

**THE EARLY ENCOUNTER BETWEEN THE SWAZI AND THE WESTERN
MISSIONARIES: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH IN
SWAZILAND, 1894-1950.**

BY

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Finally, I declare that, **THE EARLY INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE SWAZI AND THE WESTERN MISSIONARIES: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH IN SWAZILAND 1894-1950** is the product of my investigations. Information from any source has been specified and acknowledged as references.

SENDALELO

Lona ngumbiko ngelucwaningo lolwentiwe ngalendzabakati yekufika kweLivangeli eSwatini, liletfwa belumbi labamhlophe lababetitfunywa teliVangeli laMvelinchanti. Kulandzela sembulo inkhosi Somhlolo leyabanaso sivela enkhosini yase Zulwini, titfunywa teliVangeli tatseleka eSwatini ngekumenywa yinkhosi Mswati wesibili. Emkhatsini wato kwakukhona Nkosazana Malla Moe, umsunguli weLibandla LeVangeli eSwatini, lokunguyena lolucwaningo lugcile kakhulu kuye, asahambisa tindzaba taJesu emaSwatini emdzabu.

Livetile leliphapha kutsi emaSwati atemukela ngelisasa lelikhulu titfunywa teliVangeli. Ngabe sizatfu lesimcoka lesenta loko kwabakutsi letitfunywa betibapha boshukela, netiswayi, nemasekeni? Cha, kwakujulule kunaloko. Imfihlakalo kwaba kutsi inkholo yemdzabu lecuketse emagugu enhlakanipho elukholo yayise iwuvukutile umhlaba wanotsa, walungelela kutsi lembewu yenkholo yebuKrestu nayi hlanyelwa ichume itsele titselo. EmaSwati abukhandza lobuyanga lobabuvetwa yinkholo yemdzabu bucedzeka ngoba bebusitfunti salokukhulu lokutako. Loko kwenta kutsi noma letitfunywa betinemaphutsa, lebetiwacondzile nalebetingakawacondzi, emaSwati atikhandza letitfunywa kutitja letibutsakatsaka, kodwa letiphetse igolode. Ngekufundza tincwadzi emitapeni leyehlukeni, nanekufuna imivo yebantfu leyehlukene, kubekhona imicondvo

letsite lolucwaningo loluyitfolile, leveta lentsambo letsekeleta letinkholo letimbili. Loko kube yinkhomba yekutsi emaSwati atikhandza emukelekile enkholweni yebukrestu, ase ayayitsatsa lendzaba yeliVangeli yaba ngeyabo nabo.

Konkhe loku lokungetulu, kucuketfwe ngemakhasi lasitfupha alolucwalingo. Lamakhasi acale etfule ingcikitsi yalolucwalingo, bese achaza ngalokufinciwe imvelaphi yesive semaSwati nekutsi sikuphi lamuhla, bese etfula inkholo yemdzabu netingoni tayo, kanye nekufika kwenkholo yebukrestu. Emakhasi lamabili ekugcina atfula imivo yebantfu labehlukene ngebudlelwane emkhatsini waletinkholo letimbili bese ayasonga.

Ngineletsemba kutsi lomcukutfu lona utakuba lusito esiveni semaSwati, kulesitukulwane salamuhla nakusasa, ngoba uveta lolunye luhlangotsi lolungenta kutsi liSwati libe neligcabho ngemvelaphi yalo, nangenkholo yalo yemdzabu. Futsi nemalunga elibandla leVangeli, kanye neKrestu onkhana atawukwati kutsi lelibandla lichamukaphi. Nalomunye asangachubeka acwalinge kutsi likuphi lamuhla liBandla leVangeli.

CHAPTER ONE

FOCUS FRAMEWORK

This research is a report of a historical study of the early encounter between the Swazi and Western Christian missionaries, with specific reference to the establishment of the Evangelical Church, 1894-1950. The first chapter of the thesis presents the background of the study, specifies the problem of the study, describes its significance, identifies its interpretative guide and presents an overview of the methodology used. The chapter concludes by noting the limitations of the study and the research ethical standards the researcher conformed to.

