu* as mother tongue). Sesotho is also used by large numbers of Southern *Sotho* speakers in the Orange Free State and the Southern Transval. In other words, Sesotho=Southern Sotho. Sesotho may also be used to distinguish the ways and customs of the Basotho from that of other peoples. Thus, we can talk of the relationship between Sesotho and Christianity. Basotho inhabit the country of Lesotho which Europeans called Basutoland. Present-day Lesotho is generally divided into three main regions: (a) the Lowlands, a very fertile belt of land which follows the Caledon River along the western border-this is where most of Lesotho's people live; (b) Foothills, an intermediate zone which is excellent for both crop farming and herding; and the Maluti or mountainous area which covers two-thirds of Lesotho, is more sparsely populated, and is primarily used for grazing (1993:XIII).

He established strong ties with Mohlomi who acted like a counsellor to a young Moshoeshoe. This old man was always a faithful adviser and sincere friend of

Moshoeshoe. He is the one who reinforced the love of peace in Moshoeshoe's heart. This love grew so strong in Moshoeshoe that he finally called peace his sister. Thus peace (*khotso*) was given all priority by Moshoeshoe and his people. In fact to the present day, "Peace! Rain! Plenty!" (*Khotso! Pula! Nala!*) has remained the motto of the Basotho nation. Whenever an important public figure finishes his speech, his closing words are always *Khotso! Pula! Nala!*. Also, when they greet, the Basotho normally say *Khotso!*. Both Moshoeshoe and Mohlomi assisted the forces which promoted an amalgamation of their society into bigger political units. It was due to their efforts that their kingdom withstood the turbulent times of the great upheavals.

1.1.3 MOSHOESHOE LEAVES BUTHA-BUTHE FOR THABA-BOSIU

Moshoeshoe lived near Butha-Buthe, Menkhoaneng in the northern part of the present Lesotho. He was also often times attacked by the Tlokoa of 'Manthatasi, a Sotho group from the area of modern day Harismith which had been displaced by the Ngwane of Matoane and the Hlubi of Mpangazitha (other Bantu tribes of the region). Although Moshoeshoe was not defeated, he became aware of his nation's vulnerability of further possible attacks. He therefore decided to leave Butha-Buthe for security purposes.

This was done after Moshoeshoe's brother, Mohale, had suggested Thaba-Bosiu as the best new place of refuge and defense. In June, Moshoeshoe and his people set out on a journey to their new fortress. It took them two days to reach the place.

Due to severe famine, and troubles of the time, a new phenomenon came to the fore. This was the problem of people who had become man-eaters because of the scarcity of food and absence of time to cultivate the soil due to the then prevailing instability. It was during the journey to Thaba-Bosiu that the cannibals of whom Rakotsoane was chief, captured Peete, Moshoeshoe's grandfather and ate him near *Malimong*. Cannibalism is described by Laydevant in the following way:

If one is to believe the fables, which are very ancient, it seems that cannibalism was held in horror by the old Basotho. However, there was a period when this practice was quite in vogue, more so between 1824-1830, when Basutoland and the neighbouring countries were totally devastated by invasion from Natal; Ellenberger estimates that, at that time, about 6000 people indulged in eating human flesh.

There are many ways of killing a cat; so also the cannibals or *Malimo* had many ways of killing human game. According to Minnie Martin, one method consisted in bleeding the victim by cutting the upper lip and phalange of the small finger of each hand. Blood was considered as choice food and was collected in calabashes or other vessels

made of clay. Another method used, as related in 1909 by an old man of 90 years by name of Fako, consisted in shaving the hair off the head of the victim. Then a rope made of hair was placed around his neck and tightened. Cuts were then made along the scalp and the blood was preciously collected as it dripped from the wounds. Just as the victim lost consciousness, a sudden jerk on the rope broke the nape of neck, and the meats were ready to be cut up and cooked (1952:20).

On Thaba-Bosiu Moshoeshe established his headquarters and because of the relative stability of the place, his followers started cultivating the surrounding plains. Within no time, many other destitute tribes from all sides joined him attracted by the security of his natural fortress and his willingness to treat fairly with them. It is on this mountain where Moshoeshe displayed his astute diplomacy and his ability to intelligently adapt to new life situations. This tactful leader, recognising the futility of open resistance to the marauding Tshaka's armies, kept Tshaka and his successor Dingaan at bay by offering them gifts as a sign of acknowledging their might over him (Spence, 1968:8-9). The two men (Moshoeshe and Shaka) differed greatly in terms of their approach to life. Whereas for Shaka the principle of life was : never leave an enemy behind or it may rise again to fly to your throat, for Moshoeshe, the principle of life was : open hostility does not pay; a homestead that prospers is that of a humble man. Of course, Moshoeshe was following in Mohlomi's footsteps, his great advisor

who had taught him that:

It is better to thrash the corn than to sharpen the spear. When thou shalt sit in judgment, let thy decisions be just. The law knows no one as a poor man. Conscience is the faithful monitor of man; she invariably shows him what is his duty. If he does well, she smiles upon him; if he does evil, she torments him. This inward guide takes us under her guidance when we leave the womb, and she accompanies us to the entrance of the tomb. (Gill, 1993:60).

It is said that at this time, Moshoeshoe was also able to start his policy of clemency towards the cannibals. He gave them fields, animals and security, and thus persuading them to give up their habits and rejoin the community. It is also reported that Moshoeshoe's people wanted to kill these people, particularly Rakotsoane, who had killed Moshoeshoe's grandfather. But it is said that Moshoeshoe could not allow this to happen as he regarded them as the grave (walking grave) of his grandfather. To do so, would be to unearth his grandfather's grave, and this was equal to committing a sacrilege. Instead, he had them all brought before him, and performed on their bellies some of the burial rituals such as smearing them (bellies) with the contents of the stomach of a sacrificial ox.

1.1.4 NEW THREATS

On the mountain, Moshoeshoe and his people did not enjoy peace for long, for no sooner had the prospects begun to brighten for the emerging Basotho nation than a new and dangerous adversary appeared on the horizon. Different new communities composed of remnants of the Khoi and San, as well as Xhosa, Whites and persons of mixed blood emerged. As early as the 19th century, the Southern Tswana and Sotho groups like the Hoja and Taung were adversely affected by the existence of these new mixed communities. In the late 1920's Moshoeshoe became another victim of this new force. These mixed communities joined with the Kora and started to raid cattle from Moshoeshoe's subordinates. Although they never directly attacked Thaba-Bosiu, they remained a threat to the Basotho.

Another threat to the Basotho nation was Mzilikazi (Moselekatse) who together with his powerful Ndebele nation envied Moshoeshoe's wealth. This man had decimated the Tswana chiefdoms in the south western Transvaal. In 1831, he attacked Thaba-Bosiu, but he failed in his attempts to scale it. As a solace to the defeated Mzilikazi, Moshoeshoe sent him a gift of cattle. After this humiliating gesture, Mzilikazi never

took courage to face Moshoeshoe again (Gill, 1993).

1.1.5 THE ARRIVAL OF THE MISSIONARIES

It was obvious during his nine years at Thaba-Bosiu that Moshoeshoe had overcome all obstacles to his attempts to unite the many clans, both Sotho and Nguni into one nation. In spite of all his remarkable achievements and developments of his nation, the great chief was looking for something more. He wanted more for his people than peaceful co-existence with their neighbours and adequate grazing areas. He had heard of the missionaries and the benefits his nation might receive from them, especially in the field of education. In 1833, this dynamic leader invited three members of the Paris Evangelical Mission to settle in his kingdom. Spence summarises the contents of his invitation in the following way:

You behold our miseries ... this country used to be full of inhabitants. Wars have devastated it. Multitudes have perished. Others have sought refuge in strange lands. I have remained almost alone on this rock. I was told that you would be able to help us: you are promising us to do so. It is all I wish to know. Remain amongst us. (1986:56).

In this way missionaries came to Lesotho and were wholeheartedly welcomed by

Moshoeshoe at Thaba-Bosiu in June 1833. These missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS) were: Thomas Arbousset, Eugene Casalis and Constant Gosellin. They had come to southern Africa to help the London Missionary Society (Livingstone, 1857).

The PEMS missionaries were later followed by the missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). These were: Bishop Francis Allard, Father Joseph Gerard and Brother Pierre Bernard of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (O.M.I.). They were gladly accepted by Moshoeshoe in 1862, February with the following words:

I have chosen a site which may be suitable for your work ...
I want you to be near my residence so that I may be able to
hear from you and to know your doctrine. (Lesotho
Catholic Directory, 1988:8-9).

This site was in Roma valley, Tloutle. The PEMS missionaries on the other hand, had already established themselves at Makhoarane in Morija. Having gone this far with a short survey of the historical events, we now move on to our main topic.

CHAPTER TWO : BASOTHO TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Our critique of various missionaries' perceptions of the Basotho religious life will be done in the light of what is understood to be the nature of African Traditional Religion in general. This being the case, we shall look at nature and history of African Traditional Religion in general as our starting point.

2.1 NATURE AND HISTORY OF AFRICAN RELIGION IN GENERAL

2.1.1 NATURE OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

In responding to all that he or she experiences as his or her own perception of reality, not as it is in itself, but as he or she experiences it an individual person is likely to follow three ways.

Cumpsty explains this process in the following way:

Humankind's primary response to the world-out-there in which it finds itself, is the uncomplicated monistic one, "this is the real." If, however, total, experience cannot be affirmed as the real to which one would belong ultimately, then the quest for belonging will led to a splitting" of that

which can be wholly affirmed from that which cannot. This “splitting” sets up the expectation of something to be overcome and it establishes the distinctive character of what have been called religions of salvation or release.” The splitting can take two forms only. The split can be modelled as divide between reality and its appearance, or, as a divide within reality itself (1995: 8).

These three possible paradigms for reality give birth to three main categories of religion as a phenomenon. These categories are what Cumpsty has called Nature Religion, Withdrawal Religion and Secular World Affirming Religion. Within Nature Religion we find those religious traditions for which the world out there is real and worth belonging to. Such religions have a monistic view of reality. They perceive the universe to be a closed system of cause and effect. This, however, should not be understood as denying such religions of the idea of the Absolute or the Ultimate Reality. The point is that the Ultimate Reality is within the system and not outside it. That is, the supernatural pervades the whole system and influences it from within. This explains why the adherents of African Traditional Religion, as an example of Nature Religion, will for whatever happens, especially, if it threatens their lives, seek the cause within the system.

Like Nature Religion, Withdrawal Religion also has a monistic view of reality. But

unlike in Nature Religion, although the world-out-there is acknowledged as real, it is not experienced as it is in itself. Here an example will be such religious tradition⁵ as Hinduism in which the experience of the world-out-there is not affirmed as experience of the real. In Secular World Affirming Religion the immediate world-out-there is experienced as real but secular. In other words, the experience of the world-out-there is not regarded as experience of the Ultimate Reality. Consequently religious traditions falling under this category have a dualistic view of reality. An example here is Judaism in which there is on one hand an Ultimate Reality (Transcendent) to which one would belong finally and the rest of the experience through which one gets or moves towards the Ultimate Reality on the other hand. This already implies that in such religious traditions, time is linear as it is a movement towards something worth arriving at in future. In them life is characterized by not-yet-ness and therefore a constant hope for something better to be achieved in future. As one good example of what Cumpsty refers to as Nature Religion, African Traditional Religion distinguishes itself from the rest of religions in the following ways:

2.1.1.1 MONISTIC VIEW OF REALITY

In African Traditional Religion the cosmos is regarded as a closed system of cause

and effect. What does this mean? Does it mean that to Africans, reality is a big lump of matter without anything spiritual or supernatural? Not at all. This simply means that gods, spirits or ancestors are hierarchically higher in the system than ordinary human beings just as humans are higher than animals yet they all belong to the same reality (cf. Cumpsty, 1991:178). It means coexistence of the visible and invisible world; coexistence of the infinite and, the finite.

Such a world-view encourages harmonious and peaceful coexistence of all beings as any disturbance may turn the whole system upside down and thus suffocate even the wellbeing of the innocent. In case, such disturbance actually takes place, it is not taken to have happened by chance. Chance has no place in such a system. Therefore someone among the members of the community is thought to be responsible.

2.1.1.2 EXTENSIVE USE OF MYTHS AND RITUALS

If there is anything typical of African Religion, it is its extensive use of myths and rituals (Wemdef, 1933; Goldstein, 1964). It is particularly due to its readiness to resort to myths in trying to explain reality, that some people call it a mythopoeic

religion. This tendency (to resort to myths) is created by the conception that this religion has of reality. For it, as we have seen, the world-out-there is real. And because it is real, it is all acceptable. In other words, because it does not have the expectation of an unacceptable life experience, whenever it experiences anything that threatens this positive world-view, it has to find a way of explaining it so as to keep the cosmos together. That is to say, it invents myths to offer explanations. Thus myths become a way of maintaining a unified sense of the real.

The choice of myths and not any other means of maintaining a unified sense of the real can be explained in the following way: To maintain the coherence of the cosmos to which adherents belong, there are three possible perspectives. These are what Cumpsty has called the Actual Life-World Perspective, the Total Perspective, and the Symbolized Life-World Perspective.

The Actual Life-World Perspective, to use his words is:

The perspective in which each aspect of everyday existence is perceived as it exists in itself and in interaction with its neighbours. That is, without overt symbolic implications and without relationship to postulated entities or to the totality of things. This perspective exists in every culture, although in some it may be heavily overlaid by perspective 3 (1991:

276).

Total Perspective, which is an immediate available alternative to the Actual Life-World perspective is:

The perspective in which one might stand back from all the bits and pieces of life and seek to know what all-that-out-there feels like and, perhaps, to ask “what is it all about?” In the nature religion type of tradition the minimal conceptual answer would have to be that it is a closed system of cause and effect embracing a multitude of interacting parts and that it has a feel, if not a conceptualizable character, of its own (Cumpsty, 1991:276).

Symbolized Life-World Perspective, which is very important concerning the existence of the incredible variety of myths in African Traditional Religions is:

The perspective in which significant aspects of the life-world are separated out and then given a symbolic content or relationship. It enables them to be reintegrated at the level beyond that of their actually experienced relationships. The different aspects may be personified, or given the characters and whims of beasts, or they may be conceived as vital forces that are neither personal nor impersonal (Cumpsty, 1991: 276).

To go back to the question of the unacceptability of experience, we have to mention

here that such unacceptability can either be acute or chronic. If it is acute, a move to an increased consciousness of the total perspective described above is likely to result. When this happens, language also changes since this is a more holistic perspective which tries to create the feeling that experience as a whole can still be affirmed as the real. As Cumpsty puts it, "literal discourse will not serve to express consciousness of, let alone feeling about, the totality. As a minimum aid to consciousness of totality the ultimately-real may be named. Feelings about it are likely to be expressed in art forms and in narrative myths" (1991:280). Once it is named, a tendency will be to personify it since it can be related to, manipulated, and even addressed. It is treated as unique. Because it is unique, people tend to have a personal feel towards it and to speak of it in personal terms.

This, then "means that one must get behind the language to the structure of the reality being expressed, if an experience being described in personal terms is to be fully understood" (Cumpsty, 1991:281). This also shows that it is wrong to determine the "quality" of a God that people have in terms of whether they use personal or impersonal terms to refer to him. This was the mistake of many missionaries who thought Africans had a God of "Lower quality" because of the impersonal names that were used in

referring to him. This was, for example, the attitude of Moffat towards Batswana's Divinity. (Moffat, 1842). The question of choosing personal or impersonal names solely depends on which perspective one has of the reality, and it does not necessarily mean if one speaks of the reality in personal terms and another speaks of it in impersonal terms, then the two are speaking of two different realities, one superior and another inferior. Regardless of whether one uses personal or impersonal terms, the reality might still be one and the same.

If, however, the unacceptability of experience is chronic instead of being acute, the likely response is that the unacceptable will be modified and that which cannot be modified will be integrated. If an acceptable verdict on experience cannot be given simply by opting for the total perspective, or by devices of categorization such as when Yoruba people invented a category of "those born to die" in order to integrate the then prevailing problem of high infant mortality rate, then, as Cumpsty states it, "one must seek to divide, distinguish and interrelate both the threatening and compensatory aspects. In that way a sense of unity may emerge. One has then moved into the third perspective identified above, that of the symbolized life-world" (1991:281). It is particularly in this sort of situation that Africans will then create all sorts of myths.

Thus the volume of myth^s expands and greater integration emerges among the myths already in existence.

To remind ourselves what we said earlier, in Nature Religion the immediate World-out-there is perceived as real, and as such, something to which one would like to belong.

There are times in life, however when such belonging can be disturbed. When this happens people have to do something in order to maintain their belonging. As their first step they will do this in the ways just set out by the community. But as this fails and the situation gets worse:

Protective moves will be made in relation to the mode of belonging, and this will begin in a strengthening of the sinews that are already understood to hold experience together. One of these is the family and extended family, to the clan and beyond. In situation of disturbance these relationships are likely to become more conscious and to be more consciously safeguarded. In situation of chronic unacceptability of experience they may even be duplicated in some way, so that each individual has two or more ways of belonging to the community. In either acute or chronic disturbance one would expect the mediatorial roles of key figures such as the heads of households, the chiefs of clan, of immediate ancestors and of specially endowed individuals, to be further elaborated and emphasised. At levels of disturbance beyond the community's expectations of such functionaries special arrangements will need to be made (Cumpsty, 1991:266-289).

This whole enterprise of mediation then gives birth to the extensive use of rituals which in extreme cases may even include human sacrifices such as, for instance, when Basotho sacrifice a man to the water snake in order to pray for badly needed rain. Thus in Africa, when the disturbance increases, there is a growing specialization of rituals all of which are aimed at maintaining the sense of belonging to the cosmos.

2.1.1.3 PERSONAL-IMPERSONAL NATURE OF THE ULTIMATELY-REAL

Earlier on in this work, we said that to maintain the coherence of the cosmos to which adherents belong, there are three possible perspectives. One of such perspectives, as we have already seen, is symbolized life-world perspective. This is the perspective that Africans often opt for. And as we have seen, it is the one that gives rise to personal-impersonal nature of the Ultimately-Real. This is because in a monistic understanding of reality, the personal and impersonal are not that much distinguished from each other. Here, unlike in the case of the total perspective, there is no question of uniqueness and therefore of speaking of the Ultimately-Real in personal terms only. In this way, African Religion differs from other religious traditions in that:

there is no pressure to think of the ultimately-real as personal and, therefore, not the same pressure as in the secular world affirming traditions, to make a radical distinction between personal and impersonal. The real is neither strongly personal nor strongly impersonal, and it may be modelled in either way and then easily pass over into the other and back again. Equally, it may be modelled as a vital force, perhaps more manifest in ancestors and chiefs than in ordinary folk and in some descending degree in animals, plants, rivers, the earth and stones, but nevertheless as being the essential presence in all of them. It is this understanding that makes African writers protest that, however much imagering may be drawn from aspects of life in order to speak of reality itself, Africans are not animists (Cumpsty, 1991:281).

Generally speaking, to speak of the Ultimately-Real as personal is something that happens in cases where people are faced with an acute unacceptability of experience. What has just been said in the above quotation is exactly what one finds in Basotho Traditional Religion. In this religion the sacred is spoken of as both personal and impersonal at the same time, depending on the context in which it is being spoken of.

2.1.1.4 ASSUMED MEMBERSHIP

One of the distinguishing features of African Religion is its membership which is not something to be sought. Belonging to it is assumed and must be maintained or repaired

if fragmentation occurs. What distinguishes it from Withdrawal Religion, in which belonging is also assumed, is the fact that, unlike in the latter where such assumed belonging needs to be realized individually, here it is realized collectively or communally.

Participation in this religion is by the observance of a communal behaviour pattern. Behaviours for the maintenance of belonging are indistinguishable from everyday life activity. The same is true with behaviour for the restoration of belonging. They are closely related to life activities, but may, however, where necessary become special and distinctive ritual (cf. Cumpsty, 1991; Zahan, 1979).

This is a kind of religion one is born with. It is written in the lives of the people:

It is not preached from one people to another. Therefore a person must be born in a particular African people in order to be able to follow African Religion in that group. It would be meaningless and useless to try and transplant it to an entirely different society outside of Africa, unless African peoples themselves go with it there. Even within Africa itself, religion takes on different forms according to different tribal settings. For that reason, a person from one setting cannot automatically and immediately adjust himself to or adopt the religious life of other African peoples in a different setting. The peoples of Europe, America or Asia cannot be

converted to African Religion as it is so much removed from their geographical and cultural setting (Mbiti, 1986:13).

Despite all variations within this religion, what remains to be noted is that basic characteristics still remain the same no matter which African community may be practising it. This is what makes it one religion and not many.

2.1.1.5 COMMUNAL-CENTREDNESS

In Africa an individual is first and foremost a member of his community. He or she is always treated and related to not in isolation but in relation to where he or she belongs. Thus one may say, in Africa community is prior to the individual, and the wider community takes precedence over the immediate community. This understanding of a person, is best expressed in their world-famous saying, “A person is a person through other persons” (*Motho ke motho ka batho*).

The importance of community in African Religion is expressed by Thorpe in the following words:

Throughout Africa the milieu in which religious concepts are born and nurtured is that of the tribe or group of which

individuals belong. So important is the community to religion that it has itself become a part of the traditional African creed. Whether the individual or the group takes precedence is difficult to determine. Without the group, the individual would not exist, but likewise, the group would be null and void without its individual members. For Africans, however, the community on the whole has primacy, since it is understood to antedate the individual. The community is *a priori* to existence (1991:110).

This implies that in Africa a strong emphasis is placed on kinship. Such kinship controls and determines interpersonal relations of the members of the community and their relationship with animals, plants and inanimate objects. Because it is essentially communal, in this religion:

The individual belongs to the ultimately-real in belonging to his or her community, both living and departed, and with it to the immediate world of experience and to whatever extends beyond. Belonging begins with most immediate and most clearly defined and then moves out to include all that is known and unknown. That is, it begins with the individual centre and moves out to include everything, but with decreasing definition. It is a centred communal belonging” (Cumpsty, 1991:296).

With this in mind, we now move on to the views on the traditional religion of the Southern Sotho.

To start with, let us first clarify certain points on the choice of a paradigm and the history of African Traditional Religion in general as this will enable us to understand whatever will be said on Basotho Traditional Religion better. Cumpsty argues as follows:

Why a particular paradigm is chosen or comes to dominance within a culture may be accidental, but there seems to be evidence for predisposing conditions. For example, in relation to the events of biblical history leading up to the Sinai covenant, the condition which pressed the group toward choosing the bifurcation in reality itself was a socio-cultural disturbance which led to geographic migration and thence to a sense of a lost past and a future hope.

It seems that when the important thing about time becomes some future event, rather than natural cycles, people put their god where their hope is. That is, they place the full availability of the divine in that future time when experience will be fully acceptable and affirmable as that to which they would belong ultimately. Because this ultimately-real already exists it is also modelled as being presently "above" or otherwise spatially removed. For such a model to be satisfactory, it must include the expectation that this and that which transcends it, will come together at that future time (Cumpsty, 1991:175).

Elsewhere he includes cultural migration:

.... People undergoing geographical or cultural migration tend to move in the direction of transcendence and the

Secular World Affirming paradigm. They, as it were, put their God where their hope is, that is out in front or above. (Cumpsty, 1995:11).

In Southern Africa both the Vakovango and the Vahvenda, in their different ways, went through a long period of conscious migration looking for land of their own. Whereas Israel believed its ancestors to have been led by a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day, the Vakovango were led by an Eagle, a manifestation of the high god Karunga or Nyambi, and the Vahvenda by a Drum given by the high god Mwali. A sense of linear time linked with a sense of transcendence produces open ended myths whereas in settled situations they tend to be closed, the hero figure being driven away or killed to start the beneficial cycle again (Diaz, 1992).

The reverse of Cumpsty's point is that when people "arrived" and go back to settled conditions, then they are likely to return to a sense of cyclical time and lose transcendence and, therefore, to a concentration on ancestors or other aspects of a monistic universe, the high god falling into the background of attention. Many in ancient Israel, it seems sought to return to the Ba'als and allow Yahweh, the god of the migration era, to fall into the background. The Vahvenda say they can no longer hear

Mwali in the thunder. The Vakovango, on the other hand, have retained a sense of openness to the future because for other reasons, not least the rainfall cycle, they were not able to gain a settled sense.

The history that we tried to trace for Basotho ancestors indicates a situation between that of conscious migration and of settlement. Always moving on, seeking to survive, but spending quite long periods in places along the way, but never consciously looking for any particular imagined place, it was not until they came to the coast and the south and therefore into conflict with those already settled there, that under Moshoeshe they became established in their present home. At that moment in time we note the relative willingness, compared to the AmaZulu, with which they embraced Christianity in its various forms, suggesting that some sense of transcendence was not foreign to them.

2.1.2 HISTORY OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

From the very beginning when missionaries started their work of evangelization in foreign countries, the Congregation of the Propagation of Faith issued a statement of warning:

Do not regard it as your task and do not bring any pressure

to bear on the people to change their manners, customs and uses unless they are evidently contrary to religion and sound morals. What could be more absurd than to transport France, Spain, Italy or some other European country to China? Do not introduce all that to them but only the faith, which does not despise or destroy the manners and customs of any people, always supposing that they are not evil, but rather wish to see them preserved unharmed.... There is no stronger cause for alienation and hate than an attack on local customs especially when they go back to a venerable antiquity.... Do your utmost to adapt yourselves to them (Hinfelaar, 1994:6-7).