BACKGROUND

Inkhosi Somhlolo yayisebutfongweni,

Inkhosi yeZulu yeta kuye yam'bonisa umbono.

Uyeva na? Uyeva na? Halleluya! Asidle umculu!¹ (Song)

King Somhlolo was in a dream;

The King of Heaven showed him a vision.

Can you all listen? Can you all listen?

¹ A Christian song about the vision of King Somhlolo composed by Swazi Christians. It is usually sung during national events like Easter celebrations, Somhlolo Festival of Praise, etc.

Halleluya! Let us eat the scroll!

The Western missionaries first arrived in the Kingdom of Swaziland in 1844 after King Somhlolo, the founder of the Swazi nation, had had a vision in his deathbed. According to Swazi tradition, one night in 1836 King Somhlolo dreamt of people of a strange species, coming out of the sea and entering the country.² They were the colour of red mealies, and their hair resembled the tail end of cattle. They were carrying two objects: a book (*umculu*) and money (*indilinga*). A voice cautioned the king that the Swazi should take the book and avoid the money, and that they should not fight against these strange people. He interpreted the vision to mean that Europeans would be coming to Swaziland with money and the Bible. He advised the Swazi to accept the book wholeheartedly. Soon after the vision had been related to royal councillors, the king died. King Mswati ii, his successor followed up on his father's vision and sent emissaries to Grahamstown in South Africa in 1838 to invite the missionaries to come to Swaziland. After a considerable delay, the Wesleyan Missionary Conference considered King Mswati's request and Western missionaries arrived in Swaziland in June 13, 1844.³ The 16-year-old king, the Queen mother and the royal councillors unanimously welcomed them. The enthusiastic welcome of the Wesleyan missionaries opened doors for many Western missionaries to flow into the country. Miss Malla Moe of Norwegian origin and the founder of the Evangelical Church arrived in Swaziland in 1894 to preach the gospel of the good news.

² Kasenene, P.; *Religion in Swaziland*, Braamfontein: Skotaville Publishers, 1988, p43.

³ Matsebula, J.S.M.; *A History of Swaziland*, Cape Town: Longman, 1987, p32.

MOTIVATION

The missionary enterprise in Africa is one phenomenon that has received considerable attention in African scholarship. Various approaches have been adopted to analyse and interpret the interactions between Western Christianity and indigenous cultures. A synopsis of these approaches and examples of their exponents is in order at this juncture. J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, whose important ideas are implicitly shared by a wide constituency, represent advocates of one perspective of the debate on the African situation. Their analysis is based on a somewhat adversarial characterization of the relationship between the missionaries and the recipients of the mission. The interaction is compared to a “long conversation” where a “two-way” flow of ideas between the two parties, each guarding its own agenda. However they do acknowledge the conversions that took place in the process, whilst maintaining that no matter what the intentions of the missionaries were, there were unintended consequences. In his critique of the Comaroffs, Richard Elphick⁴ raises the concern of what he says the Comaroffs seem to have missed; that is interpreting the Christian story from the “inside” which involves “entering into” the world of the missionaries, and taking seriously their belief in the gospel.

African theologians have also made some contributory insights to the debate. A majority of them have argued for the “continuity” school of thought, which asserts

⁴ See Balcomb, A.; “Of Radical Refusers and Very Willing Victims- Interpolations of the Missionary Message in the Stories of Nongqawuse, Nxele, Ntsikana, and Soga”, in *Bulletin for Contextual Theology in Southern Africa and Africa*, Vol 5 No.1&2, 1998,p4-14.

that the gospel was more continuous than discontinuous with the African cultural heritage. Scholars such as Gabriel Setiolane, Bolaji Idowu, and Christian Gaba have raised concerns about the denigration and destruction of Africanness as a result of the early interactions between the missionaries and the missionized. They would argue that Western Christianity brought little that was new to Africans, and would stress the value of dialogue to draw parallels between African and Christian traditions and integrate the two. John Mbiti, another exponent of the “continuity” tradition has constantly maintained that the African context has served as a vehicle for perception and communication of the Christian faith by indigenous people, in so far as it prepared ground for the gospel seed to germinate in the African soil. Following Mbiti’s reasoning, Kwame Bediako and Lamin Sanneh have attached much importance to primal religions, but part ways with academics that attribute so much validity to primal religions that they place them on par with the Christian faith. The reflective, legitimate insights of these scholars and their input to the debate on the African situation, have motivated the researcher to investigate the interactions between the Swazi and the early Western missionaries, using the Evangelical Church as an example, with the aim of identifying any continuity between the Swazi religio-cultural categories and the gospel of the good news.

The thesis has potential significance in that it is likely to make an important input to African theological scholarship, in its investigation of a context whereby the gospel preached by the Western missionaries shows continuity with the primal

religion of the Swazi. Also, the study is hoped to be of value to the Evangelical Church and the entire Swazi society in that it will present a reinterpretation of the missionary episode from an indigenous perspective, thus enabling the Church to approach issues of religio-culture differently. The study could also provide resource material for workshops and other training projects for human development and enrichment.

SWAZILAND SPECIFIC LITERATURE

There are some scholars who have shown particular interest to study the phenomenon within the Swazi context. F.J. Perkins and R.J. Cazziol are amongst the few who have done detailed studies on the early encounters between the Swazi and the Christian missionaries, and have presented a perspective that disassociates the missionary project from political hegemony. Perkins, in his thesis "A history of Christian Missions in Swaziland to 1910" has repeatedly acknowledged the sacrificial aspect in the work of the missionaries and their achievements in preaching the good news of Jesus Christ, which he argues "was the underlying motive that drove the missionaries to this remote region far from friends and relatives to fulfil a call of mission which possessed them."⁵ Cazziol who shares similar sentiments with Perkins, takes the argument further and he disassociates the early missionaries from any imperialistic inclinations. Substantiating his assertion, he says, "the majority of the missionaries were not British, they had no stake in the expansion of British

⁵ Perkins, F.J.; "A history of Christian Missions in Swaziland to 1910", Ph. D. Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

imperialism.”⁶ Whilst this study agrees with the above scholars in their fairer assessment of the missionary activities in Swaziland, it approaches the phenomenon from an Africanist perspective, which gives credit to those positive aspects of traditional beliefs, customs and institutions insofar as they prepared a fertile ground for the gospel to germinate, which the scholars have virtually ignored in their arguments. Viewed *in toto*, these arguments show little or no sensitivity to the good that traditional categories are likely to have contributed to the gospel. They seem to assume that the Swazi were, “a sort of *tabula rasa* on which a wholly new religious psychology was somehow printed.”⁷

Joyce Vilakati, who is analytically critical of the work of the early missionaries, with some degree of insight though, perceives early missionary Christianity as an ideological attempt to institute a religious hegemony, which is related to and favoured by Swaziland’s political hegemony of absolute monarchy. Further, she asserts that though Christian missionaries did not enforce conversion of the Swazi through armed conquest, “that Swazi converts were also expected to renounce their cultural way of life constituted psychological violence.”⁸ Without dismissing the legitimacy of Vilakati’s acuity, this study attempts to emphasize an alternative interpretation of the missionary story, which it finds precedence for in some of the scholars mentioned above. Different from Vilakati, it demonstrates

⁶ Cazziol, R.J.; “A Comparative Study of Christian Missions in Swaziland, 1845-1968”, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Natal, 1989.

⁷ Hastings, A.; in Bediako, K.; *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*, London: Regnum, 1992.

⁸ Vilakati, J.; “Religious Pluralism in a Nonpolitical Society: the Case of Swaziland in the 90s”, in *Uniswa Research Journal*, Volume 12, December, 1998, p59-66.

that Christianity in Swaziland, from its very point of inception was not through human effort; it was God's initiative. The gospel, which belongs to God, in its adaptable prospective, was already anticipated in the indigenous forms and realities of the Swazi. At conversion therefore, the Swazi were responding to a familiar God, who brought to fulfillment all religious and cultural aspirations of their heritage. However, the study does not overlook the subjugation of Swazi by the early missionaries, which it interpreted as an expected consequence at any interface of two different cultures.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

1. Research question

Robertson Smith has said, "...no positive religion that has moved men has been able to start with a *tabula rasa* to express itself as if religion was beginning for the first time, ...the new system must be in contact all along the line with the older ideas and practices which it finds."⁹ Relating this quotation to the focus of this study, the question the researcher will investigate is: which are some of the aspects that show an affinity between the pre-Christian religion of the Swazi and the gospel preached by the missionaries?