Words such as these show us the good spirit the leadership of the church had when they first sent out missionaries to mission countries. But what happened? Often times the opposite was true. A number of factors led to this. To start with, Christianity never existed in isolation or a vacuum. Hence it could only be transported in the culture in which it was known. As missionaries did not know African cultures and only knew Christianity as it was expressed in their own cultures, it was almost impossible for them to communicate it in any other way than the one they knew. Therefore to talk of introducing only the faith (devoid of any cultural influence) was to some extent to make an unrealistic statement, at least at this moment which was an initial stage of evangelization of mission countries.

Secondly, prior to their conversion to Christianity, Africans were very religious people – religion was the strongest element whose constant influence was felt in all departments of life. They had no categorization of things or people into religious and non-religious, sacred and profane; spiritual and material, transcendent and immanent. The so-called “irreligious” person was non-existent. They carried their religion wherever they went, be it to the fields, to the feast or war, to the funeral, school, politics, hunting, fishing and whatever business one may think of. To use Mbiti’s words, religion was in the “whole system of their being” (1983:3). Religion was a frame of reference in their lives. Now, for someone coming from a dualistic world view background in which there is always a sharp distinction between religion and daily life of the people, it appeared as if Africans did not have any religion. Therefore it comes as no surprise that some missionaries understood Africans as people without any religion. In this way they tended to treat Africans as if it was the first time for them to hear about Supreme Being. They displayed a master-servant kind of attitude towards Africans and condemned quite a number of African manners, customs and uses, contrary to what the Congregation had instructed them to do.

Most early accounts by Western travellers and missionaries reveal without doubt some

of these biased attitudes towards African cultures. The following quotation from Samuel Baker as quoted by Ray speaks for itself:

Without any exception, they are without a belief in a Supreme Being, neither have they any form of worship or idolatry; nor is the darkness of their minds enlightened by even a ray of superstition. The mind is as stagnant as the morass which forms its puny world (Ray, 1976:3).

People such as these, totally ignorant of African way of life, happily contented themselves with such beliefs. To say that Africans were without a belief in a Supreme Being was incorrect. If this was correct there would be no African names for God. But as experience shows, there is not a single African community in which there is not an African name for God. Such names are just too many to enumerate. How can people have so many names for a non-existent? This usage of local nomenclature is a proof that the concept of the Supreme Being is not foreign to Africans. It is likewise not correct to maintain that Africans did not have any form of worship. They may not have congregated together every Sunday and led into prayer by some ecclesiastical authority, but this does not mean they did not worship in their own African way. As we have already said in the previous pages, when missionaries encountered Africans for the first time, against all that has been written about them, Africans were deeply religious.

Beliefs were absorbed from the community and woven into the life of each member of the community wherever a person was. Religion was a whole way of life of the people (Magesa, 1997). This was in sharp contrast with Christianity in which there was a strong tendency to keep religion and ordinary life strictly separate, and religion was for Sundays, for special moments and for special occasions.

It would appear that missionaries came ill-prepared by modern standards. They knew practically nothing about the societies to be evangelized. Most information about them was collected from books written by explorers, adventureres, navigators who were not trained in the art and science of ethnology or social anthropology. Those writers isolated facts from the social cultural context, in which alone they made sense. They picked out only what seemed to be 'strange, superstitious, weird, abhorrent, obscene, wicked and intolerable.' They tended practically to describe the African, as being 'lower in intelligence than dogs, with a bizarre sense of religion,' steeped in superstition of iniquity, without any sense of morality.... They contended that they had to do all they could to snatch 'the wretched African' from the grip of the devil (Sarpong, 1990:107).

Accounts such as these were not uncommon in the early days of African encounter with the Western World. Generally speaking, a considerable number of missionaries and Western travellers failed to see anything positive in African cultures (Barret, 1971). Thus their attitude was of a total rejection and exclusion of such cultures to which was

attributed pejorative adjectives such as “barbaric”, “savage”, “primitive”, “backward” and “satanic”. This was, as Tutu puts it, to make Africans feel somewhat uneasy and guilty about what they could not alter even if they tried until doomsday-their Africanness (Cumpsty, 1991:141). In fact, as Mudimbe (1994) reports it, being human and civilized meant a total denunciation of the old, and a noticeable absorption of more than just a mere handful of the new. This unfortunate attitude has turned African peoples into what Tempels has called “the deracinated,” that is, “those who have been torn away from their ethnic roots: and who, belonging nowhere, are very liable as a result of their insecurity to all kinds of unstable behaviour.” (1969:24).

The anti-Africa bigotry reached its turning point when through what John Paul II rightly calls “a tragedy of a civilization that called itself Christian” (Bujo, 1992:6) –slave-trade, which robbed Africans of their dignity as human beings, Africans were sold as mere goods and chattels. Africa was deprived of a big number of her sons and daughters who were forcefully abducted to strange lands where they are still victims of prejudice, ill-treatment and social discrimination even today.

These are but a few instances by which one tries to show how much disastrous a failure

to understand the mentality or the thinking of the people can be, and hence a need to discover and study other people's system of thought if ever one is to treat them as his or her fellow human beings. It is, I believe, through such a failure, that some White people of South Africa felt it their moral duty to dominate and humiliate Black people by subjecting them to all sorts of indignities under the apartheid system. Some even today feel reluctant to give a Black person what is due to him or her just because they think by so doing they will be equating him or her to their "first class humanity." To claim any racial superiority above any group of people is not only a crime against humanity but is in fact, to be guilty of arrogance.

Today there is a general awareness that if ever Africa is to get out of her economic and political predicament, there is a need first and foremost, to restore the dignity that the Black person has been deprived of at the cultural level. A hasty break made during the euphoria of independence in favour of the Western way of life needs to be meticulously scrutinized. Africans should identify themselves with their own culture. Long before their contact with the Western World, Africans 'had their own political forms and socioeconomic administrative systems, which were based on genuine political insight' (Bujo, 1998:158) and were very successful. Why can't these be made compatible with

the modern state? Don't economic analysts attribute the Japan's economic success to that country's ability to amalgamate the best of the Japanese culture with the best of the Western culture? If this has worked for Japanese, will it not perhaps work for Africans too?

Western forms of governance may only be successful in Africa if they pay attention to the traditional African models and properly consider them.

It is regrettable that the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) has so far never taken a genuine African cultural policy into consideration. The principles of its charter are mainly formulated according to a Western method which concentrates on problems caused by the First World without looking for a culturally adapted solution. It ought to be the OAU's task to promote specific African political forms which are capable of restoring the traditions neglected since colonial times. The First World, in turn, ought to demur no longer on the question as to whether a traditional African understanding of democracy can be defended. Rather, it should help to prevent the still existing and approved traditions from disappearing, so that they may lead to an African political form of life, which could also be important for the economic stability of the continent. (Bujo, 1998:167-168).

It is, I believe, due to such an awareness that what has come to be known as "the Nationalist-ideological philosophy" be it Senghor's "Negritude," Kaunda's "African

Humanism,” Nyerere’s African Socialism,” or Nkrumah’s “Consciencism” all of which reiterate, embrace and re-echo African values came into being. It was the feeling of all these African politicians that they had been deprived of their identity (cf. Ruch and Anyanwu, 1981:185). Of the three factors, namely, slavery, colonialism and racialism, all of which led to such feeling, racialism was the most pernicious and could rightly be taken as the source of the other two. It was because of it that some Westerners felt a moral justification to reduce Black people to slavery. It was again due to it that they felt a right or even a duty to “civilize” them through the process of colonization. It was still due to racialism that about Africans, Hume wrote:

I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the Whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor even any individual, eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the whites, such as the ancient Germans, the present Tartars, have still something eminent about them, in their valour form of government, or some other particular. Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction between these breeds of men.... In Jamaica, indeed, they talk of one Negro as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for slender accomplishments, like a parrot who speaks a few words plainly (Ruch and Anyanwu, 1981:185).

To deny people the capacity to think, while at the same time acknowledging that they all act and react in the same way is itself in some sense a contradiction in terms. How can people without any exception, do things in the same way and yet be said to be without any system of thought?

For some arrogant and snobbish Westerners such as Hegel, an African was natural man in his savage state, with an untameable nature (Bujo, 1990:48). He was classified “as a creature degraded by nature, reliant on instinct, more akin to animals (a handsome beast, at best)-just good enough to serve whitefolk” (Ogrizek, 1954:31). For him, if one wished to understand an African, one would have to pass over respect, all morality, or generally, any human feeling, because for him in Africans there was not trace of humanity. They knew only of sorcery, witchcraft, magic and fetishism devoid of any conception of God or morality grounded in religion.

In order to prove to the Western-World that Africans were not real humans or at best not fully human, one African lady Saartjie Baartman, was used in circus where she was forced to expose her nakedness as a form of entertainment to white audiences in Europe without considering any moral implications of this (perhaps because for them, Africans were people without morality!). It is again no secret that even today some of the

European museums have these parts which have been mutilated from early African victims of slavery and colonization displayed for public viewing (Sunday Times, October 18, 1998:29).

Commenting on the possible impact of such a negative approach, Tempels says:

It is contended that in condemning the whole gamut of their supposed “childish and savage customs” by the judgement “this is stupid and bad” we have taken our share of the responsibility for having killed “the man” in the Bantu (1969:28-29).

Without any doubt such a negative attitude, as Tempels has rightly observed, impinged upon African cultures. This displaced Africans culturally. Of course, no one in his good senses could proudly continue associating himself with what was considered “satanic.” “Such low esteem has degraded us long enough and has created in some of us an inferiority complex which can be eradicated only with great difficulty” (Bujo, 1990:49). It has destroyed an African’s cultural pride and self-confidence to the extent that today he lives as a mere copy-copying everything from the West. Will he ever be given a chance to be original?

He speaks everyone else’s languages, he wears everyone

else's clothes; he has assumed everyone else's culture; he bears everyone else's names; he aspires to everyone else's way of living; he eats everyone else's food and buy everyone else's products! (Nangoli, 1987).

2.1.3 VIEWS ON BASOTHO TRADITIONAL RELIGION.

The first Christian missionaries to encounter Basotho were Casalis, Arbousset and Gossellin in 1833. These were, as we have already indicated, members of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society. One of the very first things they observed about the Basotho was that unlike in other parts of the world where people normally have visible manifestations of religion such as sculptural or architectural evidence and monuments, here such things were non-existent. In his words Casalis says:

In all ages and all climates man has erected monuments, in accordance with his progress in the arts, to express his religious ideas, or to shelter his worship. Nothing of the kind is seen here, not even a consecrated stone, like that which Jacob set up at Luz until he was able to build an altar (1861:237).

No one can understand, appreciate, respect fully, or enter the inner world of another, without knowing their world-view, or how that person experiences and interprets events. This is the fact which Casalis seems to have ignored in the above criticism levelled against Basotho. He criticized them when he practically knew nothing about

their conception of the world-out-there. He seems to be ignorant of one important fact, namely, that Basotho, like many Africans, maintain a monistic view of reality. Their situation is one in which life is not artificially divided into the sacred and the profane. In such a world-view there is no need to erect some special structures which have to be treated as sacred. The entire universe is believed to be permeated by the supernatural powers. That is to say, the presence of the holy is felt in the entire universe although in different degrees as stated in our discussion of the basic features of African Traditional Religion in the previous pages. He was himself from the background in which there is always a tendency to keep both ordinary and religious life of the people strictly separate. But this is not what one meets in Basotho situation. He was therefore looking for something which in this context, was irrelevant. The way Casalis thought of the Basotho religious life is the way followed by virtually all other missionaries who lived in Lesotho. Their works, as we have already indicated, are to a great extent nothing more than mere duplications of Casalis opinions. I am here referring to such authors as Widdicombe (1891) of the Anglican Church, Laydevant (1952) of the Roman Catholic Church and Ellenberger (1969) of the Lesotho Evangelical Church. A good example of what we mean is the following quotation from Widdicombe:

The traveller may pass through all the various territories inhabited by them without seeing the slightest indication of any religious belief or worship. The natives of Central Africa have at least a fetish; these have none they have no temples or structures of any kind dedicated to religious uses ...(1891:59-60).

In essence what Widdicombe has said above is not different from what Casalis had said before him on the same issue. Given the kind of the world view Basotho maintained regarding the world-out-there, a temple or any structure dedicated to religious uses was, as we have already said, something irrelevant to Basotho religion. This is something, which Widdicombe could have been aware of had he not allowed himself to be influenced by popular views of his predecessors and his superior-inferior attitude toward Africans. Going through some of the things he has written on Basotho, anybody who is aware of what other missionaries have written on Basotho cannot but come to one conclusion: this was the most snobbish and arrogant of all the missionaries whom the Basotho had ever encountered.

In his description of Basotho, he describes them as being “inferior to the Kafirs in physical strength and beauty of form.” (1891:18). It is important to note that contrary to these views of Widdicombe about Basotho, objective studies done by other people

on Basotho elsewhere reveal that they are one of the most-sought-after type of manual labourers, particularly when it comes to working underground (in shaft sinking) or on farms precisely due to their physical strength, tenacity and expertise. For this reason, apart from working in South African mines, many Basotho men are recruited to work in such countries as Latin America, China and Switzerland (cf. Guy and Thabane, 1988). He describes Basotho men as being “mere clumsy, unclean bunglers ...” (1891:55). He also arrogantly describes their food as being “a pasty, insipid, unappetising mess, resembling a cannon ball in size and form” (1891:55) which “Europeans rarely, if ever, take to it kindly” (1891:55).

His arrogance and lack of appreciation of Basotho things become even worse when it comes to the Basotho dance or music. He describes their music scene as nothing but mere orgiastic “bestial revelry, such as can hardly be imagined, much less described” (1891:56) and their singing as a “deafening babel of sounds and clattering of tongues” (1891:57-58). In some cases he describes the sound produced by some of the Basotho musical instruments as being “hideous and deafening noise Which would be nothing less than an utter terror to anyone possessed of nerves” (1891:58). Elsewhere he says:

Sometimes the women and girls will dance to these instruments, keeping time by singing and clapping their hands. On such occasions one of the females, generally a wizened old hag with a stick in her hand, acts as conductress and mistress of the ceremonies; and the women with their contortions, their horrible grimaces, their hand clappings, their shrill piercing voices, and the flapping to and fro of their short stiff leather petticoats look like so many witches – an African rendering of the well-known scene in “Macbeth.” (1891: 58).

From what we have just read in these preceding pages it becomes obvious that Widdicombe had no appreciation of the Basotho culture at all. He saw as inferior anything with which he was not familiar and he obviously had no doubt at all about the superiority of his culture over that of Basotho. It does not look like he sufficiently entered into the life of Basotho to understand anything of their culture.

The very music he was condemning was, to Basotho, one of the most important expressions of their religious sentiments and devotion. Along with such music is always drumming or clapping of hands that gives freshness and vitality to the music which otherwise would be a boring and gloomy dirge. At the same time there is dancing, some bodily movements as everyone enjoys the rhythm. Dancing becomes the very expression of the life-force within the participants. As the beat of the cowhide

drum reverberates through the village, even toddlers or babies on the back of their mothers cannot resist swaying their heads or shuffling their tiny feet. In a little while life-problems are put aside as even those plagued by all sorts of miseries also join the celebration joyfully. And there is absolutely nothing orgiastic or “licentious” about this as Widdicombe seems to suggest (1891:57).

What Widdicombe and his colleagues (e.g. Ellenberger, 1969) failed to understand in as far as Basotho singing was concerned is that it is not silence or a dirge-like type of music which throws an African into religious ecstasy or spiritual trance, but rather the rhythm-when muscles and drums synchronize, bodies sweat and the pulse outruns the drumbeat. It is during moments such as these that the barrier between the visible and the invisible world crashes down as the living sway in rhythm with the living dead.

It seems to me that, contrary to what the congregation of the Propagation of Faith had warned some of them against, these missionaries were quite adamant to despise and reject anything not European. Because they regarded Basotho music as being noisy, coarse, very monotonous and without harmony (Ellenberger, 1969), they imposed upon

Basotho their own Western melodies which turned the whole liturgical celebration into a gloomy and boring enterprise.

For a long time this kind of music has failed not only Basotho, but many Africans upon whom it has been imposed elsewhere in Africa. It has nothing wrong in itself, but it is not the kind of music that Africans have the susceptibilities of. About this type of music Kaunda says:

The idea of solo performance in music is foreign to us. It is an intolerable strain to sit passively in a concert hall and be played or sung to. In spite of ourselves, our whole body responds to musical beat; we cannot resist swaying our heads, shuffling our feet and clicking our fingers (1966:35).

Each person is under normal circumstances understood to be the product of the society in which he or she has been brought up. This simply means that the way each person reacts to different stimuli is primarily shaped and influenced by the way his or her people respond to such stimuli. Thus everything is likely to make sense and to have a meaningful impact on one's life as long as it relates and corresponds to the perspective of one's own society on things of its nature. If these messengers of good news were only aware of this, they could have realized that the very celebrations which they

described as being licentious, noisy and coarse and the very music they described as being monotonous and without harmony were always done to honour the ancestors who were felt to be present and participating in them.

For Ellenberger, Basotho did not only lack visible manifestations of religion such as sculptural or architectural evidence and monuments, but they also did not have any myths or legends of a religious nature. In his words he says:

There are no myths, and legends of a religious nature. They seem to have lived from generation to generation entirely for the present, troubling themselves little about the past and less about the future.... They seem to have lived for many centuries in the same state of barbarism, without changing their manners or belief, unless for the worse; and so absorbed were they in present needs and pre-occupations that religious tradition became dim, and the idea of God so obliterated that, at the time of which we are writing, there was nothing of religion among the people beyond a lively fear of bad spirits. (1969:237-8).

Once again, we have to say that what Ellenberger says in the above lines is purely based upon his ignorance about the nature of African Traditional Religion. In this type of religion, religious life is not separate from life in general. There is no a radical gap between what is religious and other entities which comprise the world of experience.

All belong to one monistic reality. Therefore what may, at first glance, appear as nothing more than an ordinary thing or event may, under serious scrutiny be found to be deeply religious. When Casalis saw *likoma* for the first time, he regarded them “as nothing more than a mere series of sounds which are agreeable to the ear, but without any serious meaning” (1861:265). But today almost all Basotho theologians are unanimous that *likoma* are one of the richest sources of the Basotho religious thought. It was precisely this Casalis’ failure to take *likoma* seriously that led him into the mistake of placing the Basotho deity in the sky instead of placing him in the bowels of the earth – the place which is his abode according to what we have read in *likoma*. By saying that Basotho had no myths and legends of a religious nature, Ellenberger seems to be doing exactly what Casalis did regarding *likoma*. His problem is not that Basotho do not have myths and legends, but that their myths and legends are not of a religious nature. He seems to forget one important thing: that he is here dealing with people whose religion pervades all of life and is symbolized in behaviour of a natural rather than of a separated out, specifically religious kind. The truth is, as will be seen in a moment, Basotho do have myths and legends of a religious nature, although this may not be that obvious due to what has been said above about their world view.

His criticism that they trouble themselves little about the past and less about the future and that they seem to have lived for many centuries without changing their manners or belief can also be explained in terms of their world view and not Ellenberger's world view. For them what is out there:

.....is monistic and real. Therefore the environment or significant parts of it are dealt with as divine and eternal or (if those personal and philosophical concepts are not present) as a given without a beginning and without a destiny and, beyond certain limits, not to be interfered with by humankind. ...time does not run in linear fashion but is cyclical. The ideal person, in relation to nature, is relatively passive fitting himself or herself into the given rhythms. They may build storehouses to bridge the years of dearth and plenty, but they do not radically take hold of the world around and seek to shape it, for it is divine, or at least permeated by the divine spirit or spirits or by some all-pervasive vital force (Cumpsty, 1991:118-120).

Perhaps it is this kind of conceiving reality which has to be blamed for the prevailing under-development in many African countries. It discourages initiative because it encourages every person to live in such a way that every act, every detail of behaviour, every attitude does not deviate from what is already known and held dearly by the community, but contributes to the strengthening and maintenance of the status quo. I believe that it is because of this same conception of reality that in many African

Communities:

Women feel unable to oppose community dictates, even when these affect them adversely. Many women even go to great lengths to support these dictates by organizing groups which mete out punishment to non-conforming women, and conduct hostile campaigns against passive observers (Koso-Thomas, 1987:1).

One unique thing about all Christian missionaries in Lesotho is that despite the fact that they were not able to find any visible manifestations of religion such as a sculptural or architectural evidence, monuments, myths and legends of a religious nature (as Ellenberger claims), they never regarded Basotho as irreligious people. When the first missionaries arrived in Lesotho it was in winter (June), the time during which Basotho had and still have a lot of feasts which are made in honour of their ancestors in order to thank them for good harvest. Casalis has written quite extensively on some of these feasts and has drawn some remarkable parallels between them and those performed by the Israelites. He says that at these feasts “a certain quantity of beer is separated from the rest, and placed religiously in the most remote corner of the hut; after some time the old men go and drink the sacred liquor, as the Jewish priests ate the shew-bread.” (1861:252). This (ancestors’ veneration) alone, it seems, was enough evidence for them to regard Basotho as religious people. I am saying this alone because from what

they have written, it does not look like they were able to see clearly that there was more to this religion than a mere ancestral veneration.

It seems that to some extent they even thought that this veneration of ancestors was almost all that this religion was all about. This is at least what one gets from the following words of Widdicombe, which are in essence not very much different from what the members of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society had written before him on the same issue:

The Basutos, in common with the other Bantu tribes, believe that the spirits of their ancestors interfere in their daily affairs, and influence their destiny. Accordingly they endeavour to worship and propitiate them with prayers, incantations and sacrifices. Such worship as they render to these departed spirits is based upon fear; love does not enter into it. Some of them may perhaps have a dim idea of the existence of a supreme, all-powerful Being; but if so, He is for practical purposes an abstraction to them. They do not regard Him as interesting Himself in their affairs, nor do they imagine that they stand in any direct personal relationship to Him. What religious instincts they possess have become so perverted that it is doubtful whether it can be said with truth that they are "a power which makes for righteousness." (Widdicombe, 1891:60).

Once again biased and arrogant Widdicombe gets it all wrong. First of all, as we have

already said it in the previous pages, we are not aware of any incidence where the ancient Basotho ever spoke of spirits outside the phenomenon of *sangomaism*. It is therefore, not correct to say that Basotho worshipped the spirits of their ancestors. They never regarded them as spirits. In fact, the word "spirits" has not been always part of their vocabulary. The word "shades" (*liriti*) would, perhaps, be a better word than the word "spirits" in this case, so that a better formulation would then be that they worshipped the shades of their ancestors. But even this sounds a bit awkward despite the fact that Basotho do speak of the shades of their ancestors at times. What they had was ancestor-worship and not spirit-worship or shades-worship. But as Farmer correctly observes:

The commonly-used phrase 'ancestor-worship' must not mislead us here, nor be allowed to suggest a distinctly religious significance in the cult of ancestors which it does not necessarily possess. (Idowu, 1976:179).

Worship properly understood, in as far as Basotho are concerned, is an activity reserved for their Deity to whom the ancestors offer the prayers of the living. Perhaps at this juncture, the question will be: Do Basotho have any deity? This is the question we now attempt to answer.

2.1.4 THE BASOTHO'S IDEA OF DEITY

Among the features that religions have in common, is the belief that there is more to life than appears on the surface, that there is what is regarded as ultimately real by humans in all religions. In his theory of religion Cumpsty holds that in Nature Religion (under which he classifies African Traditional Religion) the environment or some significant parts of it may be dealt with as divine or eternal.

According to him in this religion more than in any other religion:

It is apparent that the nature of the ultimately-real and the relation of men and women to it, will depend very directly upon the immediate experience of the community concerned. Thus if there are gods which are personifications of significant aspects of life's experience, they are, to the outsider, strangely ambivalent. They have aspects of creativity and preservation on the one hand and destructiveness on the other, and a fair degree of capriciousness to go with it. It must be remembered, however, that these are deities drawn largely from nature and nature is itself both creative and sustaining, destructive and depriving and with it all largely unpredictable. (1991: 118-119).

Being part of African Traditional Religion, the traditional religion of the Southern Sotho is no exception to what Cumpsty has said above. In this religion what was seemingly

regarded as supreme deity, namely, water snake, had both elements of creativeness and destructiveness as will be seen in the course of our discussion. This supreme deity was referred to as *Molimo*.

2.1.4.1 THE NAME 'MOLIMO' AND ITS SIGNIFICATION.

The word '*Molimo*' is, as Casalis correctly observes, the name given to the Basotho's object of worship. (Casalis, 1861:248). Among those who have written on the Traditional Religion of the Southern Sotho several have made an attempt to trace the etymology of the word *Molimo* (cf. Smith, 1950). Unfortunately, none of the proposed hypotheses is without problems. The word appears in almost all traditional prayer formulas which were known to Basotho before their contact with the white missionaries. In almost all cases this word appears to be an indirect object of the words of prayer. That is to say, in these prayers ancestors (*balimo*) are the direct object of the words of prayer for they are asked to pass the prayers of the living to him who is their master (*Molimo*). The following prayers bear witness to this:

- (a) *Oho! Molimo o mocha rapela oa khale*
Ntate, bona ke otile joang
Ke mosesanyane molala e ka khoele
Na nkare ke na le beng ke le tjee?
Nka tiisa kare ke ngoana oa Molimo ke le tjee?