Sub questions

1. What was the attitude of the early missionaries towards Swazi culture?
2. Were the early missionaries "watchdogs" of the European imperialists?

⁹ Smith, R.; in J.B. Mzizi, (ed.), *Swazi Culture, Christianity and Development: An Ecumenical Seminar Workshop*, October 4-6 1994, Mbabane, Swaziland, p4.

3. How did the Swazi respond to other secondary sources of power that were part of the missionary package?
4. What was the attitude of the Swazi converts towards their pre-Christian culture?
5. Was the conversion of the Swazi subjection of Swazi culture by Western cultural imperialism?

2. Research hypothesis

The assumption that guided this study was that Swazi religious categories were crucial factors in the early interactions between the Swazi and the Christian missionaries, hence their (Swazi) good response to the Gospel of the good news. The western culture, in which the Gospel was wrapped, is not all that the missionaries intentionally or unintentionally preached to the Swazi; there was the Gospel that transcended all cultures. Their western culture was, as Walls would put it, “a gas cylinder that God used as a container to carry the oxygen to Africa.”¹⁰ It is therefore assumed in this study that the “oxygen” resonated with the traditional categories of the Swazi, hence their conversion. As a nation that had always been religious, worshipping *Mvelinchanti* “The One Who Appeared First”, as the Creator God, they recognized in the gospel message something they had been searching for and had anticipated. Differently put, the gospel brought a fulfillment to their spiritual quest.

¹⁰ Walls, A.; Class discussions, Akroffi Christaller Study Centre, September 2003.

3. Objectives of the study

1. To critically analyse the interactions between the early missionaries and the Swazi, which led to the establishment of the Evangelical Church in Swaziland.
2. To investigate the cultural aspects which the missionaries criticized and the reasons for the criticism.
3. To identify the continuity between the Swazi pre Christian culture and the gospel message.
4. To evaluate the conversion experience of the Swazi in response to the Gospel message of Christ preached by the Western missionaries.

INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

Four interpreters of African Christianity who are exponents of the “continuity” position provided the framework for the reflections the study will make. These are John S. Mbiti, Kwame Bediako, Lamin Sanneh and Andrew Walls. In common with other contemporary theologians the four scholars share a concern to affirm the authenticity of African religious heritage, which early missionaries overlooked. However, without ignoring the critique of other African scholars of the Western missionaries’, they have given a fairer assessment of the Western missionary episode in Africa. In summary, what is the essence of their standpoint?

Mbiti¹¹ the modern African theologian and the early exponent of the continuity tradition who “gained an international reputation as the leading African theologian”,¹² argues that the primal religion prepared the soil for the gospel seed to germinate, and Christ is seen as the fulfillment of the pre-Christian religious aspirations. Echoing Mbiti, Bediako,¹³ a historical theologian, states that African religiosity afforded the framework in which the Gospel could find expression, hence his identification of some continuity between the two. Further, he observes that the vitality of the African communities, in spite of the shortcomings of the western missionaries, provides overwhelming evidence that the missionaries as agents communicated the Gospel (which belongs to God and therefore transcends culture) to the Africans. With that consideration, he notes:

When conversion occurred, the Africans were not introduced to a new God unrelated to the traditions of our past but to one who brings to fulfillment all the highest religious and cultural aspirations of our heritage.¹⁴

Hence his assertion that the Africans, as recipients of the Gospel, recognized that in it there was something that they were searching for, which they proceeded to make their own through translation. He argues that translation unfetters the gospel from the cultural forms in which it came to them and also liberated itself

¹¹ Mbiti's works consulted: African Religions and Philosophy, London: Heinemann, 1969, New Testament Eschatology in an African background, London: Oxford University Press, 1970, “The ways and Means of Communicating the Gospel” in C.G. Baeta (ed), Christianity in Tropical Africa, London: Oxford University Press, 1968, p329-350.