Oh! New *Molimo*, pray to the Old One
Father, see how thin I have become.
I am thin, and my neck is like a string.
Can I state that I have masters, being thus?
Can I claim to be the child of *Molimo* being thus? (Laydevant,
1952:22).

- (b) *Ke le ngoana oa Molimo ka ota!*
Oho! molimo o mocha rapela Oa Khale
Rapela Nkopane oa Mathunya
U rapele Mohlomi oa Matsie

I am a child of *Molimo*,
Yet I am thin!
Oh! New *Molimo* pray to the Old One,
Pray to Nkopane of Mathunya
Pray to Mohlomi of Matsie (Laydevant, 1952:22).

- (c) *Molimo o mocha rapela oa Khale,*
U re rapelle ho o moholo Jere,
Mojari oa litšito tsa batho:
Molimo o liatla li maroba
Liatla li tšoeu tsa Rammoloki.
Li soeufetse ke ho bopa masea.
Tlhahla-macholo, hlahla metsi u a etse keleli,
Hoba keleling u nchafatsa lichaba teng,
Lichaba li tsoang ho Uena 'Mopong,
Li tlang ho boela ho Uena Meahong.
Leseli! (Matšela, 1990:14-15).

Oh! New *Molimo* pray to the Old One,
Pray for us to the Old One Jere,
The one who bears people's faults;
Molimo of light Saviour
Molimo with warm hands
The hands are white of the Saviour.
They are white due to creating babies.

The one who splashes,
Splashes water into rain (*Keleli*)
For rain renews nations,
Nations from you at creation place
Nations that will return to you.
Amen!

- (d) *Molimo ak'u utloe rea rapela:*
Molimo o mocha, rapela oa khale
Rapela Tlhahla-macholo, Rammoloki,
Rammoloki liatla li maroba,
Liatla li marotholi a pula,
Liatla li mali, li mali a lipula,
Atla tsa hao li khathetse ke ho re bopa,
Li khathetse ke ho bopa masea.
Leseli!

Oh! *Molimo* hear us we pray:
New *Molimo* pray to the Old One,
Pray to him who splashes water, Saviour,
Saviour with warm hands,
Hands that give rain,
Blood of rain.
Your hands are tired due to creating us,
They are tired of creating babies
Amen!

- (e) *Oho Molimo re utloe, rea rapela:*
Molimo o mocha rapela oa khale,
Ure rapelle ho o moholo Jere:
Mojari oa litšito tsa batho;
Liatla li tšoeu tsa Rammoloki,
Li tšoeu joalo ke ho bopa masea.
Tlhahla-macholo Rammoloki,
Hlahla metsi U a etse keleli,
Hoba keleling U nchafatsa lichaba teng,
Lichaba li tsoang ho Uena 'Mopong,

*Li tlang ho boela ho Uena Meahong.
Leseli!*

Oh! *Molimo* hear us we pray:
New *Molimo* pray to the Old One,
Pray for us to the Great One Jere:
The one who bears people's faults;
Molimo of light Saviour
Hands are white of the Saviour.
They are white due to creating babies.
You who splashes water, the Saviour,
Splash water into rain.
For it is by rain that you renew nations,
Nations from you at creation place,
Nations that will return to you.
Amen!

- (f) *Oho Molimo ak'u utloe rea rapela:
Molimo o mocha, rapela oa khale,
O atla li marotholi a pula.
Re fe pula,
U re fe marotholi a pula,
Re tsebe ho theba lihoete
Le lioelioetla naheng.
Leseli!*

Oh! *Molimo* hear us we pray:
New *Molimo* pray to the Old One
Whose hands give rain.
Give us drops of rain
So that we may dig root crops
And *Lioelioetla* (some wild root plants)
In the veld.
Amen!

These are some of the old prayers that early missionaries found already existing when they encountered Basotho for the first time in 1833. One thing to be aware of about all these prayers, (in their original language, Sesotho) is that both the “New *Molimo*” and the “Old One” are presented in impersonal terms. That is, the word “*Molimo*,” is accompanied by impersonal rather than personal pronouns. For instance, in the following lines:

Molimo o mocha rapela oa khale. Re rapelle ho o moholo jere, the two underlined pronouns make the word “*Molimo*” fall grammatically under class three nouns, which is a class of objects not of human beings. For the word to fall under class one group of nouns, which will make it a personal noun, the two pronouns will have to be replaced by pronoun “e.” According to Cumpsty (1991:276), this is typical of all religions that have the symbolized life-world perspective to maintain the coherence of the cosmos. This perspective, as he says, gives rise to personal-impersonal nature of the Supreme Being. That is, because the Ultimate Reality is a personified aspect of nature, it is possible to speak of it as a personal being as well as an impersonal being. It is important also to be aware that the words “root crops” as used in the above prayer seem to re-echo what we said earlier in the historical settlement of the Bantu peoples,

that they originated in the tropical forest areas of Cameroon before 1000 BC where they were hunter-gatherers and cultivators of some root crops. It is equally important to realize that almost all these prayers seem to focus on fertility and rain.

This already gives us some clue as to why water snake finally came to be the ultimate object of worship in this religion. According to the available comparative studies of religion done in different parts of the world, many ancient societies regarded water snakes as their deities for both rain and fertility (Eliade, 1997). This will become clearer when we discuss it in its proper place. According to what we have seen in the historical part, these were a particularly basic concern of the people living around the Great Lakes of East Africa. And the giver of such things was, as we have seen, the water snake whose abode was the underworld. The prayers appear to be indirectly addressed to the Old One (water snake). Perhaps the only exception to this style of praying is the following prayer of Barolong (one of the Basotho clans):

*Molimo oa borare
Ke letse ke sa ja,
Ke letse ka tlala.
Le ha ba bang ba jele
Ba letse ba khotše.
Le ha e le Mosha
Kapa Sekomenyana
Nka itumela.
Ke lela ho uena Molimo,*

Molimo oa borare.

Molimo of our fathers
I lie down without food,
I lie down hungry
Though others have eaten
And lie down full.
Even if it is but a polecat
Or a little rock rabbit
Give me and I shall rejoice
I cry to you *Molimo*
Father of my ancestors (Ellenberger, 1969:240).

Even here, rain seems to be indirectly the main concern as under normal circumstances we expect hunger only where there is no rain to water crops.

Some people believe that the word "*Molimo*" is derived from the root *ema* which means to stand. This was, for instance, the position of Laydevant. (Laydevant 1935:314). But this, from a grammatical point of view, is wrong because it does not follow the normal rules of the formation of nouns in Sesotho. Normally, when forming personal nouns using such verbs as *ema*, *nka*, *rapela*, *rala*, etc., the vowel "a" at the end of each of the given verbs is replaced by the vowel "i" so that we have *emi* for *ema*, *nki* for *nka*, *rapeli* for *rapela* and *rali* for *rala*. To these newly formed words, we then add the prefix "mo," so that we finally have the following personal nouns: *Moemi*,

Monki, morapeli and *moral*. Now our word, “*Molimo*,” as it can be seen, has nothing to do with *Moemi*. That is, one cannot see how *moemi* could come to be *Molimo*. We may therefore conclude with Manyeli (1992) that the word “*Molimo*” cannot be a derivative noun from the verb *ema*. There are some people who because of the existing similarities between the Basotho cultural elements and the Jewish culture see this word as coming from the Hebrew word “*Elim*” which means gods. Of such people is once again, Laydevant (1935). However, this also poses a big problem, especially, when it comes to how nouns are grammatically formed from other nouns in Sesotho. To form another personal noun from *Elim*, we have to add prefix *mo* so that we have *moelim*. However, since all nouns with the exception of those ending with “ng,” in Sesotho have to end with a vowel, we then add “o” to *moelim* so that we finally have *moelimo* as our new word. Now, it becomes difficult to see the relationship between “*Molimo*” and “*Moelimo*” as long as the letter “e” is missing in the former. Therefore this is a very artificial derivation which, as Manyeli has done, has to be rejected.

Furthermore, the concept of the Supreme Being as perceived by the Basotho is quite different from that of the Hebrews. If ever the word “*Molimo*” was derived from “*Elim*,” under normal circumstances, one would expect that the reality signified by both

words (*Elim* and *Molimo*) would be the same, at least in terms of where such reality is found. But this is not the case. For the Basotho "*Molimo*" as the Supreme Being, lives with ancestors, not in the sky or heaven (above) but in the underworld just as the Bantu-speaking peoples of Tanzania (where the Basotho come from) believed that Wamara (equivalent of *Molimo*) lived with their ancestors in his underworld kingdom (cf. Iliffe, 1989). That *Molimo* as the Supreme Being, lives with ancestors in the bowels of the earth is something that we get from the prayers which we have just seen. According to these prayers nations come from *Molimo* and they return to him when they die. Casalis too tells us that "all the natives believe the world of spirits to be in the bowels of the earth." (1861:247). Therefore if they are said to return to *Molimo* it is clear that the bowels of the earth is the place where he is to be found. This will become even more clear when we use *likoma* to locate the home of ancestors in our next chapter. On the other hand, for the Jews, God (Supreme Being) lives in heaven (in the sky), and for them the underworld is a world which cannot be inhabited by God, but only by those who are doomed (Isaiah 66:24).

Another hypothesis concerning the etymology of the word "*Molimo*," is that the word comes from the word "*holimo*." In this trend we find such people as Casalis, Maboe,

Manyeli, Moffat and many others. The word *holimo* means “above,” “in the sky.” Therefore when the personal prefix *mo* is added to it, a new personal name is formed, and this is “*Moholimo*” which will then mean the one above, in the sky. According to the above mentioned authors, the word “*Molimo*” is the contraction of the word “*Moholimo*” and it still carries the same idea, that of being high, sky-divinity, the one who lives on high (Casalis, 1861; Manyeli, 1992).

This is a very awkward way of contraction and as Lapointe (1986) rightly remarks, we unfortunately find no other word in Sesotho contracted the same way. From this point of view it then appears to be a rather artificial form of contraction, not a natural one. This can be clarified in the following way: if instead of the personal prefix *mo*, we add a non-personal prefix *le* to the same word “*holimo*,” we form a new word “*leholimo*” which means the sky. When this word is contracted the same way as “*Moholimo*,” a new personal name is formed, and this is *lelimo*, which means cannibal. Now, cannibal and the sky are totally different entities which are not even related at all. This incongruity can only be understood as pointing to the fact that “*Molimo*” does not derive from the word “*holimo*.”

The error of the argument here lies in the fact that these authors have taken for granted that the word *holimo* or *leholimo* is an equivalent of the word “heaven.” This is not correct. For the ancient Basotho, the word *holimo* or *leholimo* meant the sky. Even today Basotho still call the sky *holimo* or *leholimo*. The missionaries brought with them the general presupposition that the Supreme Being lived in the sky above, and because for Basotho the sky was called *leholimo* or *holimo* they immediately used *leholimo* to mean heaven which according to them was God’s abode. It is not therefore surprising that they were so quick to associate “*Molimo*” with *holimo*.

It is, however, important to note that even Casalis who is the originator of this hypothesis seems not to be quite confident about it, for immediately after he has concluded that the word “*Molimo*” signifies, he who is in the sky, he goes further to say that “there is an obvious contradiction between the language and the received ideas” (Casalis, 1861:248). The received ideas had unequivocally located the Basotho Supreme Being in the bowels of the earth. But Casalis, influenced by his Christian understanding of the abode of God, was so desperate to establish a connection between *Molimo* and the word ‘*holimo*’ (above) or ‘*leholimo*’ (sky) that he ignored what the people themselves had said was the abode of their Supreme Being. All he wanted to

do was to find a local name for God. Any connection of the word '*Molimo*' with the place above (sky or heaven) would surely justify his adoption of it as a local name for God. He did this when he apparently had barely carried out any systematic studies in order to determine whether or not Basotho believed in a sky-divinity. He seems to have been so completely convinced of the universality of the belief in a sky-divinity that he thought all he needed to do was to identify the name of such a divinity among Basotho.

For the ancient Basotho, (as for many people with a monistic world view) *Molimo* was a Supreme Being, above ancestors in status, but who was staying together with ancestors. Ancestors were considered to be the closest circle to him. This is why they were taken as mediators between the living and '*Molimo*.' Up to this point, it looks like all the proposed hypotheses on the etymology of the word '*Molimo*' cannot be accepted. I therefore wish to propose another hypothesis which I think, unlike all the others, will lead us to a better understanding of the pre-Christian notion of the Supreme Being among Basotho.

To start with, I would like to have a look at two of the well known myths of the ancient

Basotho. These are the myths of *kholumo-lumo* (a mythical giant ferocious beast) and that of *Limo* (man-eating man). In the first myth, we are told that this extra ordinarily huge beast swallowed all the people of the village together with all their animals. It is, however, said that one pregnant woman who had hidden at an outlet of the kraal survived and later on gave birth to a baby boy whom she named Sankatana. As this boy grew up, he kept on asking his mother about what happened to the people and animals. The mother told him the whole story. One day when he was mature enough he took his weapons and set on a journey to go and face the monster. As he approached, the monster, which could not move away due to the heaviness of its victims, tried to attack him using its long tongue from a distance. But the brave young man kept on cutting it short until he finally reached the monster. He took out his knife and opened the belly of the monster and thereby delivering all the people and their animals. As an expression of their gratitude, they gave him animals and made him their king. Later on, however, due to jealousy, they killed him. And the myth is closed so that a new cycle may begin.

In our earlier discussion on the Bantu-speaking peoples of the western part of Lake Victoria, we said that one of their most severe chronic problems was drought. We have

also seen that rain was often, if not always, the concern of the ancient Basotho in their prayers. Taking all these into account there is less doubt that the monster (*kholumo-lumo*) spoken of in this myth is the famine that plagued the whole region as the result of the drought thus killing both people and their animals. That at a certain stage in the course of their existential history the Basotho did have death as their main problem, is something that we deduce from the second myth. That is, the myth of *Limo*.

Thus goes the myth. Once upon a time there was a man called *Limo*. *Limo* lived on human flesh. He had a big bag (*khetsi*) in which he kept his victims. He always had it on his shoulders wherever he went. All victims were kept alive in this bag and were only slaughtered when *Limo* reached his home. This man was very much feared by all people because of his notoriety and wretchedness (Jacottet, 1983:81-2).

It is said that one day after *Limo* had captured a victim by the name of Tselane, he arrived at a certain village where he asked for one day's accommodation from one of the villagers since he could not see his way due to darkness. The villager who had given him accommodation was the aunt of the *Limo's* victim. *Limo* was not aware of this. While *Limo* was busy taking a meal in one of the huts, the aunt identified her niece's

finger through the hole in the bag of *Limo*. She immediately took the niece out of the bag and then filled it with all sorts of biting and stinging creatures such as bees, wasps and scorpions. The following day *Limo* took his bag and left for home. Having arrived ~~at~~ home, he locked himself in his hut and threw the key away so that he could not be disturbed when he ate the delicious meal in the bag. When he opened the bag, all the creatures got out and ferociously attacked him until he finally died.

Taking into consideration what we said in connection with the first myth, there is less doubt that here we are being presented with a personified “death” which, of course, resulted from the famine and ultimately from the drought. That is to say, we have to perceive *Limo* as being death itself. Perhaps the big bag here represents the grave.

Bearing in mind all that we have just said above, I would like to think that our word *Molimo* comes from the word *Limo* which means death as we have said above. Thus the name *Molimo* means the one who brings about death (*limo*) just as the name *mochai* (coming from the word ‘*chai*’) means the one who brings about yield (in the fields). Indeed, there is no one more worthy of the name than He who has control over life. One other important truth to note about the Basotho is that they:

... attach a special meaning to names given to people. According to this mentality, names are not mere words without reality. They embody a reality that is clear or hidden, historical or personal. Names recall a historical event that is relevant to circumstances of the birth of the child. For instance, if a person was born during a rainy season, he will be called "*mo-tla-le-pula*," that is, someone coming with the rain.....

A name is an oral way of preserving historical events. A name means the person, his or her self, his or her identity. This significance of a name is common to Bantu tribes, as R.O. Moore explains. This is the meaning of their question when they introduce each other. Instead of "What is your name?" they say "who is your name?" (*lebitso la hao u mang?*) (Manyeli, 1995:53-54).

The ancient Basotho were probably quite aware of the fact that they had no control over death. Experience had taught them that no matter what effort they could make to preserve life, in the final analysis such efforts were always defeated. They therefore saw the supernatural rather than natural being as the ultimate cause and controller of death. This they called *Molimo*. Perhaps it is due to this understanding that even today Basotho say that a person has been called (*o hlokahetse*) when he or she has died. That is to say, he or she has been called by him who controls life and brings about death, *Molimo*. The word "*Molimo*" in this context should not be confused with *Molimo* as

used to refer to any of the ancestors (*Balimo*). In fact, the word “*Balimo*” means those who belong to *Molimo* (*Ba Molimo*). That is, those who have been called. Written as one word this becomes *Balimo* which is a contraction of *Bamolimo*. We have other names in Sesotho which are contracted the same way. For instance, Basotho are at times called *Bashoeshoe*, a contracted form of *Bamoshoeshoe*. In their singular forms these words (*Balimo* and *Bashoeshoe*) are written as *Molimo* (meaning any of those who belong to *Molimo* [Supreme Being]), and *Moshoeshoe* (referring to any of *Moshoeshoe*’s people and not to the king himself) respectively.

The plural form of *Molimo* can either be *Balimo* or *Melimo* depending on the language used. *Melimo* as the plural form of *Molimo* is mainly used in poetic language such as the one used in this traditional prayer below:

.... *Liatla li tšoeu tsa Rammoloki.*
Li khathetse ke ho re bopa.
Hlabang tse Tšoeu le nehe melimo!
Le tle le bone ha melimo e thaba... (Lapointe, 1986:43).
.... Saviour’s hands are white
They are tired of creating us.
Sacrifice the white beasts to Ancestors
And you will see them rejoice.

Balimo as a plural form is used in day to day language such as in the following saying:

ke fa Balimo ba heso (I sacrifice to my Ancestors). This on the other hand, implies that

the word *Molimo* may either be a personal or impersonal noun depending on whether the context in which it has been used is poetic or an ordinary saying. When used poetically, it takes the plural form *Melimo*, and the plural form *Balimo* in ordinary language. We have quite a number of Sesotho names that change their grammatical classes in this way because of being used either poetically or ordinarily. For example, the following words: *nku* (sheep), and *khomo* (cow), ordinarily have their plural forms as *linku* and *likhomo* respectively. The same words at times, especially in poetic sayings have *manku* and *makhomo* as their plural form respectively.

Right from the time of the earliest missionaries in Lesotho, it has been, and still is a popular view that *Molimo* means Sky-Divinity, whom the missionaries called God. That was/is the position of such people as Casalis, Ellenberger, Manyeli and Maboe as we saw in the beginning of this work. To affirm this position many bring in such names as *Sekhele*, *Jere*, *Rammoloki*, *Raseapara-lome*, *Tlhahla-macholo* and many others which, as they say, also mean Supreme Being in the same sense of the Sky-Divinity. Now, the question is, is it really correct to maintain such perception, when it is so obvious (at least from what we have seen about the prayer for rain) that the name *Tlhahla-macholo* refers to the water snake? Not at all. Our task in this section

will be to show why it is wrong.

While we acknowledge the fact that the word *Molimo* was already in existence, when the first missionaries arrived in Lesotho, we regard as a baseless surmise, any suggestion that the word referred to the Sky-Divinity. Although, the name was common to both the Supreme Being and ancestors, it was never originally used equivocally nor univocally when attributed to both. It was used analogously. That is, it was predicated properly and intrinsically of both analogates (Supreme Being and ancestors), but primarily of the Supreme Being. In the following words of the prayers that we have already seen, “New *Molimo* pray to the Old One (*Molimo*),” “New *Molimo*” refers to one of the ancestors. “The Old One” as used in this context refers to the Supreme Being. However, there are some times when the same phrase (the Old One) is used to refer to one of the famous national ancestors. In such a case the names of the ancestors to which it refers are also mentioned. Such is the case with the following prayer:

New *Molimo* pray to the Old One
Pray to Nkopane of Mathunya
Pray to Mohlomi of Matsie ...

In this prayer it is clear that the Old One (Old *Molimo*) who is to be prayed to by the new one, is Nkopane, or Mohlomi both of whom are well known for their contribution to the nation of Basotho, especially Mohlomi who, as we have seen, was the closest friend of Moshoeshoe.

The same name (*Molimo*) is again used to refer to someone who is far above any of the known ancestors in terms of status. This is seen in the following prayer:

*Molimo o mocha rapela oa khale,
Re rapelle ho o moholo Jere.
Molimo a k'u utloe rea rapela ...
Liatla li tšoeu tsa Rammoloki
Liatla li tšoeu ke ho bopa masea.
Tlhahla-macholo
Hlahla-metsi oa etsa keleli
Hoba keleli e nchafatsa lichaba
Lichaba li tsoang ho uena 'Mopong
Lichaba li tlang ho khutlela ho uena meahong
Leseli!*

New *Molimo* pray to the Old One
Pray for us to the Old One, Jere
Molimo hear us we pray
Hands are white of the Saviour
Hands are white due to creating babies.
You who splashes deep pools
Splash water into rain
For rain renews the nations
Nations coming from you
Nations that will return to you
Amen!

The “Old One” to whom the “new one” is requested to pray in this prayer is described as *Jere*, *Rammoloki* who is also called *Tlhahla-macholo*. When one looks at it closely and also compares it with other prayers which were said in the same context, this prayer seems to present the Old *Molimo* (*Jere* or *Tlhahla-Macholo*) as the water snake. This becomes even clearer in the sacred songs as we shall see as we continue.

If we can take the two lines that I have underlined above as being synonymously parallel and also acknowledge the fact that this is a prayer for rain, then there is less doubt that we are here dealing with water snake as the giver of rain. We should also keep in mind what we said about the people of the Great Lakes of East Africa, who also regarded water snakes as the giver of rain. According to the words of the prayer above, the Old One (Old *Molimo*) is called *Tlhahla-macholo*, that is, the one who splashes *macholo*. What are these *macholo*? The answer to this question lies in the second line of those which I said are synonymously parallel. That is, *Hlahla-metsi oa etsa keleli* (splash water into rain). Basing ourselves on that, we can then take *macholo* as meaning a deep water or pool (*maliba*) which is the place believed to be inhabited by water snakes such as *Mokebe*, *Fito*, *Tlatla-metsi*, and *Koena*. In other words, *Tlhahla-macholo* (the Old *Molimo*) is asked to provide rain by turning water in the

pools into rain (*keleli*) since rain sustains life. This should also be compared with what Parrinder says about the Bantu people:

But most of the Bantu believe in natural and local spirits, which may be those of the departed, of “dissociated spirits, often vague and shadowy in character, but nonetheless terrifying and dangerous to the traveller.” There are spirits of mountains and forests, of pools and streams, of trees and other local objects. There are numerous animal spirits and sacred snakes which may assist in rain-making (1976:43-4).

In one of the prayers that were used in the same context (praying for rain), this Old *Molimo* (*Jere* or *Tlhahla-macholo*) is called *Soloane*. The prayer reads thus:

Soloane ee, re batla pula!
Helele! Pula e kae?
Morena re fe pula
Helele! Soloane, pula e kae?
Re sala kamehla re nyoriloe,
Soloane, pula e kae?

Oh! *Soloane* we seek rain!
Hail! Where is rain?
Chief, please give us rain.
Hail, *Soloane!* Where is rain?
Everday we remain thirsty,
And the cattle too are thirsty.
Soloane, where is rain? (cf. Guma, 1980:114).

This *Soloane* is also said to live in deep pools. We get this from the following sacred song (*koma*):

*Koana har'a letša
Morena oa teng
Koena patalali
Ka thoko ho letša
Tšeng la Soloane
Le sola le sa je
Ho tl'o je bo-Fito (Lapointe, 1993:177)*

At bottom in the lake,
The chief of the place,
Big crocodile,
Beside the lake
The lake of *Soloane*
Which only causes rash and does not eat,
So that only *bo-Fito* (other water inhabitants
including *Fito*) could eat.

The word "*Soloane*" comes from the verb "*sola*" (to cause a rash or bruise-like marks all over the body). *Soloane* (or *Solane* to put it more correctly) in this context then means the one who causes such reaction or allergy on the body. It is generally believed (even today) by the Basotho that water snake has this effect on people's bodies, especially those crossing rivers or going to the wells to draw water at night in Lesotho. Compare this with what Parrinder says in the following lines: People believe in spirits in streams that have to be propitiated by those who wish to cross them or build over them. These spirits are much feared by people who go to draw water at dusk when the naiads are liable to seize the unwary (Parrinder, 1976:50).

In the above song, *Soloane* is portrayed as having his own lake which does not destroy (eat), but only causes rash. It is probably from this lake of *Soloane* (*Tlhahla-macholo*), where nations come and to which they return. The rain from him renews the nations. This reminds us that in Sesotho culture, there was a time when a newly born baby was exposed naked in the soft rain so that its whole body could be soaked by the rain. The belief behind such practice was that the child would grow up as fully human (renewed) in everything. It was believed that any child whose parents failed to perform this rite was likely to become a thief, a person without any sense of morality. Since all children (even today in some places of Lesotho) had to undergo this rite, this was like renewing the whole nation, building a society of responsible and morally good people.