¹² Adrian Hastings in Bediako, K., *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*, Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992, p303.

¹³ Bediako's consulted books: Jesus in Africa, Theology and Identity, and Jesus in African Culture (A Ghanaian Perspective).

¹⁴ Bediako, K.; *Jesus in African Culture, (A Ghanaian Perspective)*, Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1990, p6.

from those facets of the local cultures that were conflicting with the gospel message.

Sanneh,¹⁵ a religious historian who shares similar sentiments and focuses largely on translation, gives credence to local cultures and identifies some continuity between African cultural aspirations and the gospel, and that the two can possibly be embraced through translation.

That said, does it mean that Christianity for the Africans was only a matter of cultural expediency, which the Africans embraced because it seemed much like one of their old cults? Sanneh provides a carefully thought answer in this regard. He asserts that people receive new ideas only in terms of the ideas they already have, and it therefore stands to reason that Africans embraced Christianity because it resonated with the values of the old religions. However, that does not mean, "Christianity was a religion that made no demands on the affections, loyalties, attitudes and behaviour of the people."¹⁶ At conversion the Gospel reoriented the African worldview, and the old moral framework was reconfigured without being overthrown. Thus, conversion became a revitalization of their Africanness.

¹⁵ Sanneh's consulted books: Whose Religion is Christianity, and Translating the message: The missionary Impact on Culture.

¹⁶ Sanneh, L.; "*Whose Religion Is Christianity*" Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, p43.

Affirming Sanneh's assertion Walls, the historian of Christian missions, illustrates how conversion occurs in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*. He alleges that conversion means the "turning" of old structures to new directions,

...the application of new material and standards to a system of thought and conduct already in place and functioning. It is not about substitution, the replacement of something old to something new, but about transformation, the turning of the already existing to new account.¹⁷

The above reflections of the three scholars are evidenced in the "religious itinerary"¹⁸ of the Swazi people. It is within this framework that the study shows continuity between Swazi traditional categories and the Gospel that the missionaries preached, the former being the base for the latter, hence the people's response to the Gospel of God at conversion.

OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY

The methodology in this historical research could be described as qualitative. Since historical research is a systematic collection and evaluation of data to describe, explain and thereby understand actions or events that occurred in the past, the study maintains a balance amongst three approaches; the narrative, the analytical and the descriptive. Theological, anthropological, phenomenological and social perspectives informed these approaches. Perusing archival

¹⁷ Walls, A.F.; *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of faith*, Edinburgh:T&T Clark/ New York: Orbis Books, 1995, p28.

¹⁸ This expression is taken from Howell's book *The Religious Itinerary of a Ghanaian People*, Peter Lang, 1994.

documents and interviewing individuals selected through purposive sampling were used as effective methods to study the past. The criteria for the selection of the representative sample were based on the following independent variables: age, religion and education. Details of the methodology are covered in chapter 4.

Categories of sources

1. Documents- written or printed, published or unpublished, intended for private or public consumption.
2. Numerical records (e.g. on church members, baptized converts, church buildings etc) that formed some kind of a subcategory of the documents.
3. Oral history from structured and informal retrospective interviews.
4. Relics- e.g. church buildings, monuments, furniture.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The study consists of six chapters. The first chapter, which serves as an introductory chapter, provides the focus framework of the study. The second chapter gives the background of the context in which the study has been carried. The third and the fourth chapter discuss the religious orientations of the Swazi; that is their indigenous religion and the inception of the new religious system, with special focus on the establishment of the Evangelical Church. These two chapters form the backdrop of the resonance between the two religious systems, which the study deliberates on in the next chapter. Chapter five gives the results of the investigations on the affinity between the Swazi indigenous religion and

Christianity. The concluding chapter is a summary and an interpretation of the findings in the light of the question that has been investigated.

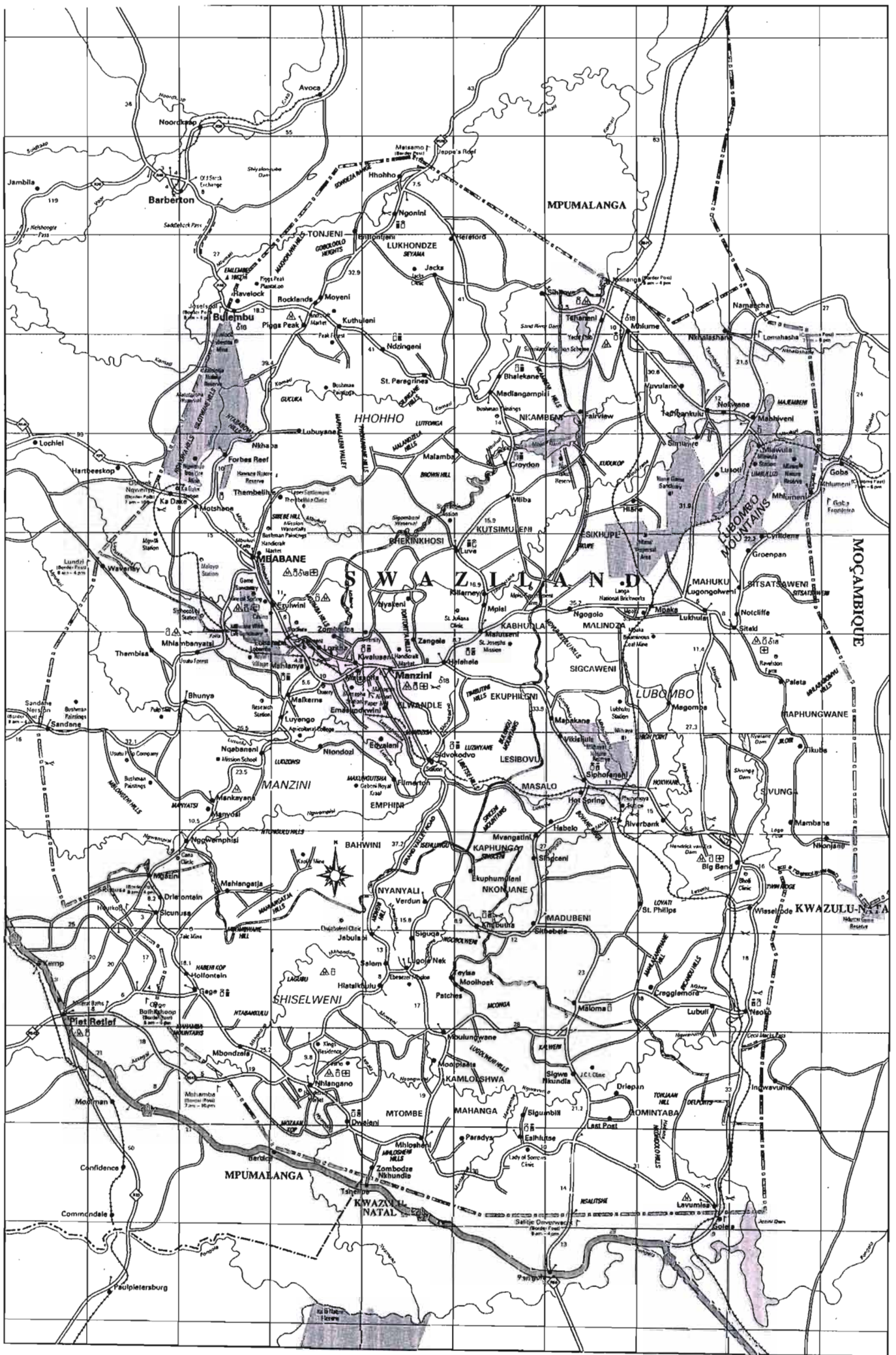
LIMITATIONS

As alluded above, the study looks back over 100 years to hear absent voices that interacted during the early encounters between the Swazi and the Western missionaries, using the establishment of the Evangelical Church as an example. In these interactions it identifies some aspects of the pre-Christian religion that have affinities with the gospel preached by the missionaries, arguing that they precipitated conversion. As suggested by the thesis topic, the study confines itself to the establishment of the Evangelical Church within the period 1894 and 1950; that is between the arrival of Miss Moe, the founder of the church and the withdrawal of white leadership. This limit therefore, does not allow the study to go further and evaluate the development of the Church under Swazi leadership.