It seems that this snake is also charged with the work of creation. This is at least, what is suggested by the following words of the prayer we have already seen:

Hands are white of the Saviour
The hands are white due to creating babies
Nations coming from you
Nations that will return to you.

To understand these words, we should remember what we said about the origin of the Basotho in the previous pages. The ancient Basotho used to say *Ngoana o tsoa letšeng*

–a child comes from the lake or *Ngoana o tsoa lehlakeng* – a child comes from the place of reeds. The place of reeds, as it was believed, was *Ntsoana-Tsatsi*. It is at *Ntsoana-Tsatsi* where we find the lake spoken of in the above lines. It therefore makes sense to call this place the place of creation since all children born come from here. It is also said in the quoted words of prayer that people return to this place when they leave the land of the living. This seems to be the reason why the dead had to face the east in his or her grave. It also seems that the reason for placing on the head of the dead person some portion of the stomach (*Ntloan 'a Lehlanya*) and some chime of the slaughtered ox of *Phelehetso* (accompaniment) on the grave was to make a signal to the water snake (who likes cattle dung), who would then be called by the smell of the dung from both “*Ntloan 'a-Lehlanya*” and the chime that someone had passed away. Apparently, it was believed as the last words of the quoted prayer suggest, that on encountering the dead, this snake would then take him home (*Mopong*) not as a dead person, but as a living ancestor.

That water snake could bring back to life a dead person, is manifested in countless myths of Basotho. A typical example in this case is the myth of *Mosimoli le Mosimotsana* (Jacottet, 1983; Liquori-Reynolds, 1965) in which *Mosimoli* was brought

back to life by the water snake after she had been killed by her mother.

In the myth we are told of Mosimoli and Mosimotsana who were twins. One day Mosimoli who was a married twin, visited her family only to find that her mother was not at home. Tired and hungry, she decided to prepare some food. Her mother had given a strict rule to Mosimotsana (the younger twin sister) that preparing food from *thulare* (special pot) was strictly her (mother) prerogative. So, by preparing the food from this pot, Mosimoli violated this rule.

After Mosimoli had left, the mother arrived. When she discovered what Mosimoli had done, she became so furious that she sent Mosimotsana to call her home. On arriving, she was told to put some corn into a deep pit which the mother had dug. While she was doing this, the mother covered her up with soil and crushed her into fine pieces which she later on dumped into a deep pool adjacent to the village's well. From these pieces the owner of the pool, water snake, resuscitated Mosimoli.

One day Mosimotsana together with some girls of the village came to the well to draw some water. When they were to take their *linkho* (clay buckets) and go back home,

Mosimotsana's bucket could not move. Other girls tried to help but the bucket remained firm to the ground. They finally gave up and left Mosimotsana there. No sooner had they left than Mosimoli emerged from the pool and scoured her for not telling her the truth that her mother was angry with her. She filled Mosimoli's bucket with muddy water and then let her go. This happened for several times.

When it finally came to the notice of her parents that Mosimoli had been resuscitated by the water snake and that she was causing problems for her twin sister, they took one portion of their cattle and drove it into the pool in exchange for Mosimoli after they had had some discussion with the water snake. Thus they were given back their daughter after having been given a stern warning never to hurt her again.

Likewise, there are many Basotho myths which present this water snake as being in full control of water. Of such myths we may mention that of *Bulane le Senkepeng* where Masilo gives his younger sister to *Noha ea Metsi*, who is referred to as *mong'a metsi*, (the owner of the water) (Jacottet, 1985:77-79). He also gives water during times of drought.

It is my belief also that some of the practices of the ancient Basotho such as the prohibition of young lads and maidens to eat *the Matšela-nokana* (meat that comes from distant places across the river) and the prohibition to do washing or hang washed clothes during the middle part of the day, have something to do with the water snake. One thing we should remember concerning the washing is that in those early times, Basotho did not have any baths or big basins that could be used for washing. Consequently, washing was done in rivers and streams with flowing waters. People were allowed to do this either early in the morning or late in the afternoon, and were never allowed to do it in the middle of the day (Sechefo, n.d.). It was also believed that bathing or washing of clothes done during the middle part of the day could bring about hailstone upon the crops.

For me this suggests that doing such works in the middle of the day was somehow provocative to that being which inhabited rivers and streams. I have no problem of identifying this with the water snake we have been speaking about. Above all, who else could be provoked by such works done in the water except him who inhabited waters? This becomes even more understandable if we take into consideration the fact that the ancient Basotho believed that this water snake sometimes came out of the

water, especially during the day to roam about in the sun disguised under different forms. For instance, he would appear as a goat, calf, young man, foal etc. It therefore seems that to do work at this time disturbed him. Hence the reason why instead of giving rain, he gave hailstone as an expression of his anger against those disturbing him. Compare what we have just said above with this:

... the Mende of Sierra Leone believe in nature spirits or genii which are associated with rivers and forests. The genie may appear in human form and white colour, and seek to entrap the unwary traveller. As a water sprite, she may be a siren with beautiful hair, like the Lorelei, and equally dangerous to those whom she fascinates. As forest sprite a genie may appear as an old white man with a white beard seeking to befog travellers with his questions and make them lose their way in the bush. (Parrinder, 1976:44).

Besides the name *Molimo*, (or *oa khale*) which is a common name applying to both the water snake and individual ancestors, other names used in referring to this water snake were: *Jere*, *Tlhahla-macholo*, *Soloane*, *Fito*, *Setsohatsana* (such as in the myth of *Linanabolele*), etc. These names as they appear in many prayers and sacred songs, seem to refer always to the water snake. They are his proper names which seem to be so sacred and holy that they are never used to refer to anybody else other than himself. This can only be understood as pointing to the supremacy and prominence of this being

over ancestors who, as the words of the prayers reveal, were subordinate to him. From this, it becomes very obvious that the ultimate object of worship in the traditional religion of Basotho was not the Sky-Divinity as many people have thought, but was him who occupied the underworld and controlled all life and waters, *Noha ea metsi*.

In some cases the name *Molimo*, especially in proverbial sayings was used to refer to some animals. For instance, *khomo ke Molimo o nko e metsi* (the cow is a god with a dewy nose) (Matšela, 1982:66). In this case this name *molimo* is predicated of *khomo* (cow) by analogy of improper proportionality in which case it is extrinsic to *khomo*.

Analogy is a kind of predication that falls between univocation and equivocation. We talk of univocation when a term or predicate is one that signifies the things represented by one and the same concept. For example, the term “human” signifies all human beings as identified in one and the same concept of human nature. We talk of equivocation when a term or predicate is one that signifies the things represented by several essentially different concepts which are not related at all. A good example will be the word “bark” which may either signify a canine sound or a tree’s covering (Wallace, 1977:15).

Analogy is the use of a term or a word to designate a perfection found in a similar way in two or more subjects (analogates), in each of which the perfection (analogon) is partly the same and partly different. Analogy may be divided into two major kinds, namely, the analogy of attribution and the analogy of proportionality. We talk of attribution when a perfection is predicated of each analogate, but one analogate is primary with respect to the others, and the perfection is predicated of others by virtue of some relationship to the primary. If the perfection is attributed properly and intrinsically only to the primary analogate and not to the others, the analogy is called extrinsic attribution. The word “healthy” as said of man and then attributed to other subjects such as food due to some causal relationship to health in man, would be a good example. The word refers to the man as possessing health and to the food as causing health in the man possessing it. If, however, the perfection is attributed properly and intrinsically to all analogates (even if one of the analogates is primary), the analogy is called intrinsic attribution. The word “is” or “being” as predicated of substance and accident, would be a good example. This is because here the being that is primary in substance is attributed properly to the accident as dependent upon such substantial being.

The analogy of proportionality is that in which is shown that a perfection found in one analogate is similarly but proportionately found in another analogate. Such an analogy will be called proper proportionality if the perfection is found properly and intrinsically in both analogates. An example would be to say something like, “as vision is to the power of sight, so simple apprehension is to the power of intellect.” (Wallace, 1977:90). The difference between this analogy and the analogy of intrinsic attribution is that whereas, in the latter, one analogate is seen as primary with respect to the other, there is no such relationship between the analogates in the case of the former. If, however, the perfection so attributed to analogates, is really extrinsic to one of the analogates, the analogy is called improper proportionality. An example would be the metaphor of calling someone a “cat” because his or her love for milk is like that of a cat for milk.

Therefore the cow was called *Molimo* in as far as its importance was somehow comparable to that of *Molimo* in the life of man. This was the most important animal in the life of the ancient Mosotho. It was used: to accompany the dead, to pay for *bohali* (lobola) to plough fields, to appease ancestors, to provide milk, hides, shields, shoes and many other domestic needs. Like *Molimo* it united people of different races, clans, tribes and families through intermarriages thus making them one big nation.

CHAPTER THREE: BASOTHO'S INTERACTION WITH THEIR DEITY

In this chapter we look at different ways the ancient Basotho employed to interact with and or relate to their Supreme Being. In other words we now look at the ritual dimension of the Basotho Traditional Religion. As will be seen, the majority of the ancient Basotho prayers or rituals centred around Water Snake as the ultimate object of the ancient Basotho's worship. Therefore this chapter is to be seen as another evidence for what we have been arguing for, namely, that Water Divinity was the ultimate object of worship in the traditional religion of the Southern Sotho.

But there is no way we can talk of these rituals or prayers without making reference to those who were charged with the task of ensuring that they reached the Supreme Being. We shall therefore look at Basotho Ancestors as our starting point. Of particular interest for us will be their home, which as we have already seen, is also the abode of *Molimo*, the Supreme Being.

3.1 BASOTHO ANCESTORS

These act as intermediaries between the living and their Supreme Being. Just as in social life it is often the custom among Basotho to approach someone of a higher status

through someone else (lower in rank), so even in religious life Basotho approach *Molimo* through these mediators.

For Africans ancestors are the dead relatives who are believed to have entered the glory of ancestorhood and continue to take part and a lively interest in the affairs of their living families. They live in the invisible world of the living dead. Beliefs in the invisible world of ancestors vary from culture to culture. It may be thought of as subterranean (e.g. among Basotho and Zulus in Southern Africa) or in the east, a place many Africans believe to have come from originally. But all in all, they remain very close to the living as indicated below:

Yet the departed are not far away, and they are believed to be watching over their families like a “cloud of witnesses.” Everything that concerns the family, its health and fertility are of interest to the ancestors, since they are its elders and will also seek rebirth into the same family. The family land is their property, and they must be consulted when land is let out to other people” (Parrinder, 1976:58-59).

This last sentence of the quotation explains the hesitation of Africans to leave the place of their birth. To expel them from the portion of land (as today’s local governments tend to do) is like divorcing them their ancestors. They consider any place they are moved to dangerous, as it already has its own occupants, that is, foreign ancestral

spirits. These are regarded to be very dangerous as they may take the new occupants as invaders and so fight them.

To understand what is meant above, let us take one example of what happened in Lesotho when people were to be resettled. The Lesotho Highlands Water Project is one of the most ambitious and comprehensive water schemes at present being undertaken in the world. A treaty on this project between the governments of Lesotho and South Africa was signed in Maseru in October 1986. The project is aimed at harnessing the resources of the Highlands of Lesotho to the mutual benefit of these countries.

When the project is over, it is expected that each of the two countries will be allowed the opportunity to undertake ancillary development in its territory including:

- (i) the development of other projects to generate hydroelectric power,
- (ii) the provision of water for irrigation, potable water supply and other uses,
- (iii) the development of tourism, fisheries and other projects for economic and social development.

An autonomous statutory body which has the responsibility for the implementation, operation and maintenance of that part of the project situated in the Kingdom of

Lesotho has been set up. This is known as the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA). The LHDA has implemented an Environmental Action Plan to ensure, as required by the Treaty, that the standard of living of individuals and communities affected are improved.

As one of its sub-plans, the Environmental Action Plan has embarked upon what has been called Compensation Plan. The plan includes, among other things, compensation policy and regulations for various losses incurred by those whose properties are affected by the Project.

With the implementation of the Compensation Plan one would expect that there would be no problem in as far as the process of resettlement is concerned. But this has not been always the case. Many of those whose villages have been affected by the Project have objected to their resettlement regardless of how much, materially speaking, they have been compensated. This they do even when practically speaking, what they are given as their compensation is far more than what they have lost materially. For example, many of them are resettled in places where infrastructure is better than in their original places.

What then is the real problem? The answer to this question is found in what was said by the villagers of both Ha Mpiti and Ha Mohale (some of the villages affected by the Project), when they mentioned the loss of the graves of their ancestors as their excuse for refusing to be resettled. Such an excuse has been described as naive and senseless by those who apparently have no understanding of the African world-views. As a matter of fact, there is more to such an excuse than what appears on the surface. No matter how educated (through western schools), over civilised or culturally displaced they may be, Africans always have their unique way of explaining reality. They often understand and explain things and events in a way that appears strange if not totally incomprehensible to non-Africans. It was precisely due to their unique explanation of reality which some Westerners described as being “irrational” that their rationality (as human beings) was doubted by people from other parts of the world. When he acknowledges the existence of such uniqueness in Africans, Kaunda says:

Possibly “psychology” is not the appropriate word, but I do believe that there is a distinctive African way of looking at things, of problem-solving and indeed of thinking- we have our own logic- system which makes sense to us however confusing it might be to the Westerners (1966 : 28-29).

This, however, should not be understood as saying that Africans are essentially a different species of human beings on earth. Rather as people living in a different

continent with its own unique life situation and geography, they see things in a way different from the people in other parts of the world with different life situation and geography do. If Europeans are unable to be entirely emancipated from the attitudes of their society, it is because their reactions are flowing from a complete philosophical system which is unique to their society. Tempels, one of the world-renowned exponents of African Philosophy, in arguing for what might be the cause for the persistence of certain attitudes which seem not to be affected by space and time in a given society says:

Behaviour can be neither universal nor permanent unless it is based upon a concatenation of ideas, a logical system of thought, a complete positive philosophy of the universe, of man and of the things which surround him, of existence, life, death and of the life beyond- We must postulate, seek and discover a logical system of human thought as the ultimate foundation of any logical and universal system of human behaviour (1969 : 190).

It is my contention that unless African world- views are well explained and articulated to the outside world, Africans will ever remain the laughing stock and victims of cultural prejudices to non-Africans who, as O'Donohue puts it "find it very difficult to enter with sympathy into what are to them strange and incomprehensible beliefs" (1981: 27). It is, I believe, due less to the colour of their skin than their conception of

reality that some people like David Hume attributed the bestial quality of irrationality to their nature, thereby excluding them from the category of men (Ruch and Anyanwu, 1981 : 185).

For Africans the fact is that all beings preserve a bond one with another, an intimate ontological relationship. For them there is interaction of being with being or rather with force. One force may reinforce or weaken another depending on the type of relationship that exists between the forces and beings concerned. Due to this kind of world-view, Africans exclude chance in reality hence everything that happens is understood to have its specific cause within the same system. This is what is meant by Tempels when about an African world-view he says:

Nothing moves in this universe of forces without influencing other forces by its movement. The world of forces is held like a spider's web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network (1969:60).

What then does this mean? It means that removing an African from his original place in order to resettle him in a new place is to disturb his spiritual world which he regards as the source of blessings in his life. It is to break the ontological link between him and his ancestral spirits and other beneficial local spirits with whom he has established

strong friendly ties. Such a disturbance may turn the whole system upside down and thus suffocate the well-being of the person concerned. In other words, an African believes that the loss of his spiritual world will expose him to all sorts of problems in life. And this is something that he cannot ignore. To understand fully what is said above, we have to bear in mind the fact that when an African settles in a piece of land, one of the first things that he will normally do is to tame such a piece of land to make it habitable for himself. This he does by, among other things, shedding some blood in order to either tame or appease all those spirits or forces from whom he is seeking cooperation and at the same time to introduce the place to his own ancestors so that they may continue to safeguard the well being of the family in the new place. When he expresses a need for such cooperation, Kaunda says:

I believe that the universe is basically good and that throughout it great forces are at work striving to bring about a greater unity of all living things. It is through cooperation with these forces that man will achieve all of which he is capable. Those people who are dependent upon and live in closest relationship with nature are most conscious of the operation of these forces: the pulse of their lives beats in harmony with the pulse of the universe (1966:22-23).

The presence of these spirits or forces in an inhabited area has some important impact upon it. It gives it a spiritual dimension. Thus the land in an African context is

understood and seen not only as a material commodity, but also as a spiritual one. Therefore losing it is regarded by them as both material and spiritual loss. They believe it is to the land that they owe their being for it is in the land that they commune with their ancestral spirits and come to terms with cosmic forces. This truth was once expressed by Thabo Mbeki in what was described as the best speech of his political career by many African politicians, when in his address to the South African Parliament he said:

I am an African

I owe my being to the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the glades, the rivers, the deserts, the trees, the flowers, the seas and the ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native land (City Press, 12 May 1996:17).

Having said all this, what then can be seen as lacking in the Compensation Plan of the LHDA and perhaps in other bodies of similar nature in other African countries which have experienced similar problems on the question of resettling the people? One thing that the LHDA seems to have obviously overlooked if not simply ignored in its Compensation Plan is the fact that Africans are known for their holistic approach to life. An African proverb says: "It takes a whole village to raise a child." Another proverb says: "One knee does not bring up a child," or "One hand does not nurse a child." All these point to the fact that Africans are traditionally communitarian people.

They believe that each person ought to live in such a manner that his whole life is geared to the common good of the whole community. This is best expressed in the saying: I am because we are; we are because I am. Whatever happens to the individual, happens to the whole community, and whatever happens to the whole community, happens to the individual (Healey and Sybertz: 1996:107).

In this kind of life Africans commune not only with the visible world, but also with the invisible world. While the former provides their material needs, the latter is believed to be the source of everything that the former provides. From this perspective Africans seem to inhabit a larger world than other people in other parts of the world. Expressing this Kaunda says:

They may be simple and unlettered people and their physical horizons may be strictly limited, yet I believe that they inhabit a larger world than the sophisticated Westerner who has magnified his physical senses through invented gadgets at the price, all too often, of cutting out the dimension of the spiritual (1966:22-23).

It is precisely this dimension of the spiritual (the invisible world) that the LHDA failed to take into consideration in its Compensation Plan. The Plan speaks of the material things (the visible world) that persons will be compensated for if they are affected by

the Project, but it remains silent regarding the spiritual ties which are disturbed as the people are forced to leave behind their invisible world. For an African such spiritual ties are regarded as the source of all good things. To disturb them without ensuring their restoration is to jeopardise future. And this is something that he cannot stand, hence the reason why he objects to the resettlement. In other words, while the LHDA sees only material value of the land Africans see both material and spiritual value of it. Therefore for them the LHDA compensation remains incomplete and indeed unsatisfactory as long as it overlooks or ignores the spiritual value of the land they have lost.

In Tanzania the failure of the German colonial rule to realize what spiritually the land meant to Africans led to the *Maji Maji* revolt of 1905-1907. In Kenya, this resulted in the emergence of the *Mau Mau* uprising of 1952-1956. This was clearly expressed by President Kenyatta when about the land he said:

It supplies them with material needs of life, through which spiritual and mental contentment is achieved. Communion with the ancestral spirits is perpetuated through contact with the soil in which the ancestors lie buried ... it is the soil that feeds the child through a lifetime, and again after death it is the soil that nurses the spirits of the dead for eternity. Thus the earth is the most sacred thing above all that dwell in or on it (Ray, 1976:166).

In South Africa those who were forcefully removed from their homes by the apartheid regime are now reclaiming their land. One thing to note, is their insistence on being given back their land even when they are promised resettlement in better places in terms of infrastructure. Such insistence can only be understood as having its basis in the significance that these people attach to the land in which lay the remains of their ancestors. Even the whole process of exhumations as carried out by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has more to do with such significance. Many of those whose bodies are to be exhumed were not given proper burials. Consequently, they have remained useless spirits that haunt their living family members as they have not been able to enter the glory of ancestor-hood. It is the belief of the families concerned that it is only through a decent burial that includes a complete observance of all African burial rites that these will be enabled to enter the glory of ancestor-hood and so be of some spiritual value to their relatives who live on the soil in which they have been buried.

3.1.1 BASOTHO'S NOTION OF DEATH

Basotho never looked at death as a total annihilation, but rather a transition from one world to another. As Guma rightly remarks, the idea of death as the end of life was

never accepted (Guma, 1980:8). This fact is manifested in a number of myths and legends which oftentimes speak of the people who were mysteriously brought back to life after death (Jacottet, 1985:91). It was never said a person was dead. That could only be said of animals. A person was said to have been called, to have passed away, gone home or to have emigrated. Because of this understanding of human death, a whole burial rite had to be properly observed to ensure the passage of the departed into the land of his ancestors (Matšela, 1990). It was believed that the dead who was not buried properly would lose the link with his deceased elders and wander about as a ghost causing trouble to the living. Under such circumstances the only way to stop him or her from haunting the people would be to perform those rituals which might not have been properly observed during the burial.

When they express an African understanding of death, Kwenda, and his co-authors, have this to say:

Invariably death is seen as some kind of birth-birth into another life. The dead person is regarded as a baby. This is why many burial practices pull the body together in a foetal position- to symbolize that this is some kind of a birth. One form of existence has come to an end and another one, a spiritual existence, is beginning. Africans want to symbolize, for the benefit of the living, what is happening spiritually to the departed. The grave is regarded as a

womb, and the experience of dying is looked upon as a rebirth (Kwenda *et al.*, (1997:38).

The ancient Basotho treated the dying in the same way as the sick. When it was obvious to everyone that a sick person was going to die, his or her next of kin and friends were informed of his or her condition so that they might gather in the village or get themselves ready for the funeral. The actual moment of death was heralded by piercing and lugubrious cries. To avoid frightening young children, the death of the member of the family or the relative was announced to them at night by whispering in their ears. The burial took place as soon as possible after death. If a person died in the morning, he or she was buried the evening of the same day. Likewise, if he or she died in the evening, he or she was buried very early in the morning of the following day. If, however, there was a need to delay the burial, such as when one of the most important members of the family concerned had not yet arrived, the corpse was kept on wet river sand which would later on be buried together with the corpse.

The dead were buried at home. Even if a person died away from home, everything possible was done to bring him or her home immediately. The only people who were not buried at home were those who had been drowned or killed by lightning. These were buried near the river. It is said that this was done in order to prevent the river or

the lightning from claiming the life of another victim. Those who assisted in the burial of such people had to be purified in a special way with special vaccination and aspersion next to the river. The burial place for ordinary deaths was the kraal. This however, excludes stillborn babies and very young children. These were buried in the household ash-dump or courtyard or under the floor.

Due to the absence of spades in those early days, the grave was not as deep as it is today. It was nothing more than a round hole, a few feet deep. The only available tool for this was a small iron rod called *kepa* or at times clumsy, bluntly pointed sticks of the wild olive tree. The dead were not laid stretched out in the grave, but were buried in a squatting position. The departed was wound up in an ox skin, bound with ropes of the *moli* (grass used for religious purposes) and was then lowered down gently into the grave and supported on all sides with the ground dug out to keep him firm. He was placed sitting up in such a way that half his body faced the east so that the rising sun might cast its rays on his right cheek. Some of the binding ropes about the head were then cut through with a knife so that the covering of the face could be slightly opened to avoid suffocation.

A few grains of various seeds such a *kaffir* corn, maize, sugar cane, pumpkin and a tuft

of ordinary dog grass twisted into a tiny ring were put beside the dead in the grave, together with some of his earthly tools. After this, the ground was thrown in as far as the head. A certain portion of the stomach of the slaughtered ox known as *ntloan'a lehlanya* was put on the head of the dead person. A small flat stone was then placed directly above the centre of the head, and sand was then used to fill up the whole grave. A heap of stones was built over the grave and a higher stone was then planted at one end of the grave to mark the head (Sechefo, n.d.:4-12).

On returning home after the burial, all the people who handled the corpse or touched anything about the grave had to wash their hands immediately outside the hut of the deceased with water mixed with the slimy juice of wild aloes from the mountain. All the tools used were also cleaned with this water. Most probably the aloe here signified the bitterness of death as experienced by the living. It was a sign to the ancestors that they should spare the lives of all the participants in the funeral. This was because things like graves were associated with misfortune. A person who happened to either sit or stand on the grave unconsciously had to have his or her feet passed slightly over a brisk fire of grass to scorch off the misfortune. After the burial all the participants were given *joala* (beer). This was meant to reduce the grief as well as to control the lamentations of those who could not control their emotions. The meat of the ox from

which the skin was obtained was all eaten by those who participated in the funeral. It had to be eaten without any salt, probably to symbolise the unhappiness of the situation.

This is in sharp contrast with the way funerals are carried out by the Basotho of today. Funeral arrangements have become one of the most expensive undertaking in the life of a modern Mosotho. Corpses are kept in the mortuaries more than it is necessary. Unfortunately the longer they stay in the mortuary, the more money is spent by the bereaved family not only on mortuary fees, but also for providing food to a never-ending number of people coming to express their condolences to the bereaved family. On the day of the funeral, a prodigious sum of money is once again spent on buying a variety of expensive food for thousands of mourners attending the funeral. These expenses, plus the money spent on the coffin (usually costly too) and in some instances, costumes worn by the members of the bereaved family, leaves the whole family in a financially kidnapped situation. This financial predicament gets worse in those cases where the deceased was the sole breadwinner and the family has no any other source of income.