RESEARCH ETHICS

The researcher has conformed to the ethical standards of the University of Natal, which included the following:

1. Ensuring that participants in the research study were protected from physical or psychological harm, discomfort.
2. Ensuring confidentiality of data; all subjects were assured that any data collected from them or about them would be held in confidence.
3. Sources were fully acknowledged.



This introductory chapter has provided the focus framework of the study, which covered the background, the investigated problem and its significance and the context of the study. The next chapter presents the historical background of Swaziland and the people, and it serves as the preparatory chapter that puts the investigated problem into context.

CHAPTER TWO

SWAZILAND AND THE PEOPLE

The preceding chapter has identified the general research approach for this study as historical and qualitative in perspective. This implies that the study concerns itself with collecting and evaluating data related to past occurrences to arrive at valid conclusions. In this sense, the interactions between the Swazi and the early missionaries, which is the main focus of the study, cannot be effectively investigated without some background information that provides the context in which the phenomenon transpired. This chapter therefore presents the background of Swaziland and the people, in respect to its comprehensive history, which embraces physical environment, economy, politics and social organisation of the pre-Christian Swaziland.

Physical Environment

Swaziland, whose political name is the Kingdom of Swaziland, is one of the smallest political entities of continental Africa, located on the eastern edge of the African plateau. Covering an area of only 17.363sq km (6, 704 miles) it straddles the broken and dissected edge of the South African plateau, surrounded by South Africa on the North, West and South, and separated from the Indian Ocean on the east by the Mozambique coastal plain.¹⁹ The land area sustains a homogenous population of about 1.2 million, with an annual growth rate of 2%. It is this ethnic homogeneity of the population, which Cazziol has identified as an

¹⁹ Edwards, G.M;(ed) *Britannica 1996 Book of the year*, Chicago, London: Encyclopedia Inc. p1043.

additional factor that promotes social and political stability.²⁰ Geographically, the country is divided into 4 regions: the Highveld, the Middleveld, the Lowveld and Lubombo. The average annual temperature is about 16°C (61°F) on the Highveld, and about 22°C (72°F) is the sub-humid Lowveld, while annual rainfall ranges from 1,000 mm (40ins) to 2,280 mm (90ins) in the Lowveld.²¹ This climate which is near temperate to tropical has resulted in the establishment of some profitable irrigation schemes for sugar cane in the fertile Lowveld region, and pineapples and citrus in the Highveld.

The country has two major cities: Mbabane and Manzini. Mbabane, which serves as the capital city lies on the edge of the Highveld at the foot of Mdzimba Mountains, a sacred place where Swazi Kings and members of the royal clan are buried. Manzini is in the Middleveld and it is the country's principal industrial and commercial centre. In between Manzini and Mbabane there is Lobamba, which is the legislative town. Traditionally, the Swazi have been subsistence farmers and herders, but most of them now work in the growing urban areas where there is viable formal economy. The country's official languages are Siswati (a dialect of Zulu) and English. Swaziland maintains its own currency called *Lilangeni* (plural: *Emalangeni*), which is at par with the South African Rand. As an independent state, Swaziland has a national flag is blue, with a yellow-edged horizontal crimson stripe in the centre. On this stripe is a black and white Swazi shield;

²⁰ Cazziol, R.J; A Comparative Study of Christian Missions, 1845-1968, Ph. D. Thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1989, p29.

²¹ *The Europa World Year Book 2003, 44th edition, Vol.II, Kazakstan-Zimbabwe*, London, New York:Europa Publishers, p.3912.

super imposed on two spears and a staff all lying horizontally.²² The nation's court of arms, with a lion on one side and an elephant on the other, represents the traditional dual monarchy, in which the king and queen rule jointly.