The mourning period was not only observed by the relatives of the deceased but by the

whole village or even in some cases, the region. The day immediately following the burial was a day of obligation to abstain from all field work such as ploughing, hoeing, reaping etc. It was believed that any failure to do this would cause hailstorms over the crops of the villagers. Thus offenders were liable to penalties before the courts. All the family and nearest relatives of the deceased gathered together at his former abode for the hair-cutting, beginning with the immediate heir and proceeding to the least of the family or clan. All the hair clipped was collected and buried in the ground or concealed under a heavy stone. This cutting of hair is very rich in symbolism. To the bereaved family it symbolizes parting company with their beloved relative. When it is performed a second time (normally, after a month or six months in the case of a wife who has lost her husband) it symbolizes parting company with the mourning period. From now onwards the bereaved family is free from any restrictions and can lead a normal life.

Burying the hair in the ground or concealing it under a heavy stone is probably something which has to do with the Basotho's fear of witchcraft. There is a general belief among Basotho that any hair left unhidden can be used by witches to bewitch the owner. So they hide it in order to make it inaccessible to witches.

3.1.2 BELIEF IN LIFE AFTER DEATH

The ancient Basotho like Christians, believed in life after death. It is however, worth mentioning that their understanding of life after death differed greatly from that of Christians. As we have already seen in the previous pages, a person was never said to be dead. It was rather said that he had slept, passed away, gone home, departed, rested or left. This way of speaking of death was not just a mere euphemism, but was already a manifestation of their belief in the life after death.

This belief was also reflected in the way they buried their dead. Corpses were buried in foetal positions, a posture suggesting that they associated the grave with the womb and death with a second birth. Objects which the dead used during his life, which were thought to be necessary to him for making a living, were buried with him (Segoete, 1981:51-53). The accompanying words at funeral such as “go in peace to prepare a home for us” were also a clear indication of the existence of this belief among Basotho.

Whereas for Christians life after death is seen as quite different from life before death, for Basotho life after death seems to be a perpetuation of life before death in terms of material needs. The various seeds given in the grave to the departed man signified that he, as an emigrant, had gone to dwell and to cultivate crops in some other land which

seemingly was not different from the world of the living concerning ways of making one's living. Apparently, the dead were thought to live in villages in the manner more or less similar to the life on earth. This to me seems to be the meaning behind burying the dead together with some of the things that they primarily used on earth for their livelihood. They seemingly had the same kind of social organization under the leadership of *Molimo* and they pursued the same occupation such as cattle raising and agriculture. The dog grass which was understood as growing only in places that were inhabited by people was a sign that the deceased was going to dwell in some permanent home. The weapons were most probably meant for self-defense on the way to the world of *Balimo*. This already suggests that the way to the world of *Balimo* was not all that smooth. This fact is also reflected in those myths that speak of the underworld. A visitor to this world is often reported to have struggled very hard to reach his or her destination. Typical of such myths is the myth of *Linanabolele* in which we are told of a young lady who struggled very hard to make her way to the underworld.

In these myths, whenever a person travelling to that world is about to lose hope, there always appears a certain personage who comes to his or her rescue by helping him or her to reach that world safely. This personage is very weird in that she does not have a normal number of organs, especially those organs which go in pairs. For instance,

instead of two, she will have one eye, one ear, one leg, one arm etc. At times one of the smaller creatures such as a frog may appear to give directions to the person. Maybe this is a clue to us that those who were not strong enough (e.g. women) to defend themselves against enemies on their way to the world of *Balimo* were not left to their own. Otherwise the world of *Balimo* itself was understood to be a peaceful land which needed no weapons.

3.1.3 THE ROLE OF ANCESTORS

Generally speaking, the living were very much afraid of the dead, particularly when they dreamt about them. But the dead who were feared most were the *lithotsela* (the lingering dead), who because of the malicious and evil life which they had led on earth had not been able to reach the land of the ancestors and so continued their evil influences against the living by haunting them, especially at night.

Associated with such fear of the dead, was at the same time a great respect shown by the living to their deceased due to their new status, ancestors, which brought them closer to *Molimo* than the living were to him. Thus every family, clan tribe and the nation as a whole was under the influence and the immediate protection of its ancestors, who were taken as mediators between the living and *Molimo*. Due to the role they

played in the life of the living, ancestors were either looked on as intercessors, protectors or guarantors of morality.

Being the closest circle to *Molimo*, ancestors acted as mediators between him and the living. They prayed for the needs of the living and passed the prayers of the living on to *Molimo*. This was the reason why many of the traditional prayer formulas began with the words: new *Molimo* pray to the old one.

Apart from being intercessors, ancestors were also the protectors of the living against all perils of life. As long as one was under the protection of his ancestors, he felt secured and protected against such calamities as droughts, hunger, poverty, lightning and all other sorts of problems in life. It was because of such existing relationship between the living and the dead that in Sesotho when one was plagued by all sorts of misfortunes in life, people used to say that his ancestors had turned against him or that his ancestors were with him in such cases as when one had mysteriously survived a serious danger.

Another important role of ancestors in the life of the living was the enforcement of morality. With morality here I mean living in accordance with demands, norms,

customs, traditions, manners and expectations of one's society.

To ensure the faithfulness of the living to any of the above mentioned cultural elements, ancestors punished all social deviants. The usual means of punishment was a series of misfortunes that befell the culprit. Sometimes the punishment was so severe as to include even death.

3.1.4 THE WORLD OF ANCESTORS

According to what we saw in the myth of the origin, the ancient *Basotho* believed that they came from *Ntsoana-Tsatsi*, a place located in the east underground and to which they returned when they died (Mojapelo & Semata, 1994). This was why the dead were placed facing the eastern direction in their graves. So if the dead went to *Ntsoana-Tsatsi* after their death this place should be the world of ancestors for it was also understood that people died not to become anything different but to start a new life in the world of ancestors. This we saw when we discussed the burial rites.

The way the ancient *Basotho* lived this myth revealed the location of *Ntsoana-Tsatsi* as a place underneath. For instance, in sacrificing to *Balimo*, Mosotho used to say *ke fa ba-faatše*. The word *ba-faatše* was another name for ancestors hence the meaning

here was that he was offering that which he offered to his ancestors underneath. It was also a common practice among *Basotho* whenever *joala* (beer) was brewed, to pour some of it on the floor (fireplace) as a gift to the ancestors who were believed to be mysteriously drinking it. That there was another world underneath seems to have been a common belief of *Basotho*. We hear of such a world in their myths (e.g. myth of *linanabolele*) and in quite a number of their sacred songs such as the following one:

*Saka la Balimo
Ha le na monyako
Le le chitja feela,
Bitsang lingaka
Li tlo le pota
Tsa re li sa pota
Li sa pota hang,
Ka hare ho lona
Ha ema petsana
Ea sepata-hlooho.*

Guma translates this in the following way:

The kraal of ancestors
Has no door: It is merely round.
Call witchdoctors
To come and doctor it
While they were doing so,
Having gone round it once,
Inside it
There arose a foal
Of the hidden head (Guma, 1980:124).

This kraal which is said to have no door is the lake (most probably the lake of *Ntsoana-*

Tsatsi). The arising foal is the owner of the lake (that is, *Noha ea Metsi*, Water Snake). We should here remember that it was the belief of the ancient *Basotho* that at times this Water Snake appeared as a foal. Especially during the day to disguise himself.

That the foal spoken of here is the Water Snake is shown by the following song of the initiation:

Tsela khahloloha
Baeti re ete,
Re etele tshosi
Tshosi ke Monyohe (Guma, 1980:125).

Road (water) separate (or open)
That we travellers might visit
Visit tshosi
Tshosi is Monyohe (Water Snake)

In these verses the travellers (maybe the departed) ask the water of the lake to open the way for them, because they want to visit or see *Monyohe* who seems to be the owner of the place of their visitation. Now in the myths, *Monyohe* is presented as *Noha ea Metsi* (Water Snake) who gives water during times of drought (Jacottet, 1985:77). Therefore the foal spoken of here is the Water Snake who as we have said, seems to be the ultimate object of worship in *Basotho*'s traditional religion.

This world was thought of as being more or less like the world of the living in that its people live in villages built on mountains just like in the world of the living. This is confirmed by the following last part of the sacred song which has been quoted above:

*Ea iketsa thaba
Thaba ea bolula
Ea bolula metse
Metse-metse ela
Ke ea bomalome
Hase ea borare.*

It (foal) turned itself into a mountain,
A mountain of to settle,
Of to settle villages.
Those many villages yonder,
Belong to the uncles.
And not to the fathers.

The last sentence of this song to me implies that uncles have more power (maybe they are headmen) in these villages, they have more say and responsibility. Perhaps this is why one's maternal uncle (*malome*) was and is still such an important figure in the life of *Mosotho*. He (*malome*) was an integral part in every important or grave matter concerning the well-being of the family of his married sister. He had to be kept informed about every important event that concerned his sister, nephews and nieces. It was believed that if he was not treated accordingly by the family of his sister, he would complain to the departed ancestors who would in turn neglect the welfare of the

family (sister's family). He was believed to have power to either impose misfortune or bring fortune on the family of his sister (Sechefo, n.d.:21). Such influence of the uncles can be understood as deriving from the fact that they are in charge of the villages in the world of the ancestors as has been indicated above.

The place of the ancestors was thought of as a place of peace, rain and prosperity (cf. Guma, 1980:8). That *Ntsoana-Tsatsi* was seen as the world of peace can be deduced from the fact that according to the understanding of *Basotho*, no evil people were allowed to enter the world of the ancestors. The end of such people (trouble makers) was to become wandering ghosts which had no place to rest nor anything to do except to haunt the living. The reeds which are said to be plentiful in *Ntsoana-Tsatsi* are a clear indication that this is the world of rain since reeds normally flourish in swamps. If it is the world of peace and rain, then it becomes automatically clear that it is also the world of plenty, since people can only cultivate the land when they have stability and the land can produce something only when it is watered. Seemingly Moshoeshoe wanted to have a land like this when he adopted as his motto: *khotso* (peace), *pula* (rain), *nala* (plenty) which since then has remained the motto of the *Basotho*.

As we have already said, *Molimo*, who according to the perception of the *Basotho* was

like a chief to his people, could not live separately from his subjects just like earthly chiefs. It goes without saying therefore that he also had *Ntsoana-Tsatsi* as his abode. This already suggests that it has been a big mistake to use as an equivalent of heaven the word *leholimo* instead of *Ntsoana-Tsatsi* which according to what we have seen, seems to be the world of both *Molimo* and his people (*Balimo*) and the world where people have not only originated from, but will also return to after their death.

3.2. BASOTHO RITUALS AND MOLIMO

Religion may generally be defined as subordination of human life to that which the individual most feels the need to belong in order that life might have meaning, security, warmth, fulfillment or be otherwise enriched. This is not a passive subordination but rather an active one which is expressed and shown in different ways which may collectively be referred to as religious expression.

Religion is more than what is believed. It is what is believed as well as what is done. This being the case, the present chapter will focus on the performative dimension of the religion of the ancient *Basotho*. The task here will be to delineate several ways that the ancient *Basotho* used to interact with that which they regarded as the Supreme Being in their religion. "Religion usually expresses itself through ritual: prayers, worship,

offerings, sacrifice, songs, dance, mimicking incantations, facial expressions, silence, beating of drums, sitting, standing, kneeling, bowing, closing of eyes during prayer, shaking hands etc.”(Kanina, 1979:13). Ritual is regarded as a primary form of religious expression (Schmidt, 1988:392) which is a sum total of “those ways of doing things that have been rubbed in through constant practice and repetition-that have been given power and authority through continued use” (Kwenda *et al.* 1997:105). Our interest, however, in this part will be only in those specific, repeatable actions that the ancient *Basotho* found to be effective and appropriate for communicating with that which they regarded as ultimately real. As we have already seen, the ancient *Mosotho* was aware of the existence of someone much greater than any of the ancestors who could rightly be taken as the author of life. He was equally conscious of the necessity to be in good terms with him in order that he might lead a happy life with a promising future, more especially after death. So, one of the ways that he adopted to communicate with him was prayer.

Prayer is, as Dhavamony correctly observes:

A universal phenomenon found in all religions in one form or another, as it springs from the natural human disposition to give expression to thought and feeling in its relationship to the divine. Man naturally communicates with other men

by speech; so also does he address the divine by the same medium in accordance with his belief and conviction. Prayer is an act of recollection by which man establishes and cultivates his communion with the divine (1973:233).

The ancient *Mosotho* understood prayer as a way of making an appeal for the intervention of *Molimo* through the mediation of ancestors in whatever situation he found insurmountable in life (Segoete, 1981). He also regarded prayer as an expression of gratitude for all good things he had achieved in life all of which were believed to have been granted by the ancestors (Manyeli, 1992).

He again and most importantly, looked at prayer as a way of keeping fellowship with his ancestors. He considered his intimacy with ancestors as a sure guarantee for enduring protection against all forms of misfortune in his life. Living without ensuring any contact with his ancestors as he understood, was accountable for all misfortunes in life (Matšela, 1990).

The object of the prayer of the ancient *Mosotho* could be divided into two: the direct or immediate object and also indirect or mediate object. The ancestors were the immediate object of the prayer while *Molimo* on the other hand was taken as the

mediate object of the prayer. Just as he could only meet his chief through the mediation of the chief's councillors, so he believed he could not meet *Molimo* without the mediation of the ancestors (councillors of *Molimo*). This understanding is reflected in most, if not all traditional prayer formulas which normally begin with the following words: *Molimo o mocha rapela oa khale*. What we see in these words is the request put forward by the living to the new ancestor (*Molimo o mocha*) that he may pass their prayer to *Molimo* who, in this context, is addressed as the Ancient of Days (*oa khale*).

According to the Basotho's conception of the ancestors, they were concerned with a person's daily life from birth to death. If in life, one happened to experience a series of misfortunes, people used to say, *o furalletsoe ke Balimo*, meaning that his ancestors have turned against him, hence the reason why he is being haunted by all sorts of evils (problems in life). Thus communion with the ancestors meant protection against all problems in life on the side of the one maintaining such communion with them.

Generally speaking, the ancient Mosotho used prayer as a way of expressing his gratitude, petition or winning the favour of his ancestors against all the problems of his life. Among such problems were drought, witchcraft, wars, poverty, infertility in

women and all sorts of misfortunes as experienced in life (Pula, 1990).

3.2.1 DIFFERENT MODES OF PRAYER

As we shall see the ancient Mosotho employed quite a number of ways to approach his deity in prayer. These ranged from a speculative form of prayer or oral traditional prayers to more practical or action-oriented prayers which were offerings of sacrifices and joint prayer expeditions.

3.2.1.1 ORAL TRADITIONAL PRAYERS

These were poetically arranged words of petition or supplication directly addressed to the ancestors, but indirectly addressed to *Molimo* as the Supreme Being. Some of the prayers were used nationally while others were used by individual clans, families or people. This categorisation depended more on what was being prayed for and its extent or magnitude. If what was being prayed for concerned only a particular clan or family, then the addressees in such prayers were the ancestors of that particular clan or family. For example, the following is a prayer of an individual person who is in misery:

New ancestor, invoke the old one.
Father, look at me thin as I am;

I am thin, my neck is only a thread.
Can I affirm that I have masters, in this condition!
Can I proclaim that I am the son of an ancestor, in this condition!
(Lapointe, 1986:42).

But if that for which prayer was said concerned the whole country, then, the addressees in such prayer were famous national men. The following introductory formula has been taken from one of such prayers:

New ancestors invoke the old one;
Pray to Nkopane of Mathunya
Pray to Mohlomi of Matsie. (Lapointe, 1986:42).

Nkopane and Mohlomi were highly esteemed by all the ancient Basotho because of their outstanding contribution to the well-being of the Basotho nation during their earthly life. It was therefore believed that they would continue their contribution to the welfare of the nation from their new world of the ancestors and were thus taken as national protectors-national ancestors. Strictly speaking, these were the ancestors of *Bakoena* clan, but as *Bakoena* held leadership position in the social organisation of Basotho, their influence did not end with their death regarding matters of the national interest, it continued even beyond death.

There was another prayer which the family of the sick had to direct to his or her ancestors who were suspected of being behind his or her sickness. It reads thus:

Fie! Why is so and so (one of the ancestors of the sick person)
quarrelling so much, my people?
Oh! Our ancestors, bear with us.
You our brother (or sister) as we impose our hands on you,
today, we say: sleep well.
Oh! Recover, that when we come back tomorrow we will
find you eating, standing and walking; that these dreams
(about ancestors) may stop troubling you as we leave you!
Please, get better! (Sekese, 1983:28-29).

Other oral prayers are those that we saw when we discussed the Basotho's idea of deity. We have already analysed some of them and established their connection to the Supreme Being. Therefore right now we move on to our next mode of prayer, namely sacrifices. The analysis of some of the oral prayers mentioned above will be continued when we discuss joint prayer expeditions later on in this chapter.

3.2.1.2 SACRIFICES

Another way of praying to one's ancestors which was extensively used by the ancient Basotho was the offering of sacrifices. This method of prayer has been, and still is the one mostly used by a vast majority of Basotho. I would like to note right from the

outset, that a sacrifice was and is always a feast or celebration, not only for the family concerned, but also for all villagers, invited and uninvited. This included even strangers from other villages or areas. We will now look at the motives for such sacrifices.

The motives for these sacrifices were of diverse nature. There were motives of fear, of satisfaction as well as the motives of petition. As we have already seen, the ancient Basotho believed that their ancestors had an immediate influence on their lives. It was also their understanding that ancestors could turn one's life into a mere misery in cases where the living did not show any regard to them. The opposite was true in cases where they were given due concern and regard. Therefore, any misfortune that would befall either the society as a whole or an individual member, and whose cause was not known, was believed to have been caused by the dissatisfaction of the ancestors. This mentality created fear and the attitude of supplication and prayer for forgiveness by way of sacrifices to one's ancestors. These sacrifices had overlapping motives: motives of fear and of satisfaction.

Besides these as we have said earlier, other motives were of petition whereby one would offer sacrifices to pray for such things as a happy death, rain, peace etc. Apart from this, other sacrifices were offered in thanksgiving. For example, after a child had

been born, a few days later or months, even years at time, depending on the capability of the family concerned, an animal was offered to the ancestors as a sacrifice of thanksgiving for the gift of the newly born child. This was because they believed, a child was a gift from the ancestors.

Another special thanksgiving was done after each harvest by the ancient Basotho: After the grains had been threshed out on the threshing ground, some small quantity of the grains was left in a shallow hole dug at the centre of the threshing ground as a gift to the ancestors who were supposedly the givers of the good harvest. Such sacrifice was technically called *phabalimo*, meaning a gift to ancestors. Still on sacrifices were *joala ba leoa* (harvest festival) or the first beer brewed after the first harvest which was a sign of the harvester's gratitude for the generosity shown by the ancestors in the harvest, and also *joala ba lipitsa* (literally, the beer of pots). This was the beer brewed not long after the burial ceremony. The purpose here was to remove any possibility of misfortune, likely to occur in connection with the use of all the pots used during the time of the burial. We should here remember that it was the belief of the ancient *Basotho* that anything used during the burial had to be cleansed in a special way before it could be used or else its use was likely to bring bad luck to the user.

Under normal circumstances the ordinary ministers of these sacrifices were the heads of the families concerned. These were men since in *Basotho* culture each man was considered the head of his family. In cases where the head of the family was no longer alive, any of the elderly people of the extended family was assigned the task. In special cases, which needed the intervention of traditional healers, such healers normally worked as ministers also (cf. Manyeli, 1992). Apart from the individual ministers, the ancient *Basotho* had collective ministers for such sacrifices as those offered during famine, epidemic or war which concerned the whole village or nation as such.

Victims in such sacrifices ranged from simple birds to mammals. It is said that birds were chosen very seldom while mammals were frequently used as the preferred type of victims. These mammal-type victims included, sheep, goats and cattle (Manyeli, 1992). In some of the instances, wild animals killed in public expeditions were used as victims in the sacrifices.

3.2.1.3 JOINT PRAYER EXPEDITIONS

Another way of presenting petitions to the deity was by making campaigns for joint prayer expeditions. But unlike other modes of prayer, these methods of prayer were mainly and primarily used in cases where the problem for which such prayers were

offered was regarded as affecting the whole nation, region or village. The expeditions we are speaking about here are *molutsoane*, *lesokoana* and *molula* feast. We shall now consider them one by one.

(a) **MOLUTSOANE EXPEDITION**

In an exceptionally dry season, it was customary for the chief to summon all his men for *molutsoane* (hunt-meeting) in the mountains. Early in the morning, all cattle of the place were driven into the veld by these men summoned by the chief. They climbed to the tops of the hills, cliffs and mountains, searching for living creatures in every hole, den or cave, killing all of them and smashing old pots and even broken ones. This is explained by Ellenberger in the following way:

A beast of certain colour would first be sacrificed, and early in the morning, the people would start driving the cattle before them to the top of the mountain. It was customary to show their discontent by destroying all the shrubs they happened to come across, to throw stones into dried pools and water-courses, and to kill all the game that came within reach, but it was forbidden to return with any game without first disemboweling the animals and throwing the entrails into a water-course. Towards midday they would return to the village, the cattle driven pell-mell in front, and the women wailing and repeating many times the following or similar prayer:

O Soloane! We seek rain!

*Soloane, where is the rain?
Oh! Where is the rain?
Lord, give us rain.
We remain always thirsty,
The cattle too are thirsty.
Soloane, where is the rain? (1969:253).*

It is said that one of the victims of the day during this expedition had to be a human being, preferably, a young unmarried man or any of those who could not bear children. Some authors say that such a human victim had to be the most immoral barren woman of the village (Laydevant, 1952). Her immorality was taken as the source of the problem. Therefore, it was believed that eliminating her would rectify the situation. It is asserted that such a person had to be secretly chosen by the chief and the traditional doctor before the expedition could be carried out. This fact is alluded to in one of the sacred songs which stresses the importance of rain in one's life. This is the song:

*Koana tlaase tau lia rora,
Li rora li ja khomo e tšoana,
Khomo e tšoana nyopa
Nyopa li sa tsoaleng
Ere li tla tsoala
Ho ke ho ne pula
Pulana li nang
Li na melubela
Melubela Tlotsi
Tlotsi ke Sekhele. (Laydevant, 1952:28-29).*

Down there, the lion roar
 They roar so, eating the black cow.
 The black cow which is barren
 The barren that cannot reproduce
 Unless it rains first
 Little rains falling
 Rain abundantly
 Heavy rain of *Tlotsi* (one who brings about wetness)
Tlotsi is Sekhele (Protector).

The symbolic and nebulous terms of this song are probably an allusion to *Molutsoane* expedition. The black cow spoken of here is probably the human victim who has been sacrificed while the roaring lions in the lake (*tlaase*) are water inhabitants (e.g. *Fito*) which now feed on the victim. The little rains are the victim's blood, which, once shed, will bring about heavy rains (*melubela*).

Maybe at this juncture one would like to know the purpose of emptying the bowels into the rivulets and rivers. To find out the purpose let us first look at this prayer that was connected with the expedition:

Oho Molimo a k'u utloe rea rapela,
Molimo oa Leseli oa Rammoloki,
Molimo O liatla li maroba;
Liatla li tsoeu tsa Rammoloki,
Li soeufetse ke ho bopa masea
Tlhahla-macholo Rammoloki,
Hlahla metsi u a etse keleli,

*Hoba keleli e nchafatsa lichaba
Lichaba li tsoang ho uena 'Mopong
Lichaba li ea boela ho uena Meahong
Leseli. (Matšela, 1990:15).*

Oh! *Molimo* hear us we pray
Molimo, Light and Saviour
Molimo whose hands have *maroba*;
The palms (hands) of the Saviour are white
They are white due to creating babies.
The Saviour, you who splashes deep waters
Splashes them into rain (*keleli*)
For the rain renews the nations
Nations from you at creation place
Nations which will return to you.
Amen! (*Leseli!*)

In this prayer I have translated the word *Rammoloki* as “Saviour.” There are reasons for this. This word can mean two things: Firstly, it can be taken as meaning the father of (*Ra*) the saviour (*'moloki*). In this way *'Moloki* might be taken as Jesus Christ and *Rammoloki*, God the Father. But this cannot, of course, be true since the ancient *Basotho* did not know Jesus nor the Trinity as such. Secondly, it may be taken as meaning the one who is fond of saving, who likes to save others. This is for instance, like *Rabasali*. The word *Rabasali* as used here does not mean the father of (*Ra*) *basali* (women). But means the one who loves women too much. In the same way, *Rammoloki* as used here does not mean the father of *'Moloki*, but it rather means the one who is fond of saving his people from all life perils.

Some people, especially those who take the word “Saviour” (*Rammoloki*) as referring to Jesus, have translated the word *maroba* as “wounds” that Jesus bore on his hands. (Guma, 1980). Again this cannot be correct since the ancient *Basotho* did not know Jesus. Another reason why we cannot take this word to mean wounds is that it is also used in reference to other people than the “Saviour.” Let us look at the following example:

*Molimo o mocha rapela oa khale.
Molimonyana u tumela baloi,
Tumela ba shoeleng khale-khale,
Bana ba Ntate ba liatla li maroba
Liatla li tsoeu ... (Lapointe, 1986:43)*

In this prayer, the one who has *maroba* is no longer the Saviour, but those who died long ago (*Ba shoeleng khale*). Now, if the word means “wounds” of Jesus, where have they got their wounds from? This incongruity can only be understood as pointing to the fact that the word *maroba* means something else than wounds. The fact that we do not know what it means does not in any way suggest that we have to attribute irrelevant meanings to it. Some of the old people whom I discussed the word with suggested that it meant “soft” or “warm.” If this is what this word means, to say that *Molimo* has hands that have *maroba* is to say that he has peaceful and welcoming hands.

The word *Tlhahla-macholo* as has been used in this prayer refers to Water Snake, the giver of rain as we have already seen in the previous pages. The ancient *Mosotho* identified the presence of water with that of the water snake. According to their belief this snake inhabited big lakes and all natural water sources (underground). They also believed that the movement of this snake in these deep lakes (*macholo*) caused spattering or splashing (*hlahla*) of water, thus turning it into rain (*keleli*). Heavy storms or tornadoes were and are still explained by the *Basotho* as having been caused by the emigrating angry water snake. For example, according to Manyeli:

Regular whirlwinds, hurricanes and tornadoes of the 1950s, at Thaba-Bosiu and Roma, were not a problem for ordinary traditional Basotho. According to them a huge snake moved from one place to another. Its tail caused the havoc on its path, for instance, roofs of huts and houses were blown away: fifty year-old trees were uprooted (1995:162-3).

It was also their belief that this snake liked fresh cattle dung (*bolokoe*). From this we can infer that the reason for emptying the bowels of all animals killed during the *Molutsoane* expedition into the rivulets and rivers was to entice him (*Soloane*) into action through the smell of the cattle dung (from the bowels). That is, as the water flowed, it carried along with it all the dung to dump it into different lakes down the rivers and streams.

Even today some people, especially the old ones, still believe that rain is caused by *Noha ea Metsi*. For instance, it has been a common saying in Lesotho among many people, that the severe drought that has recently stricken the country is due to the disturbance done to *Noha ea Metsi* by the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. They also say the same thing if it does not rain during the construction of a bridge over any of the rivers. That is, they say that it does not rain because *Noha ea Metsi* has been disturbed by the construction.

Should the *Molutsoane* fail to bring the badly wanted rain, the great doctor *morokapula* (rain-maker), was consulted. In this case, the chief or the head of the clan was required to undergo the *lefehlo* (a certain process of charms) by the doctor. He was given *thato* (drugs added to the medicines as directed by the divining bones). He then had to take the medicines and a long reed along with him to a stream. On returning, he dragged the reed along the way till he reached his destination. As a result, a heavy rain was expected to fall. Even in this case, apparently the medicines and the reed striking the waters were meant to influence *Tlhahla-Macholo* to give rain. Most probably the ingredients of the medicines either by their smell or by any other means were intended to attract him from his hiding place.

(b) **LESOKOANA EXPEDITION**

If the *Moroka-pula* failed to bring the rain, the women of the village concerned were asked to go and “steal” the *lesokoana* from some neighbouring village. The *lesokoana* is the stick used in any house for stirring bread (*papa*) in a pot. An expedition was organized to invade one of the neighbouring villages by the women of another village, in order to “steal” the *lesokoana*. The procedure was as follows: One woman or girl known for her swiftness in running, and who, preferably was the senior of the village, entered the family home and after looking around found the *lesokoana*. She snatched it away and at full speed ran off, in order to give it to her companions, who remained scattered at different intervals along the road leading to their village. In case their taking away *lesokoana* had not been noticed, they themselves gave the alarm shouting: Behold! The *lesokoana* is gone! On seeing or hearing this, the women of the invaded village dashed out of their houses and running pell-mell attempted to regain the *lesokoana*. A helter-skelter chase ensued from both sides. The men of the village stood in groups on high places to watch this exciting exercise.

Finding herself tired or about to be captured by her pursuers, the woman or the girl having the *lesokoana* threw it to her companion ahead of her, who also was to do the same. Each side competed by taking and retaking the *lesokoana* from each other, until

finally one side won by reaching their home with this “stolen” *lesokoana*. It would remain there until the defeated party waged another combat to try to fetch it back.

The winners would then enter their village with merriment, wearing green leaves and a certain grass called *sechaba* about the head and necks and waist, singing victoriously the following song:

Soloane, (water snake).
we need rain
Where is rain?
Chief give us rain etc. (Sekese, 1983:92-93).

We should here also mention that this *lesokoana* was not only meant for praying for rain, but it was also organised for praying for barren women. So, If the motive for carrying out *lesokoana* was that of reminding the village that the infecund should be prayed for, then as they entered the village they sang the following song:

Re mekholochane (bakopi)
Ha re etsa oele-oelele (mangoengoe)
Sila koe, re e'o tsuba thabeng
Re 'o tsoala Mosoeu' a lehaha
... Molimo a k'u utloe rea rapela
'Maakane! Ho iloe kae,
Ho sa keng ho khutloa re tlo bonoa?
Bo-Nkhono ba llela matlala Etc. (Sekese, 1983:93).

We are beggars,
When we make *oele-oelele*,
Grind tobacco so that we may go,
And snuff at the mountain,
Let us go and bear *Mosoeu* of cave.
God hear us we pray.
Oh! Where have the people gone,
That they do not come to see us?
Grandmothers are demanding meat ... etc.

After the *lesokoana*, it was expected that it would rain a lot. It is not clear how this brought about rain. The only thing we know is that it was the belief of the ancient *Basotho* that to see a calf or calves frolicking about was an indication of imminent rain.

We also know that in *Sesotho* at times, young women (virgins) are called *lithole* (heifers) and the old ones are called *makhomohali* (cows). Perhaps it is from this perspective that like calves, their frolic (running) brought about rain. Or perhaps their sweating was meant to attract rain. That is, based on the principle that "like attracts like," the running sweat was meant to attract rain.

We should also look at the whole process of *lesokoana* as a symbolic action. For instance, these frolicking women and girls symbolized the calves whose frisking action brought the rain. Likewise, the whole question of putting the green leaves about the

head, neck and waist has to be understood as the symbol of the needed rain whose function was to cause greenness in plants. Even the very action of ‘stealing’ *lesokoana* and the *lesokoana* itself were symbolic. Among their many riddles, *Basotho* also have the following one:

Sefelekoane beta pelo u kene koetseng
Serpent take courage and enter the lake.

The answer to this riddle as given by the *Basotho* is the stirring rod (*lesokoana*) which as it is used in stirring bread is immersed in the boiling water in the pot. Thus we may deduce from this that the *lesokoana* here symbolized the water snake, the giver of rain as we have already seen, who being transferred from one village to the other, would give rain to the villagers. That is, the presence of this ‘stolen’ *lesokoana* signified the presence of the giver of rain, *Noha ea Metsi*. This kind of interpretation is also strengthened by the fact that the name “*Fito*” (water snake) was pronounced each time the *lesokoana* was recaptured from those who had stolen it. That is, they identified this *lesokoana* with *Fito*.

(c) MOLULA EXPEDITION

There was among the ancient *Basotho* a very peculiar way of praying for fecundity in

women. A special feast called *Mokete oa Molula* (barrenness feast) was arranged by all the married women of the village, who had no problem of barrenness. These together with those who were considered infecund went far away to the mountains with a certain man called Ntili. The only people who were to remain home were men, children and old women who could no longer travel over long distances due to their old age.

Ntili was the relative of Monaheng (Monaheng of Basotho). He was not married. Among *Basotho*, he was famous for his ability to pray for childbearing to the ancestors on behalf of all the women who could not bear children. He was regarded as a mystery from *Molimo*. He was carried on the back of the infecund like a child to these distant places. They stayed with him in a cave praying throughout the night. They did not bring any food along with them. So, they spent the whole night without eating.

It is said that as a sign that their prayer had been accepted, there had to be a miraculous happening: they felt some drops of water sprayed on them or some small particles of stones thrown at them.

Very early in the morning, all men in the village left the village in order to look for the

women who had disappeared with Ntili. They also took along with them all their cattle. When they found them, they drove the cattle back home where they were milked together at the same place just as in the case of *Molutsoane*. All the women with Ntili on their backs, had to leave the cave and go home together with the men. They (women) decorated themselves in green plants as in the case of *lesokoana*. As they approached the village, they waited at the village gate (*khorong ea motse*). It was while they were still there that they were given traditional beer brought to them by all the girls who remained home during the expedition. One of the cattle of the village was then sent to them driven by some chosen men in order to accompany them as they then entered the village.

On that very day, each of the husbands of the barren women slaughtered an ox as a sacrifice to pray for his wife. This was then a big feast where people gathered together to celebrate. All the infecund women were then anointed with a red ochre, *selibelo* (special fatty cream) and *phepa* (white chalk-like powder) all over their bodies.

As they celebrated, they sang a very solemn song (*koli ea malla*), at the same time crying and exchanging Ntili on their backs from one to another. Their husbands joined them in their crying while Ntili prayed endlessly on their backs in a very solemn way

as he was being exchanged from one back to another. When the singing and crying were over, a certain part of meat (*litlhaha*) from each of the slaughtered oxen was taken and sent to a maternal uncle of the barren women. After this all the women were taken back to the cave where they were fetched by their maternal uncles in a way similar to the previous one. In the cave, their prayer was that which we have already seen under *lesokoana*. That is, "We are beggars ..." etc.

When all the business of visiting the cave was over, these barren women had to carry always, on their backs an artificial baby called *Ngoana oa Seho* or *Khongoana-Tsingoana*. This artificial baby was always placed beside the mother when sleeping as if it were really a living baby. It was given a name, which later on would be given to a real baby in case the mother gave birth to one (Sekese, 1983). It is said that Ntli died in 1822 because of the great famine. After his death, his place was taken by a chosen unmarried man among the men of the village.

Even in this prayer we already see some traces of the water snake, the creator of children. Apart from wells, streams and rivers, other places which the ancient *Basotho* believed were inhabited by a water snake were caves, especially dark caves with some water or lake in them. It is very likely that the cave spoken of here was one of such

caves. We have many of such feared caves in Lesotho even today. For example, we have one called Leqhili-qhili at Taung in the district of Mohale's Hoek and another at Mautse. The drops of water sprinkled over the women in the cave were most probably from him, *Tlhahla-Macholo* to whom the prayers of the women were addressed. It is said that they were anointed with *selibelo*. One of the ingredients of such *selibelo* was the fat obtained from milk (*mafura a lefehlo*).

The water snake among other things was believed to like milk. It is therefore very likely that the *selibelo* (mixed with milk fat) was meant to attract the snake by its smell so that he could come out and so answer their prayers. This *selibelo* was used in many occasions where it appears to be still somehow associated with *Noha ea Metsi*. I am here particularly referring to the case of the initiation schools where the initiates were anointed all over their bodies with this substance. Some of the rituals, for example, in the case of the initiation of girls were performed in the water where the initiates were said to meet Motanyane (another name for *Noha ea Metsi*).

That Motanyane is *Noha ea Metsi*, is alluded to in the following song of the women initiates:

... *Ho shoela ke beng bohloko!*
Nkabe ke na le malome.
A tle a mphe potsanyane,
Ke tle ke e nehe Motanyane.
Ngoan'a metsi a tle a thabe,
A tle a khutlele metsing (Wells, 1994:95).

... The pain of losing relatives,
I should have an uncle.
He could give me a goat.
So that I could give it to Motanyane:
The child of the water would be happy,
And would return to the water

From this song it becomes clear that only a gift from the uncle could make *Motanyane* happy. I know that in reality, *Motanyane* was a chosen person who disguised himself as *Motanyane*. But we should understand this person as being symbolic only. He was symbolizing the real *Motanyane* (water snake) as we have already seen.

What has just been said above should be understood in the light of what Eliade says in the following lines about the fertilizing power of snakes:

Snakes are thought of as producing children Among the Togos in Africa (a giant snake dwells in a pool near the town of Klewe, and receiving children from the hands of the supreme god Namu, bring them into the town before their birth). they prevent women from being sterile and ensure that they will have a large number of children (1997: 167-8).

Now that our hypothesis has been positively tested and proven sound through a critical analysis of various *Basotho* cultural elements, in the following chapter we look at the results of the interviews we had with some *mathuela*. These results are meant to supplement what we have already established through this analysis, namely, that water snakes held a pivotal position in *Basotho* Traditional Religion.

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER FOUR : CULTIC FUNCTIONARIES AND REVERED OBJECTS.

4.1 BOTHUELA

Most religions if not all, have what we call cultic functionaries. These are:

... religious leaders who are set apart for the service of God and the divinities. They usually have sound religious knowledge and they lead others in religious activities. In other words, they are sacred persons as well as custodians of religion. However, sacred persons may not perform the same function. There are categories of them, and each category may perform a function distinct from other categories. Thus we have priests and priestesses, medicine-men, magicians and herbalists (Awolalu, J. and Dopamu, P., 1979:139-140).

In this chapter our focus is, as stated in the previous pages, on *mathuela* who are also known as *bakoma* or *amagqira*, and are almost the only surviving cultic functionaries in Basotho Traditional Religion today. These are specialists in the sacred. They are believed to be possessed by spirit which enables them to heal and to communicate with ancestors and water snakes. They are also able to divine or even to foretell things; and they generally possess incredible diagnostic skills. The following tables show us age, marital status and educational background of those we have interviewed in our attempt to get as much evidence as we could regarding what has been proposed in our hypothesis on the position of water snake in *Basotho* Traditional Religion.

Table 1: Age Distribution of *Mathuela*

AGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Below 21	3	15
21 – 30	2	10
31 – 40	4	20
41 – 50	4	20
51 – 60	5	25
61+	2	10
TOTAL	20	100

This table shows that age is not necessarily an important variable in becoming a *lethuela*. This is because in almost every age there are *mathuela*. Moreover, among the interviewees the youngest was aged ten (10) years, and some indicated that they knew others who were even younger than that age.

Sex of *Mathuela*

Among the twenty (20) that were interviewed, thirteen (13) were female (65 percent) and seven (7) were males (35 percent). This shows that there are more female *mathuela* than male ones. This, therefore, makes it clear that *bothuela* is female-dominated.

Table 2: Marital Status of *Mathuela*

MARITAL STATUS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Married	13	65
Widowed	2	10
Single	5	25
TOTAL	20	100

The above table shows that *mathuela* also marry just as “ordinary” people do; being *lethuela* does not necessarily mean that one cannot live like the rest of people who are not *mathuela*. However, one important thing to note here is that during the initiation process all initiates are required to abstain from sexual activities regardless of their marital status.

Table 3: Educational Attainment of *Mathuela*

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Never Attended School	3	15
Primary School	7	35
Secondary School	9	45
High School	1	5
TOTAL	20	100

This table shows that those that were interviewed have very low education attainment.

The majority of them (95 percent) did not even go as far as high school level. Some of them indicated that they had to drop out of school because they were very sick. After being initiated into *bothuela* they did not continue with their studies.

4.1.1 THE ORIGIN OF BOTHUELA

Many people seem to have taken for granted that *bothuela* has always been part and parcel of the *Basotho* culture. This is a mistaken thought. There is much evidence which seems to suggest that this is of relatively new origin. As it will be seen, this is a foreign cultural element which seems to have come from *Nguni* people, especially *Amaxhosa*.

Let us first consider what the first missionaries wrote on the culture of *Basotho*. It is a well known fact that many of the missionaries who came to Africa endeavoured their best to record whatever they observed as having some importance in relation to the religion of the indigenous people. The first missionaries came to Lesotho in 1833. No sooner had they settled down than they started writing some anthropological accounts on *Basotho* culture. Many such accounts have been published as books and are today available in bookshops and libraries countrywide.

When one goes through these accounts, one thing becomes obvious: they all make no reference to the phenomenon of *bothuela* with the exception of those which were written after 1938. The question is, why do they not make such a reference? One explanation may be that the authors were not interested in the phenomenon or at least they did not see any significance of it. But the fact is that the very authors have written so much about traditional healers giving even some details of their different types. Now, in all this there is not a single mention of this type of healers, yet as we know them today, *mathuela* are the most prominent, influential and popular type of healers in *Basotho* society. Their exclusion could only mean one thing: the phenomenon was non-existent in the then *Basotho* culture. Otherwise, given the kind of popularity and prominence that this phenomenon enjoys in *Basotho* communities, the missionaries would have no other option but to write on it. The very word '*mathuela*' is a derivative noun. It comes from the word '*Tugela*'. *Tugela* is the name of a certain river in South Africa where a certain *Nguni* traditional healer used to initiate *Basotho* into the phenomenon of *bothuela*. That was before this phenomenon took roots in Lesotho. Thus etymologically speaking, the word '*mathuela*' simply means the people of *Tugela* or those initiated at *Tugela* river.

Another factor which adds to our scepticism about the identification of the phenomenon

with *Basotho* in terms of its origin, is the language used in relation to its practice. A few examples will suffice to drive our point home. Traditionally *mathuela* are also called *maqekha*. This word comes from a *Xhosa* word, “*Amagqira*” which means indigenous healers. A person who has completed his or her training as a *lethuela*, is called *mokoma*. This word derives from a *Xhosa* word, “*ingoma*” meaning a song. Thus the word “*mokoma*” means the one who sings. This is because during the time of initiation and after the initiate has become a *lethuela*, he or she has to perform *hlophe*. This is a ritual performed indoors, with singing which is accompanied by heavy drumming, clapping and a rhythmic pounding dance in which the whole body trembles rigorously. The word “*hlophe*” comes from a *Xhosa* word “*intlombe*” which means the same thing as what we have just explained above. When an initiate undergoing *bothuela* training is shown some things in his or her dreams which he or she is expected to use in his or her profession, he or she is said to have *thoaso*. The word *thoaso* derives from a *Xhosa* word, “*thwasa*” with similar meaning. Furthermore, when a patient has come to consult a *lethuela*, he or she is expected to say “*siea vuma*” whenever the *lethuela* gives correct information in the process of diagnosing the problems of the patient. The word “*vuma*” derives from a *Xhosa* word “*Vumisa*” which carries the same meaning. These are but a few among many examples that we have of *Xhosa* vocabulary used in this phenomenon.

Another factor contributing to our doubt is the area in which this phenomenon is more pronounced. More than in any area in Lesotho, this phenomenon is concentrated in the southern part, especially in the district of Quthing. This place shares its boundaries with Transkei (RSA) which is known to be a *Xhosa* area. It is in this place again where we find many *Basotho* who speak this language as their first language. Basing ourselves upon this fact, there is a high probability that the phenomenon of *bothuela* came to Lesotho as a result of the *Basotho's* interaction, (which involved intermarriages) with the *Xhosa* people from the region of Transkei.

The kind of beasts used for sacrificial purposes by *mathuela* also deserves our attention in as far as the origin of this phenomenon is concerned. It is a well known fact that both cattle and sheep are preferred mammals for making sacrifices in Lesotho. *Basotho mathuela* deviate from this common practice and seem to prefer goats to all mammals when making sacrifices. In South Africa, people who predominantly use goats for sacrificial purposes are known to be *Amakhosa*. This similarity of preferring goats to other types of mammals which seems to exist between *Basotho mathuela* and *Amakhosa* to me appears to suggest one thing: *Bothuela* or *sangomaism* (as it is commonly known in South Africa), although today seems to have taken root within *Basotho* culture, never originated in Lesotho.

4.1.2 ACQUISITION OF BOTHUELA

According to the practitioners that were interviewed, there are basically three ways in which one can acquire *bothuela*. The majority of those we interviewed pointed out that they became *mathuela* after having suffered. They suffered from some sort of illness which Western medication could not heal. For instance, one indicated that she suffered from uncontrollable headache, toothache, stomachache, and also had swollen feet which restrained her mobility. She was admitted to the hospital where she stayed for months but could not be cured. She eventually had dreams in which she was told that she had ancestral call to become a *lethuela*. She pointed out that at first she did not believe it, and apart from that she did not want to be a *lethuela*. Because of that she did not tell anyone but her dreams did not stop.

However, she eventually accepted this call after she had had a dream in which she saw someone very furious, telling her that because she did not accept the call, she was going to die. Scared of this, she finally accepted the call and had to go for a churning process. She was initiated into *bothuela* by a person she was shown in her dreams. In this way of acquiring *bothuela*, intense religious experience which may involve a period of seeming madness, nearness to death, austerities, isolation and apparent spiritual transformation, is the starting point of the process of becoming *lethuela*. Such

a religious experience is of a possessional nature. An individual feels like being invaded or seized by some spirit. This is often accompanied by dissociative mental phenomena such as visions, ecstasy, channeling the voices of spirits and uttering strange words at times, as well as displaying erratic, compulsive actions such as involuntary jumping, running, weeping, shouting and vigorous dancing.

In *Sesotho* when a person is in such a state, he or she is said to have spirit (*o na le moea*). In the visions such a person is normally shown among others, a healer who is to initiate him or her into the process, a pool where he or she will meet a water snake or get some of the items necessary for his or her initiation. The whole process is referred to as *thoaso* (from *thwasa*). This is often times resisted for a number of reasons. The following reasons as given by Buhrmann for such resistance among *Amakhosa*, also hold for *Basotho* case:

The diagnosis of *thwasa* is often resisted, and the sick person and his relatives can consult several *amagqira* to have it confirmed or negated. It is resisted for variety of reasons: the treatment and training is long, demanding and expensive, and can interfere with other duties and relationships; as could be the case with married people. It is not only the patient but also his family who must accept the findings because their role during the whole treatment and training period will be of particular significance. The life of an *igqira* is also onerous and demanding; he has to

serve the ancestors and the community, and his responsibilities are considerable. The claim that prolonged resistance to ancestors' call can lead to insanity is not to be taken lightly (1984:37).

Once it has been confirmed that a person has indeed been called by ancestors to become a *lethuela*, the necessary arrangements are made with a traditional healer (an experienced *lethuela*) whom the patient has been shown in his or her dreams, so that the patient will finally be taken by the healer so as to undergo the full treatment. When this happens, the patient is said to enter the churning (*o kena lefehlong*). In the presence of his or her relatives and friends a feast is made to initiate him or her into the *bothuela*. A beast is killed, preferably a goat, not a sheep since, as they say, a sheep may darken the patient's sight. Such a goat is stabbed with a spear. In the process the initiate is made to drink a medicine (*sethoto*) that has been beaten into a froth. This is believed to enable the initiate to see his or her ancestors. After churning the medicine once again into a froth, the doctor bedaubes the initiate and gives it to him or her to drink and wash his or her body while the rest of those present sing praises of the living and the dead. The whole process takes place in the morning.

In the evening, the singing which is accompanied by dancing, drumming and clapping of hands begins. When they dance the dancers make quick jerky steps which include

the trembling of the whole body whose tempo gradually gets quicker and quicker. This takes the whole night. In the morning the initiate is given some medicine mixed with chyme to protect him or her against sorcery. After this, the initiate is expected to perform the same singing daily until such time as his or her healer or ancestors will deem it necessary to bring the initiation to its completion. Each time he or she performs some of the villagers come to listen and join the singing as well as to help by playing a drum (*sekupu*).

During the whole process of initiation, which may last for even a year, the initiate undergoes a very demanding and intricate training which includes abstaining from certain things and leading an austere kind of life. From the very beginning the initiate is given a special attire made of a goat skin which he or she has to wear full time. He or she goes bare-footed with the whole body smeared with a red traditional cream (*letsoku*) which is a mixture of some special red soil and fat obtained from milk. During this period there is no shaving, no sexual activities and not any kind of activity which may be considered immoral may be displayed by the initiate.

One of the tasks which the initiate will be expected to perform when he or she is a full *lethuela* will be to find stolen or lost goods and to discover hidden secrets as well as

to expose witches. To prepare him or her for this arduous responsibility, the initiate is subjected to a special training in which he or she is asked to go out and in his or her absence some item is hidden and he or she is asked to identify the hidden item and the place where it is hidden.

Such a hidden object is technically called *mok'hoba*, meaning something hidden. Because it is a must for the initiate to discover these hidden objects, he or she has to develop extraordinary concentration powers in order that he or she may follow faithfully the guidance of ancestral spirits in discovering these objects without any distraction. Where necessary, the initiate is helped to attain an ecstatic state. It is believed that it is while in such a state that he or she will be able to receive the ancestral guidance easily. Either drumming or special medicine (*bolao*) may be used to induce ecstasy. In very rare cases flagellation may also be used for the same purpose. At times an initiate may be shown a special well or pool in his or her dreams. In such cases he or she is also expected to pay regular visit to such a place accompanied by his or her healer in order to perform some rituals which are meant to establish strong ties with the owner or the ruler of the underworld, water snake. Out of twenty *mathuela* that we interviewed, sixteen claimed to possess such special pools.

In some cases *bothuela* is not acquired through ancestral call, but through the willingness of an individual. Most of such people are only taught, and in most cases by one member of the family who is in the practice. For instance, in one case, in the same household, the father, mother and son were all *mathuela*. When I tried to find out how this happened, the mother said that she was taught *bothuela* by her husband because she always assisted him when healing people, and then she became interested and wanted to be a *lethuela* too. She said that her son was also taught through his own interest.

Lastly, one may become a *lethuela* because he or she has been deceitfully drawn into this practice by rapacious experienced *mathuela* who, when consulted for medical help, tend to associate every illness with the ancestral call to *bothuela*. These corrupt *mathuela* do this because they know that this will give them a lot of money since initiating someone into *bothuela* entails payment. This then answers the question as to why there are more *mathuela* than other traditional healers among the *Basotho*.

4.1.3 SOME ENIGMATIC STORIES ABOUT WATER SNAKES

Unlike in other areas of the *Basotho* culture where human-snake relationship is not very

obvious, with *mathuela* such relationship is very obvious. In fact many of them have either a pool or a well of their own. The ownership of such a pool or well is acquired through the repeated visions of it. That is, an initiate will see such a pool or well several times in his or her dreams. When it has been confirmed that ancestors have indeed set aside such a pool or well for his or her use, the chief of the place is informed about this. He in turn informs his people about this new ownership of the pool or the well concerned.

The initiate and his or her healer will then visit such a place (a pool or a well) in order to perform some rituals which are meant to scare off the sorcerers, who out of jealousy may maliciously interfere with the place and so disturb the good relationship between the owner of the pool or the well, water snake, and the initiate. Such pools become a meeting place between the initiate and the water snake as well as the river people who are said to live beneath these waters. Once the rituals have been performed the pool or the well becomes a personal property of the initiate. From now onwards the villagers have a limited access to such a pool or well even if this was their common property before. For example, they may be required to stay away from such well during certain times such as after sunset.

These are times during which the water snake is believed to come out from the underneath to invisibly roam about outside the well or the pool. Those who ignore such restrictions get what is called *mosolo*. That is, their bodies develop some kind of skin rash that covers the whole body. In my village, where I grew up as a boy, I have seen people suffering from this kind of a rash, the reason given being that they were at a wrong place at a wrong time. Even today people are very much discouraged from crossing rivers or drawing water after dusk for fear that they might get *mosolo*. This is because it is the general belief among the *Basotho* that whenever there is water there is always a water snake as the source of such water.

In fact, the early missionaries tell us that *Basotho* “believe that to destroy a crocodile is to infallibly spoil the rain” (Journal des Missions, 1844:54). It is believed that this water snake likes the presence of natural vegetation around pools and natural wells. Because of this, people are also discouraged from destroying natural vegetation around the natural wells for fear that if they do, the water snake may abandon the place and so cause the well to dry up. It is for the same reason that they accept the building of artificial wells (e.g. bore-holes) with great reluctance. The presence of the water snake in natural wells gives the water from such wells spiritual value. This explains why water from a natural well rather than from a tap is always preferred when it comes to

using water for religious purposes.

In general, people are totally discouraged from going near to deep pools (*likoetsa*). Here the belief is that such pools are a dwelling place for the water snake. People are forbidden to go near to such places for two main reasons. Firstly, as we have already said at the beginning of this work, it is believed that this snake has some hypnotic powers through whose influence people may be drowned. Secondly, this is to minimize the chances of seeing this snake in its snake form. It is believed that those who see it in its snake-form either die, lose their sight and speech or become horribly disfigured. It is less dangerous when seen in its disguised form than when it is seen in its actual form. When she speaks about this among *Amakhosa*, Buhrmann says:

Apart from these River People with human attributes, there is a special snake, *inchanti* which can change its shape dramatically and is a dangerous form of the ancestors. An igqira once said about the *inchanti*: One should pray that one sees it only in one's dreams; to see it while awake can cause blindness, insanity and even death (1984:29).

In Lesotho there are many stories of people who drowned in pools as the result of having been hypnotized by this snake. Even today when crossing some of the rivers, especially where there are big pools, some people perform some propitiatory rituals as

a way of minimizing the chances of being hurt by this snake.

Unlike in the case of *Amaxhosa*, where it looks like no one can see this snake and remain intact, in the case of *Basotho*, *mathuela* may see such a snake without having to suffer any undesirable consequences. In fact there are many cases of *mathuela* who are said to have had special encounters with such snake. Some of them are said to have spent some days or even months beneath the pools in the presence of this snake. Many of them came back having signs or objects which they did not have before they entered the pool.

I had an opportunity to interview some of these. I even saw for myself some of the objects which are alleged to have been given to them by water snake. These included beads, special horn stuffed with some substances and *baphaphi* or *lihoana* (special egg-like objects covered completely with colourful beads). The size of *baphaphi* is that of an ostrich egg. The *mathuela* call them their children and speak to them as if they speak to human beings. When they (*baphaphi*) speak they utter some whistle-like sound whose meaning can only be understood by the *lethuela*. They keep the *lethuela* informed about everything which may be of some significance to him or her. Through them the *lethuela* is able to divine, converse with spirits, predict the future and to

uncover secrets.

One day (August 1998) I was travelling, and in the bus I sat next to a *lethuela*¹. No sooner had I sat down than I heard her uttering some words. When I asked her about this, she told me that she was speaking to her children (*baphaphi*) and that they were making her aware that she had patients awaiting her at home. I asked her to tell me more about her acquisition of the *baphaphi*. She then told me that when she was undergoing her training as *lethuela*, she had many visions of a special pool which she finally visited together with her healer and some people. At the pool the healer prayed and then put some snuff into the pool. The level of the pool's water rose and started bubbling as if it was boiling. It whirled and splattered and those around were seized by fear. When it finally subsided, she entered the pool and sank to the bottom while the rest of the people remained drumming heavily outside the pool.

In the pool, as she said, were people some of whom she identified with her ancestors. The place was dry and full of traditional things such as clay pots and some medicines. Then there was this huge snake in its coiled state. Its size was that of a big hut. The

¹ This lady is not part of those twenty that I interviewed. Her story appears here only because it tallies well with what I got from some of my official interviewees. For some reasons I could not find her during my official interviews.

big head, thickly covered with mane looked like a horse's except that it looked horribly ugly due to its scary protuberant cheeks. It had something like a mirror on its forehead. In addition to the above description, some *mathuela* whom I consulted mentioned this snake also as having some green reeds at the centre of its head and *loli* (local grass used mainly for religious purposes) around the head. Almost all *mathuela* whom I consulted gave more or less similar descriptions of this snake. The same description is also given by old *Basotho* people who believe in the existence of such a snake. They also say that it has one eye. Perhaps what the *lethuela* explained as looking like a mirror was such an eye.

This *lethuela* as well as those that I consulted afterwards did not go into details as to what kind of conversation she had with the snake. She only mentioned that she was given *baphaphi* and sent back. When she finally emerged out of the pool, her clothes were as dry as before she entered the pool. Some *mathuela* with similar stories emerged from such pools with new style of hair-they came back having thick mane heavily decorated with beads. Some came back having their faces covered with white dots.

We are here dealing with a very complicated issue which to explain or make sense of

seems almost impossible. But it would be wrong to trivialize or dismiss it as being naïve or crazy. We have to remember that we are here dealing with the holy. This has its own ways of manifesting itself. Although it transcends all that is finite and sensible, the fact remains that it manifests itself through multiple finite, sensible media. Put differently, “humans experience the sacred through persons and other concrete, finite media, but they cannot have unmediated experiences of it because the sacred is not material and sensory.” (Schmidt, 1988:63). Here we are also faced with the problem of religious language-the language which is double-intentional in the sense that it points to that which is finite, transitory, observable and contingent on one level, and also to that which is infinite, supernatural, trans-empirical, supersensible, eternal and absolute on the other level. This double-intentional character of religious language turns it into an ambiguous, indirect, metaphorical language which, if taken literally may appear foolish or even contradictory.

4.1.4 COMPLETION OF TRAINING

The duration of the churning process depends on whether or not one knows and also has memorized all he or she has been taught. This is because without the knowledge of what they have been taught, the initiates cannot graduate. One of the interviewees said that she took seven years to complete the training because she had a very poor

memory. Others are told by the ancestors through dreams when it is time for them to graduate. When a novice has completed his or her training, a colourful celebration is organized to mark this important event. Before the actual celebration takes place, the novice will be expected to identify a beast which will be used for sacrificial purposes during the celebration. Such identification is made through *thoaso*. That is, the novice will have to see such a beast in his or her dreams. Once such an animal has been identified whoever owns it, regardless of whether or not he or she is related to the novice, has to release it without expecting any compensation. The owner behaves like this because in Africa the good of the community comes before a personal good. He knows that the novice has been chosen by ancestors for the benefit of the whole community. With the help of the ancestral spirits, as a *lethuela*, he or she will be expected to cure sickness, diagnose diseases, perform sacrifices and other cultic duties, execute magical function and establish a special communication with the realm of the ancestral spirits. This communication will among other things enable him or her to interpret dreams, reveal thefts, find lost goods, foretell the future, read other people's thoughts, influence the thoughts or behaviour of an absent individual either for a good or evil purpose and be aware of what is happening in distant places.

The release of the animal (an ox) by the owner is followed by a very demanding task

which is meant to prove once and for all to the public that the new *lethuela* is a fully trained qualified healer who can work independently of his or her healer. In the absence of the novice (new *lethuela*), the animal is driven away into a hidden place. The novice is then asked to identify the place and so find the animal. The rationale behind this is that if he or she has been really appointed by the ancestors into this new office, they will guide him or her in his or her desperate search for the beast. As he or she continues the search, his or her relatives join him or her in prayer so as to get the badly needed ancestral guidance in order to expedite the finding of the animal. Until the animal has been found everything regarding the celebration comes to a stand still. Depending on how long it takes for the novice to find the hidden animal it may take even a week for the whole process of celebration to finish.

Once the animal has been found the trainer of the novice imposes yet another complication. Through his or her medicines he or she makes it impossible to control or kill the animal by making it as wild as possible. When everybody seems to have lost hope of bringing the beast under their control, he or she then intervenes through the use of another medicine which will then bring the beast under their control. There is no explanation offered as to why this is done. But we may infer that it is perhaps to demonstrate the absolute power of the trainer over the whole process as mandated by the ancestors. As the legitimate and senior representative of ancestors he or she is an

overseer of the whole situation. Nothing can happen without his or her prior consent. After every detail of the sacrificial part of the celebration has been given meticulous attention, a vigorous dance (*hlophe*) accompanied by clapping and heavy drumbeats erupts, and this continues throughout the night. This becomes everybody's celebration where all people, regardless of age and sex, enjoy themselves. Witches have no place here. In fact, they do not even dare to come in most cases. This is because, the moment somebody with malicious intentions comes to the event, his or her presence is immediately detected by the many healers (*sangomas*) who have come to join the celebration. Once the presence of such a person has been detected, experienced *sangomas* identify him or her and expel him or her from the celebration. So, to avoid this public embarrassment, anybody who is likely to be identified as evil or immoral will never dare attend such celebrations.

When the celebration comes to an end, everybody present understands that the novice has now acquired a new status. He or she is now a *lethuela* in the real sense of the word, and from now onward he or she will dress like the rest of the *mathuela*. These have a very distinctive way of dressing. Their manner of dress resembles very much that of the traditional *Amakhosa*. This, of course, is not surprising given the fact that the phenomenon of *bothuela* came to *Basotho* through the influence of *Nguni* people.

They develop their hair into thick tresses and put strings of white beads around their heads, necks, wrists and ankles. Many of them today also put on special skirts made of *Swazi* traditional cloth. Preference is given to a red and white cloth printed with crocodile images.

Both the crocodile images and the long beads-laden tresses symbolize the water snake. What they have in mind when they develop tresses is the thick mane, which as we have already said, is one of the features of the water snake. They are trying to look like it. It is, as some of them said, a way of identifying themselves as people of the water snake. In fact, as one of his or her primary obligations, the new *lethuela* will be expected to pay regular visits to his or her pool in order to meet his or her master the water snake. A failure to do this may earn one a severe punishment. Some of my interviewees narrated to me some cases of people who were severely beaten by this snake due to their failure to pay such regular visits. They allegedly came home with bruises as a clear sign of their being beaten up. Even before he or she may enter the pool, a *lethuela* can detect whether or not his or her master is angry by simply observing the movement of the pool's water. Gentle and simple or calm ripples generally denote that the master is happy. Rough and violent ripples denote that the master is not happy.

4.2 REVERED OBJECTS

By revered objects we mean those things which due to their association with the holy are often, if not always, used for religious purposes, whether animate or inanimate. Most of the objects which *Basotho* use for religious purposes are those which are connected with water, which according to my opinion is a clear evidence that *Basotho* or their ancestors traditionally had water-divinity as the ultimate object of worship in their religion. Many of the caves which are used as hierophanies, that is, places in which pilgrims meet their ancestral spirits or are visited for religious purposes in general are watery places. Most of them are believed to have mysterious pools in them. To protect their homes against evil forces the ancient *Basotho* rubbed special stones with sacred oily mixtures and drove them into the ground at certain places around the homestead. These were pebbles taken from the river bed. They were preferred to other stones probably because of their connection with the water in which dwelt what they regarded to be the source of all things. There was also what the ancient *Basotho* called *lejoe la koena* (crocodile's stone). This was the stone through which *Basotho* chiefs received a signal or an alarm if the enemy tried to attack them in their sleep. Each time he went for sleep, a chief was to put this stone under his pillow. It is said that if the enemy tried to attack while the chief and his people were fast

asleep, the stone produced a special sound and so woke him up so as to get ready in order to face the enemy.

This was a special stone whose acquisition required effort and dedication. It is said that very early in the morning, the chief would pick among his warriors those known for their courage and fierceness and sent them out to rivers to hunt for the fiercest crocodile. On finding it, they would struggle with it until someone would open its belly with the spear. This was done while it was still alive. Having managed to open the belly, he would then find this stone which is believed to be present in each crocodile's belly. This stone was believed to have supernatural powers. Apart from keeping the chief informed about the coming of the enemy, it also magnified his royal dignity and thus gave him a distinctive personality and appearance. These are some of the qualities necessary for a chief to command respect from his subjects and admiration from his colleagues.

Among the revered objects we also find both reeds and *loli* (one of the local species of grass). Both these grasses grow in watery places. When a *Mosotho* builds his or her hut, the use of reeds as part of the thatching materials is indispensable. This is probably done in order to maintain the link with the holy and the ancestral place, which

as we have already seen, is the place of reeds. We have said that among other things, the water snake, which seems to be the ultimate object of worship in the traditional religion of the Southern *Sotho*, is said to have some reeds on its head. Keeping this in mind we may perhaps think of their use of reeds in thatching as one way of trying to identify themselves with this snake. We also need to remember that true *Basotho mathuela* live in a hut. Even if they have several of other types of houses, having a hut is a must for them. It is only in such a hut that a genuine communion with the holy or ancestral spirits will take place. I talk of true *Basotho mathuela*, because as we have seen, some people become *mathuela* not out of any genuine ancestral call, but only because they have been deceitfully drawn into this by corrupt and rapacious senior *mathuela*. This is the reason why today we see an incredible proliferation of this phenomenon among teenagers and destitute women. In the past it was only a few mature individuals who became *mathuela*. Such people were regarded as community servers and were expected to participate and make a substantial contribution in societal decision making processes. Today's *bothuela* raises many questions in one's mind regarding its possible contribution towards the community's welfare. What meaningful contribution can a child of ten make to society, especially in an African context?

At the beginning of this work we said that in many *Basotho* villages, the cutting or removal of natural vegetation surrounding a well is completely forbidden. This is done because of their conviction that water snake, which is the source of water, will remain in the vicinity of the village well as long as the natural vegetation around the well remains undisturbed. Keeping this in mind, I would like to think that the building of a hut for *lethuela* is to create a natural environment which seems to be an environment preferred by water-divinity in order to promote its presence in the vicinity of the *lethuela's* homestead. We also have to remember that there are times when some *mathuela* are paid a special visit by this snake. This normally takes place in a hut. During such a visit the snake appears in a form of rainbow. I was fortunate enough to have among my interviewees, one who received such special visits in her hut.

She told me that she was one day sleeping in her hut. When she peeped through her blankets, she saw a rainbow cutting across the roof of the hut with one end just hanging above her head. Although the rest of the people who were also sleeping in the same hut could only see this as nothing more than a mere rainbow, she on the other hand, identified this with the water snake. As a proof that this was not just a mere rainbow, when they woke up the following day, everybody in the hut, except herself, was covered with rash all over the body-the same rash that we talked about in chapter three.

As this continued to happen day after day, those whose bodies suffered this unbearable rash finally abandoned the hut. Today the poor lady sleeps alone in her hut; and has been labeled a witch due to her body's immunity to the rash. Even today *Basotho* associate the rainbow with the presence of water snake in the area. When I was a young boy my father used to give me a stern warning never to play near waterfalls which displayed rainbow belts when they splattered. I was told that if I did, I would be hypnotized and killed by water snake. The same warning was given in connection with playing around deep natural pools. This is the warning which is given to every *Mosotho* shepherd even today.

If, however, for one reason or another, a *lethuela* does not have a hut, when it visits her or him, the snake takes a form of a whirlwind which centres around the family's ash-dump. Although other people may see this as an ordinary whirlwind, to the *lethuela* it is a hierophany—a manifestation of the sacred. Its appearance is an indication that he or she is needed at the pool. This is like a call to him or her. As his or her response to this, he or she has to follow it (whirlwind) to the pool playing his or her drum (*sekupu*) all the way and at times in the accompaniment of his or her relatives. On arriving, he or she puts a little amount of snuff into the pool. As he or she does this, the pool is said to open the way for him or her to enter. That the pool may give an

allowance to a *lethuela* to enter is something alluded to in the following sacred song:

Tsela khahloloha
Baeti re ete,
Re etele tšosi
Tšosi ke monyohe
Ke monyohe rethe

Road (water) separate (or open)
That we travellers might visit
Visit the frightening one
Who is *monyohe* (water snake)
Monyohe the great one ...

That the being spoken of in this song is frightening is something which is also alluded to in what one of the early missionaries has written about the God of *Basotho*.

According to him:

He was, for the most part, regarded as a malignant spirit, invisible and wicked; a pitiless master, residing in a subterranean cavern, always working evil, to whom they attributed all their ills and sufferings (Ellenberger, 1992:239).

What Ellenberger says here seems to confirm what we said about the dwelling place of *Molimo*, especially what we said about the caves. From this quotation we also learn that the missionaries did not place the God of *Basotho* in the sky because of being ignorant of where he actually was. They wanted to perceive him the way they

perceived their own God who was a Sky-Divinity and so because of this they threw away almost all available facts which located him somewhere else. That this is what they did is something which we deduce from the following words of Casalis concerning their attribution of the word '*Molimo*' to their Christian God.

The missionaries have not hesitated to adopt this venerable word, which seemed, as it were, only to await their arrival to reascend to its source, leaving in their nothingness the false deities that had hitherto been the objects of worship. (1861:248).

I have no doubt that one of the "false deities" to which Casalis is referring in this quotation is the water snake. It is only unfortunate that he chose to say not a word about it. One of the interviewees who claimed to have entered the pool in this manner told me that inside the pool, apart from *Fito* (the biggest snake), he found several other smaller snakes which had human features from the waist up to the head and snake features the rest of the body, lying down on the dry floor of the pool. What he said seems to tally with what Granet, as quoted by Eliade, tells us about the Chinese dragon. According to him, "The beast of the thunder has the body of a dragon and a human head" (Eliade, 1997:207). He showed me some objects which he claimed to have found in the pool. These were a special horn-like rod stuffed with a fatty substance which he said was meant for his protection against evil forces and a special bracelet

made of tiny golden beads. He said that the gifts that *mathuela* get from the water differ from one *lethuela* to another. Some are given *baphaphi* to be used for divining while others may be given traditional clay pots which are meant to be used in the preparation of medicines.

The association of winds with the snake seems to be something common among all Sotho-speaking peoples. The strong winds that have recently left many people homeless in Northern Province, *Kwazulu-Natal* and Lady Smith in the Province of Free State in South Africa were explained geographically in terms of a cyclone formation by the Southern African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) during the English newscast (SABC3) while during the Sotho (*sesotho, setswana, and sepedi*) newscast (SABC2), these were explained in terms of *khanyapa* (another name for a water snake). That is, whereas for the whites it was a tornado that destroyed people's houses in these provinces, for Africans it was an angry water snake. Again, that a divinity prefers natural to unnatural environment seems to be something not exclusive to *Basotho's* case. The same preference is also found in other religions. For example, we find this in Judaism. Yahweh ordered the Israelites to build for him a natural altar which was "to be made of earth, heaped up, or of a heap of unhewn stones. Working the stone "profaned" it, that is, it established contact with the "unholy" the creature, and changed

it from the state in which it came from God; hence it was unfit for sacred use.”
(Mckenzie, 1965:23).

Apart from being used as part of thatching material, reeds have many other religious uses. Immediately after a baby has been born, a split reed is used to cut the umbilical cord in order to disconnect the baby from the mother. Here the reed is used even when more convenient tools such as a pair of scissors, knife and razor are readily available. This can only be understood as pointing to the fact that performing such an act is not merely an ordinary task, but a religious one. After this has been performed, two reeds are then placed on the roof just above the entrance. Some clans put a third reed on the roof just opposite to the entrance to indicate that the baby is a boy. Because such reeds are symbolic, anybody who sees them will immediately become aware of the arrival of a new baby and its sex depending on the number of reeds observed.

During their initiation period, *Basotho* girls always carry along with them long staffs made of reeds. These staffs which have been smeared with some medicine are meant to protect them against lightning and all evil forces. Whenever they sit down either to do something or to rest, one of the reeds always remains firmly planted to the ground for the same protective purposes. Similar use of reeds is also observed in the case of

boys initiation. Whenever they sit down, especially when singing, four reeds smeared with special medicines are planted into the ground to form some kind of a rectangular shape within which the initiates are enclosed. Apart from the reasons given above, these are also meant to prevent either rain or bad weather in general so that the audience may enjoy the singing without being unnecessarily disturbed by adverse climatic conditions. Reeds are also used by rain-makers to either stop or cause the rain. They are also used to protect crops against dangerous precipitation such as hailstone. For the same protective reasons the *Basotho* traditionally surrounded their huts with enclosure made of reeds.

Another grass which is used for religious purposes is *loli*. This, like reeds, is associated with water. It is found in marshy places. After the umbilical cord has completely detached itself from the baby, the symbolic reeds on the hut were traditionally replaced by a rope made of *loli* grass. Many *Basotho* believe that this grass has some protective powers. Long before the use of the present black mourning cloth, *Basotho* used to put on a special rope made of *loli* round their necks during their mourning period. The name "*thapo*" which today is used to refer to anything that is used by a bereaved family (extended family) as a sign that they are in a mourning period, comes from this grass rope. That is, "*thapo*" is a generic name given to any

rope made of grass. Today the meaning of the word has been extended to include even the period of mourning itself. So, today when people say that they are wearing *thapo*, what they mean is that they are observing the mourning period; and when they say that they “break” (or cut) *thapo*, which in the past meant literally cutting the rope which they wore around their necks, they simply mean that they bring to an end their mourning period.

Many people believe that the ancient *Basotho* used *loli* rope simply to signify that they were mourning. I think that this is an oversimplification of a very complex issue. First of all, why did they choose this scarce species of grass when there were so many species of grass readily available throughout the country? And why did they particularly choose the grass associated with water? They chose this scarce species of grass because, as we have already demonstrated, they believed in water-divinity, and not in sky-divinity as many people tend to think. Its association with water gave it special power since it was such water that they regarded as a dwelling place for their divinity. Anything in touch with the holy is regarded sacred and may as such be used for protective reasons. We observe how in such religions as Christianity many devotees use the soil from the graves of the people whom they call saints for protection.

They believe that the soil has special powers because it is in touch with what they regard as holy. Because it is in touch with the holy, it is able to dispel the forces of darkness.

What has been said above may also be applied to the *Basotho*'s case. These people, as we have seen in the previous chapters, saw human cause behind almost every human death. When a relative of theirs had actually died, their greatest fear was that unless they protected themselves, a likelihood was that they would also become the victims of the same fate. Because of such a fear, every precautionary step was taken to ensure their immunity to the possible attack. Thus, for instance, nephews and nieces (one's sisters children) of the bereaved family were always made to lead in every ritual performed in connection with the burial. These included such rituals as putting back the soil into the grave of the deceased and the cutting of hair after the burial. In this way nephews and nieces were used as shields against the feared fate. Being a different family, their interference probably broke the chain of fate. To ensure the survival of the whole family, all members of the extended family wore *loli* rope around their necks. This acted as talisman to protect them against being the victims of the same fate. It was also a way of identifying themselves with the water-divinity, the giver of life.

That this was in a way some kind of identification with water snake is attested by what traditional *Basotho* normally do when they are faced with the possibility of being destroyed by water snake. They normally use *loli* ropes to signify their allegiance with such water-divinity. I have a practical example from the place where I grew up as a boy. For several times, it was rumoured in this place that a huge *khanyapa* (another name for water snake) was on the rampage destroying every village above which it flew. In his desperate efforts to save his village, the chief of the village ordered all his subjects to wear tiny *loli* ropes on their wrists, ankles and necks. The entire village, including my family did as the chief had ordered. I learnt afterwards that this did not only happen in my area, but also in many other areas that had received the same rumour countrywide. As children, we were told that the ropes would save our lives. Each time there was such a rumour, people responded the same way. Nobody ever asked as to how this was to save our lives. But today, basing myself on the discovery that there was a time when *Basotho* regarded water snake as their divinity, I strongly believe that this was a way of identifying themselves with this snake, perhaps with the understanding that “blood is thicker than water.” This is the same grass which as we have already seen, forms some features of this snake.

The relevance of what we have just said in this last section of our thesis should be seen

in the light of what Eliade (1997) says about hierophanies of the sacred. According to him, people with Sky-Divinity as their Supreme Being tend to have more of their hierophanies in the sky, above. I understand this to imply that those having water divinity as their Supreme Being will have more of their hierophanies in water. This is what we have just seen in the case of *Basotho*. Most of their revered objects (hierophanies) are those associated with water. Therefore basing myself on what we have seen in the previous pages and what Eliade has said above, I do not think that I will be wrong to conclude that *Basotho* had Water-Divinity as their Supreme Being.

University of Cape Town

CONCLUSION

Various authors seem to be unanimous that Basotho had their own religion which they practised prior to their encounter with the Christian missionaries in 1833. In this religion which penetrated and influenced every aspect of their life, two kinds of being were of the utmost importance. These were *Molimo* and *Balimo* (ancestors). *Molimo* was a generic name given to any object of worship. Thus the ancient Basotho predicated it analogously to their individual ancestors as well as to their Supreme Being.

This much is what those who have written on Basotho Traditional Religion seem to have been aware of. What they have all missed, however, is that used in its ultimate sense, this word always referred to water snake. In other words while they all understood that apart from the individual ancestors to whom it was attributed, this name referred to the Supreme Being, they failed to discover the identity of that Supreme Being. Thus they mistakenly identified him with the Christian God who lived in the sky (heaven). They did this not because there was enough evidence to see him that way, but, as we have seen, because they were so desperate to find a local name for their God that they paid very little attention to the actual signification of this word as revealed in

oral prayers and many other Basotho cultural elements. They were desperate to find a name they should call their God when they preached to Africans. The urgency of finding such a name was further created by their fear that, as Okot p'Bitek puts it:

Africans might come to regard Christianity as a white man's religion. It was therefore of paramount importance that Christianity should be preached as the full expression of what Africans had been groping for (1970:60).

They wanted to make sure that the truth they preached to Basotho was not going to be taken as something foreign to their own, which meant they had to link it with the best of Basotho's aspirations. What we have said above should be understood in the light of the fact that, as once again Okot p'Bitek puts it:

The missionaries did not carry out systematic studies in order to determine, first of all, whether or not Africans believed in a High God, and, secondly, if they did, what His/Its/Her name was. They were so completely convinced of the universality of the belief in a High God, that they thought all that was needed was to discover the name (1970:64).

It has become evident from what we have seen through a critical analysis of some of the Basotho cultural elements, that for the ancient Basotho, water snake as some kind of a Supreme Being was most often in mind when the Balimo were addressed. We

have seen this in oral traditional prayers in which there seems to be an indirect reference to *Molimo* as water snake always. It is clear from some of the prayer expeditions that there were some special moments, especially during acute disturbances, when they addressed and dealt directly with *Molimo* as water snake. Nevertheless *Molimo* (water snake) as the Supreme Being remains very much with *Balimo* and very immanent. There was undoubtedly a tendency toward transcendence but the situation does seem to fall between the extremes of the settled and the consciously migrating. This according to Cumpsty, as we have already seen, seems to confirm our understanding of their pre-Lesotho history as one which would generate this consciousness.

In almost all different forms of prayers and sacred songs we have analysed, this being (water snake) appears to be the ultimate object of worship in this religion. As to why so many authors, both local and foreign have failed to see this, apart from what we have already said in the above lines concerning the missionaries (foreign authors), there are two possible reasons in as far as the local authors are concerned. Firstly, it is possible that they did not want to deviate from missionaries popular views on Basotho religious life. Deviating from such views would jeopardize the publication of their works since all local publishing houses were church-owned. In other words they had

no other choice but to write only what they thought would be considered compatible with the Christian teaching by the missionaries. That is to say, they have written what missionaries wanted to hear and not the actual facts.

Socondly, even though today's authors have access to more liberal publishing companies than their predecessors, they have not been able to break any new ground in their interpretations of the data collected because the majority of them, if not all, appear to have relied a great deal on published sources, the problem of which we have already identified in the proceeding pages.

Limited by space and time, I have not been able to make any comprehensive comparative study of the word *Molimo* (*Modimo*) as found in the religions of both *Batswana* and the *Bambutu* Pygmies. What I have become aware of, however, is that like in the case of Basotho, the two groups named above also have *Molimo* as the object of their worship. Among the Batswana Moffat tells us that *Molimo*:

had been represented by rain-makers and sorcerers (the high priests of the traditional society) as a malevolent 'selo', thing, which the natives in the north described as existing in a hole (1842:261).

Among the Pygmies it is said that *Molimo* is said to be the great forest animal which loves being in water. They call to it whenever things seem to be going wrong. They give it offerings and sing sacred songs to it.(Turnbull, 1961).

The fact that all the three groups named above seem not to associate *Molimo* with the sky, should be a challenge to those who have associated and continue to associate *Molimo* with the sky. I believe that a comprehensive comparative study of this concept (*Molimo*) as used by Basotho , Batswana and the Bambuti Pygmies is likely to shed some light on its real signification. I therefore wish to challenge, as my recommendation regarding this study, all those who have published something on Basotho Traditional Religion, to seriously reconsider their views and pay attention to what each of the three ethnic groups identified above has to say on the concept *Molimo*. The same challenge is extended to those who have studied Batswana and Pygmies traditional religions. If subjected to thorough and critical analysis, such comparative study will undoubtedly deepen or enlighten an understanding of the real meaning of *Molimo* as an object of worship in each of these three contexts. This will, in the final analysis, help us to see *Molimo* for what he really is, and not what we make him to be.

APPENDIX 1

Abbreviations

AFER	-	African Ecclesial Review
AMECEA	-	Association of Member Episcopal Conference in Eastern Africa.
Ed.	-	Editor(s)
JTSA	-	Journal of Theology for Southern Africa
ISAS	-	Institute of Southern African Studies
LHDA	-	Lesotho Highlands Development Authority
LMS	-	London Missionary Society
ND	-	No Date
OMI	-	Oblates of Mary Immaculate
PEMS	-	Paris Evangelical Missionary Society
RCC	-	Roman Catholic Church
SABC	-	South African Broadcasting Corporation

APPENDIX 2

Glossary of Some of the Important Terms

- Amaxhosa* - One of the *Nguni* Tribes of Southern Africa
- Ba-faatše* - The subterraneans or ancestors
- Balimo* - See *Ba-faatše* above
- Bantu* - Southern African people generally believed to have originated in Cameroon.
- Baphaphi* - Divining objects used by *mathuela*
- Bothuela* - The state of being a *lethuela*
- Fito* - One type of a Water Snake
- Hlophe* - Ritual performance indoors, with singing, clapping and dancing as the basis.
- Holimo* - Above or the sky
- Keleli* - Rain
- Khanyapa* - A generic name for water snake
- Koena* - A crocodile
- Koetsa* - A deep natural pool
- Koma* - A sacred poem or song which is supposed to be known by the initiated only.
- Lebollo* - Basotho traditional initiation school

- Lehlaka* - Reeds
- Leholimo* - The sky
- Lesokoana* - A special expedition carried out by women to pray for rain.
- Lethuela* - A special cultic functionary believed to be possessed by spirit.
- Lihoana* - See *baphaphi* above
- Loli* - A special grass used for religious purposes by Basotho.
- Malibeng* - A place at which women circumcision is performed.
- Mok'hoba* - A hidden object which a person undergoing *bothuela* training is forced to find.
- Mokoma* - See *lethuela* above
- Molimo* - Basotho's Supreme Deity
- Molula* - A special feast carried out by women to pray for fertility
- Molutsoane* - A special expedition carried out by men to pray for rain.
- Mosolo* - A rash believed to be caused by water snake on human skin.
- Motanyane* - A man who represents water snake and tampers with women genitals during their initiation.
- Motho* - A human being
- Nguni* - One of the two major Bantu ethnic groups found in Southern Africa.

- Noha ea metsi* - Water snake
- Ntsoana-Tsatsi* - A mythical place believed to be the original place of Basotho.
- Phabalimo* - An offer to ancestors
- Sangoma* - See *lethuela* above
- Sekupu* - Basotho traditional drum
- Selibelo* - A special cream used for religious purposes by Basotho.
- Sethoto* - A frothy medicine used by rain-makers or *mathuela*.
- Sotho* - One of the two major ethnic groups of Bantu-speakers found in Southern Africa mainly consisting of Basotho, Batswana and Bapedi.
- Southern Sotho* - Basotho
- Thapo* - Mourning period observed by the entire bereaved family or any piece of material used as a sign to show that one is observing a mourning period.

APPENDIX 3

Interview Guide

1. Name
2. Age
3. Marital Status
4. Education
5. Years of Experience as *Lethuela*
6. Different Ways of Acquiring *Bothuela*
7. Complications Involved in Training as *Lethuela*
8. How Water Snakes come into the Picture
9. *Lethuela* – Water Snake Interaction
10. Any Known Stories or Events About *Mathuela*'s Dealings with Water Snakes.

APPENDIX 4

Interviews

Interviewee's Initials ¹	Age	Education	Marital Status	Place	Date
1. K.T.	38	High School	Married	Mohale's Hoek	06/06/1998
2. T.T	50	Primary School	Married	Mohale's Hoek	06/06/1998
3. H.N.	78	Never Attended School	Widowed	Quthing	15/07/1998
4. B.M.	33	Primary School	Married	Qacha's Nek	10/01/1998
5. G.M.	19	Secondary School	Single	Butha-Buthe	01/06/1999
6. C.L.	45	Primary School	Married	Qacha's Nek	10/01/1998
7. M.M.	31	Secondary School	Married	Quthing	18/07/1998
8. S.R.	52	Never Attended School	Married	Mokhotlong	20/12/1998
9. A.R.	40	Secondary School	Married	Mohale's Hoek	07/06/1998
10. H.T.	61	Primary School	Married	Butha-Buthe	17/06/1999
11. C.S.	20	Secondary School	Single	Mokhotlong	19/12/1998
12. P.T.	41	Secondary School	Married	Mohale's Hoek	06/06/1998
13. L.M.	59	Primary School	Married	Butha-Buthe	21/05/1999
14. M.C.	49	Secondary School	Married	Quthing	11/07/1998
15. A.L.	57	Never Attended School	Married	Butha-Buthe	20/05/1999
16. R.S.	30	Secondary School	Single	Mohale's Hoek	07/06/1998
17. M.Q.	60	Primary School	Widowed	Quthing	11/07/1998
18. J.S.	51	Secondary School	Married	Mokhotlong	14/12/1998
19. S.M.	10	Primary School	Single	Mokhotlong	14/12/1998
20. M.P.	21	Secondary School	Single	Quthing	18/07/1998

¹ For reasons already identified in our methodology, the interviewees preferred anonymity.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Awolalu, J. and Dopamu, P. 1979. *West African Traditional Religion*. Ibadan: Onibonoje Press & Book Industries (NIG) Ltd.
- Babbie, E. 1995. *The Practice of Social Research*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Bailey, K.D. 1987. *Methods of Social Research (3rd ed.)*. New York: The Free Press.
- Barret, B.D. 1971. *African Initiatives in Religion*. Nairobi: East African Publishing House.
- Beach, D. 1994. *The Shona and their Neighbours*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bettie, J.D. 1969. *Phenomenology of Religion*. London: SCM Press Limited.
- Brown, W.E. 1968. *The Catholic Church in South Africa*. London: Burns and Oates.
- Bryan, M.A. 1959. *The Bantu Languages of Africa*. London: IAI.
- Bujo, B. 1990. *African Christian Morality at Age of Inculturation*. Nairobi: St. Paul Publications-Africa.
- _____ 1992. *African Theology in its Social Context*. Nairobi: St. Paul Publications-Africa
- _____ 1998. *The Ethical Dimension of Community*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.
- Buhrmann, M.V. 1984. *Living In Two Worlds*. Cape Town: Human & Rousseau.
- Carpenter, A. and Balow, T. 1975. *Enchantment of Africa*. Chicago: Children's Press.

- Casalis, E. 1862. *The Basutos*. London: Strangesways and Walden Printers.
- _____ 1971. *My life in Basutoland*. Cape Town: C. Struik (Pty) Ltd.
- Child, B. 1957. *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*. London: SCM Press Limited.
- Coates, A. 1966. *Basutoland*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office
- Cole, M. 1961. *South Africa*. London: Butler & Tanner Ltd.
- Cumpsty, J.S. 1991. *Religion as Belonging: A General Theory of Religion*. Lanham MD: University Press of America.
- Curtin, P. et. al. 1978. *African History: From Earliest Times to Independence (2nd ed.)*. London and New York : Longman.
- Dhavamony, M. 1972. *Phenomenology of Religion*. Rome: Gregorian University-Press.
- Diaz, H.N. 1992. *A Definitive Version and Analysis of the Tjakova Myth of the Vakavango*. Ph.D Thesis (University of Cape Town).
- Dieterlen, H. 1930. *Eugene Casalis (1812-1891)*. Paris: Vrin.
- Dunton, E.A.T. 1929. *The Basuto of Basutoland*. London: Buttler & Tanner
- Eliade, M. 1968. *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*. London: Collins.
- _____ 1997. *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. London: Sheed and Ward.
- Ellenberger, V.D.M. 1969. *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern*. New York: Negro Universities Press.
- _____ 1992. *History of the Basuto*. Morija: Morija Museum and Archives.
- Fage, J.D. 1995. *A History of Africa. (3rd ed.)*. London and New York: Routledge.

- Foates, M. & Dieterlen. 1966. *African Systems of Thought*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Frazer, J.G. 1933. *The fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion*. Volumes 1-3. London: MacMillan & Co.
- Germond, R.C. 1967. *Chronicles of Basutoland*. Morija: Morija Printing Works
- Giddens, A. 1992. *Human Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- _____ 1995. *Sociology, (2nd ed.)*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gill, S.J. 1993. *A Short History of Lesotho*. Morija: Morija Museum & Archives.
- Goldstein, K.S. 1964. *A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore*. Malboro: Folklore Associates, Inc.
- Guma, S.M. 1980. *The Form, Content and Technique of Traditional Literature in Southern Sotho*. Pretoria: Sigma (Press) Ltd.
- Hall, M. 1996. *Archaeology Africa*. Cape Town: David Philip Publisher (Pty) Ltd.
- Healey, J. and Sybertz, D. 1996. *Towards an African Narrative Theology*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications. Africa
- Horton, R. 1997. *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Idowu, E.B. 1976. *African Traditional Religion*. London: SCM Press Ltd.
- Ilife, J. 1989. *A Modern History of Tanganyika*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jacottet, E. 1965. *Litšomo tsa Basotho, Buka ea Pele*. Morija: Morija Printing Works.
- _____ 1965. *Litšomo tsa Basotho, Buka ea Bobeli*. Morija: Morija Printing

Works.

- Kanina, H. 1979. *No One Taught Like This Man*. Nairobi: Jomo Kenyatta Foundation.
- Khaketla, M. 1947. *Moshoeshoe le Baruti*. Morija: Sesuto Book Depot.
- Kaunda, K. 1966. *A Humanist in Africa*. London: Longmans.
- King, N.P. 1986. *African Cosmos: An Introduction to Religion in Africa*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Koso-Thomas, O. 1987. *The Circumcision of Women: A Strategy for Eradication*. New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd.
- Kuckertz, H. 1981. *Ancestor Religion in Southern Africa*. Cacadu: Lumko Missiological Press.
- Kwenda, C.V. 1995. *Traditional African Spirituality and the Search for Wholeness*. Handouts (University of Cape Town).
- Kwenda et al. 1997. *African Religion and Culture Alive*. Hatfield: Collegium
- Lagden, G. 1909. *The Basutos Vol. I*. London: Hutchinson & Co.
- Lapointe, E. 1986. *An Experience of Pastoral Theology in Southern Africa*. Roma: Urbaniana University Press.
- _____ 1993. *Anthropology*. Roma: St. Augustine's Seminary.
- _____ 1993b. *Inculturation: Cultures and Gospel*. Roma: St. Augustine's Seminary.
- Laydevant, F. 1952. *The Basuto*. Roma: The Social Centre.
- Legum, C. 1961. *Africa: A Hand Book to the Continent*. London: Anthony Blond Ltd.

- Liguori-Reynolds, R. 1965. *Tales of the Blue Mountains*. Johannesburg: APB Publishers.
- Livingstone, D. 1857. *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*. London: Ward, Lock & Co.
- Maboe, A.T. 1982. *Molimo: Christian Theology in a Sotho Context*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.
- Magesa, L. 1997. *African Religion*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books
- Makara, A. n.d. *Mosibolli oa Basotho*. Maseru: The Catholic Centre.
- Manyeli, T.L. 1992. *Religious Symbols of Basotho*. Maseru: Maseru Printing Works.
- _____ 1995. *Phenomenological Perspective of Basotho Religion*. Maseru: Maseru Printing Works.
- Martin, M. 1969. *Basutoland: Its Legends and Customs*. New York: Negro University Press.
- Matšela, Z.A. 1982. *Makhontho Metso ea Puo*. Maseru: Maseru Printing Works.
- _____ 1990. *Bochaba ba Basotho*. Maseru: Maseru Printing Works.
- Mbiti, J. 1970. *Concepts of God in Africa*. New York: Praeger Publishers
- _____ 1971. *New Testament Eschatology In an African Background*. London: Oxford University Press.
- _____ 1983. *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann
- _____ 1986. *Introduction to African Religion*. London: Heinemann
- Mckenzie, J. 1965. *Dictionary of the Bible*. London: Geoffrey Chapman.

- Metuh, E.I. 1981. *God and Man in African Religion*. London: Geoffrey Chapman.
- Modo, I.V. 1962. *Issues in Anthropology*. Uyo: Dorand Publishers.
- Moffat, R. 1842. *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa*. London: John Snow.
- Mojapelo P. & Semata, M. 1994. *Tsohang Basotho 7*. Mazenod: Mazenod Book Centre.
- Molema, S.M. 1920. *The Bantu*. Edinburgh: W. Green & Son, Limited.
- Monning, H.O. 1967. *The Pedi*. Pretoria: J.L. Van Schaik.
- Moore, S. 1966. *A-Level Sociology*. London: Letts Educational.
- Motlhabi, M. 1972. *Essay on Black Theology*. Johannesburg: Golden Era Printers & Stationery (Pty) Ltd.
- Motlamelle, M.P. 1985. *Ngaka ea Mosotho*. Morija: Morija Printing Works
- Mudimbe, V.Y. 1994. *The Idea of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University.
- Nangoli, M. 1987. *No More Lies About Africa*. New Jersey: African Heritage Publishers.
- Ogrizek, D. (ed.) 1954. *South and Central Africa*. London: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited.
- Olaniyan, R. ed. 1982. *African History and Culture*. Lagos: Longman Nigeria Ltd.
- Oosthuizen, G.C. 1986. *Religion Alive*. Johannesburg: Hodder and Stoughton.
- P'Bitek, O. 1970. *African Religion in Western Scholarship*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.

- Parrider, G. 1969. *Religion in Africa*. London: Cox & Wyman Ltd.
- _____ 1974. *African Traditional Religion*. London: Sheldon Press.
- Paroz, A.R. 1961. *Southern Sotho-English Dictionary*. Morija: Morija Sesuto Book Depot.
- Phillipson, D.W.ed. 1975. *Mosi-oa-Thunya: A Handbook to the Victoria Falls*. London: Longman Group Limited.
- Popenoe, D. 1963. *Sociology*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall INC.
- Pula, A. 1988. *Tšabo ea Balimo*. Mazenod: Mazenod Printing Works.
- Ray, B.C. 1976. *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual and Community*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, INC.
- Ruch, E.A. & Anyamwu, K.C. 1981. *African Philosophy*. Rome: Catholic Book Agency.
- Sanders, P. *Moshoeshoe Chief of the Sotho*. London: Heinemann.
- Sauer, J.W. 1883. *Basutoland Records Vol. I 1833-1852*. Cape Town: W.A. Richards & Sons.
- Sawyerr, H. 1970. *God, Ancestor or Creator?* London: Longman Group Ltd.
- Schmidt, R. 1988. *Exploring Religion*. (2nd ed.). Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Schoeman, K. (ed.) 1991. *The Missionary Letters of Gottlob Schreiner*. Cape Town: Human & Rousseau.
- Sechefe, J. n.d. *Customs and Superstitions in Basutoland*. Roma: The Social Centre.
- _____ n.d. *The Old Clothing of the Basotho*. Mazenod: The Catholic Centre.

- _____. n.d. *The Twelve Lunar Months Among the Basotho*. Mazenod: The Catholic Centre.
- Segoete, E. 1981. *Raphepheng*. Morija: Morija Printing Works.
- Sekese, A. 1983. *Mekhoa ea Basotho*. Morija: Morija Printing Works.
- Setiloane, G.M. 1976. *The Image of God among the Sotho-Tswana*. Rotterdam: A.A. Buldema.
- _____. 1989. *African Theology: An Introduction*. Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers.
- Shillington, K. 1995. *History of Africa*. Revised Ed. London: Macmillan Education Ltd.
- Shorter, A. 1978. *African Christian Spirituality*. London: Geoffrey Chapman.
- Shutte, A. 1993. *Philosophy for Africa*. Cape Town: UCT Press.
- Smith, E.W. (ed.) 1950. *African Ideas of God*. London: London House Press.
- Spence, J.E. 1986. *Lesotho: The Politics of Dependence*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Taryor, N. 1984. *Impact of the African Tradition on Christianity*. Illinois: The Struggler's Community Press.
- Thorpe, S.A. 1994. *African Traditional Religions*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Tooke H. 1974. *The Bantu-Speaking People in Southern Africa*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Turnbull, C.M. 1961. *The Forest People*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Tylden, G. 1950. *The Rise of the Basuto*. Cape Town: Juta & Co. Ltd.

Vander Zanden, J.W. 1990. *Sociology, The Core. (2nd ed.)*. New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Co.

Wallace, W. 1977. *The Elements of Philosophy*. New York: Alba House.

Well, R.E. 1994. *An Introduction to the Music of the Basotho*. Morija: Morija Printing Works.

Wemdef, A. 1933. *Myths and Legends of the Bantu*. London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd.

Widdicombe, J. 1891. *Fourteen Years in Basutoland: A Sketch of African Mission Life*. London: The Church Printing Company.

Zahan, D. 1979. *The Religion, Spirituality and Thought of Traditional African*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

ARTICLES AND OCCASIONAL PAPERS

Akiiki, B. 1978a. 'Aspects of Bantu Marriages (1)' AFER, Vol. 20:258-268.

_____ 1978b. 'Aspects of Bantu Marriages (2)' AFER, Vol. 20:364-372.

Bululeete, S. 1985. 'Inculturation: African Drums are not Enough.' AFER, Vol. 27:286-288.

Burke, C. 1980. 'Marriage and the Family: Some Pastoral Problems.' AFER, Vol. 22:273-280.

Carmody, B. 1981. 'Towards an African Notion of Divinity.' AFER, Vol. 23:142-146.

Challancin, J. 1981. 'Afro-Christian Liturgy: Pastoral Suggestions.' AFER, Vol. 23:327-337.

Cumpsty, J.S. 1995. "Types and Processes in Religion: A Bridge into African

- World-views*". Presentation Paper (Academy of Science, St. Petersburg).
- Eugene, U. 1981. "The God of our Ancestors and African Unity." AFER, Vol. 23:344-353.
- Gratsch, E.J. 1981. 'Water.' New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 14:825-827.
- Guy, G. and Thabane, M. 1988. 'Technology, Ethnicity and Ideology: Basotho Miners and Shaft – Sinking on the South African Gold Mines.' Journal of Southern African Studies. Vol. 14, No.2:257-278.
- Hickey, R. 1985. 'Authentic African Religion'. AFER, Vol. 27:216-224.
- Hillman, E. 1980. 'Missionary Approaches to African Cultures Today.' AFER, Vol. 22:342-356.
- Hinfelaar, H. 1994. "Evangelization and Inculturation." AFER, Vol. 36:2-18.
- Kwenda, C.V. 1998. 'Giving and Receiving in the Construction of Civil Society.' JTSA 101:1-10.
- Laydevant, F. 1935. 'Idee de Dieu Chez les Anciens Basutos', Revue de l'Universite' d' Ottawa. P.308-330.
- Machobane L.B.B.J. 1993. 'Christianization and African Response: A Comparative View of Religious Conversion Among Barolong and Basotho of the Caledon Valley, 1820-1890'. Occasional Paper No.7 Roma: ISAS.
- _____ 1995. 'Basotho Religion and Western Thought' Occasional Paper No.55. Edinburgh University: African Studies Centre.
- Nkurunzinja, D. 1985. 'Liturgy: The Privilege Area for Inculturation.' AFER, Vol. 27:209-215.
- O'Donohue, J. 1981. 'Spirits and Magic – A Critical Look' Spearhead No.68. Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications.

Pula, A. 1990. '*Balimo (Ancestors) Veneration and Christianity.*' AFER, Vol. 32:330-345.

Sarpong, P.K. 1990. "*Emphasis on Africanizing Christianity.*" *Inculturation of Christianity in Africa.* AMECEA Gaba Publications Spearhead 112-114: 105-111.

Uzukwa, E. 1980. '*Food and Drink in Africa and the Christian Eucharist.*' AFER, Vol. 370-385.

University of Cape Town