About 90% of the population professes Christianity. Recent statistics estimate that the population is 35% protestant, 30% Zionist (indigenous churchies), 25% Roman Catholic, 1% Islamic, with the remaining 9% divided between other faiths.²³

Economy

Swaziland ranks amid the more flourishing countries in Africa. Most of the high-level economic activities are in the hands of foreigners, but the ethnic Swazi are becoming more active. Small entrepreneurs are moving into middle management positions. Although 70% of Swazis live in rural areas, nearly every homestead has a wage earner. The past few years have seen wavering economic growth, which has been further aggravated by the government's inability to create new jobs at the same rate that new job seekers enter the market. This is due to the country's population growth rate that strains the natural heritage and the country's ability to provide adequate social services, such as health care and education.²⁴ Overgrazing, soil depletion, drought, and floods are persistent problems.

²² *Europa The World Year Book 2003*, p.3912.

²³ Bureau of African Affairs, October, 2003. [http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2841:htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2841.htm).

²⁴ See Bureau of African Affairs, October, 2003.

The Crown, in trust of the Swazi Nation, holds nearly 60% of Swazi territory. The balance is privately owned, much of it by foreigners. The question of land use and ownership remains a very sensitive one. For the Swazi living in rural homesteads, the principal occupation is either subsistence farming or livestock herding. Culturally, cattle are important symbols of wealth and status, but they are now being used increasingly for milk, meat, and profit.

Swaziland enjoys well-developed road links with South Africa. It also has railroads running east to west and north to south. A north-south rail link, completed in 1986, provides a connection between the Eastern Transvaal rail network and the South Africa ports of Richard's Bay and Durban. The sugar industry, based solely on irrigated cane, is Swaziland's leading export earner and private-sector employer. Soft drink concentrate (a U.S. investment) is the country's largest export earner, followed by wood pulp and timber from cultivated pine forests. Pineapple, citrus fruit, and cotton are other important agricultural exports. Swaziland mines coal and diamonds for export. There also is a quarry industry for domestic consumption. Mining contributes about 1.8% of Swaziland's GDP each year but has been declining in importance in recent years.

Recently, a number of industrial firms have located at the industrial estate at Matsapha near Manzini. In addition to processed agricultural and forestry products, the fast-growing industrial sector at Matsapha also produces garments,

textiles, and a variety of light manufactured products. The Swaziland Industrial Development Company (SIDC) and the Swaziland Investment Promotion Authority (SIPA) have assisted in bringing many of these industries to the country.

Early Beginnings of the Swazi nation

The Swazi, part of the broader Nguni group originating from the Great Lake areas of Central Africa, have lived in the present-day Swaziland since around 1750. According to tradition, the founder of the royal clan of the Swazi who became known as the Dlamini-Nguni (Emalangeni) was Dlamini 1, a man of Embo-Nguni origin. Together with other migrating groups he and his patrilineal clan members arrived at the Komati River towards the end of the 15th century.²⁵ They migrated south and eventually settled around the Tembe river area near the present day Maputo, where they stayed for about two centuries. There, they associated with the Tembe people and engaged in a heavy commerce along the coast, including the export of ivory through sea trade. The Ngwane involvement was one factor that led to the Tembes' loss of monopoly on commerce.

The war-like Dlamini later died of smallpox after having conquered and incorporated other neighbouring clans into his Benbo Nguni group. After him, Swazi history makes reference to King Ngwane III who, according to Kuper was the first king to be commemorated in present day Swazi ritual and therefore introduced a distinct period in Swazi society. After a number of lineages seceded

²⁵ Malan, S; *Swazi Culture*, Pretoria: Pretoria Printers, 1985, p4.

from the main group, he led his small group of followers into the Southern region of present day Swaziland. This was in approximately 1750, and as Matsebula suggests, "we can almost date the history of Swaziland as such from that date."²⁶ His followers identified very closely with him by referring themselves as *bakaNgwane* (the people of Ngwane), a name that has remained to the present. Through coercion and persuasion the Swazi consolidated their country under several able and significant leaders. Bonner makes the same point when he remarks, "when the Ngwane entered Southern Swaziland, they were small and vulnerable, and the first priority was to expand their nuclear strength. Various Swazi kings accordingly pursued a policy of intensive incorporation."²⁷

Agreeing with Kuper, Matsebula, Malan, amongst others, Zigira categorizes the conquered, incorporated and consolidated, clans into 3 groups:²⁸

- i) *Bemdzabuko* (those who claim to be true Swazi) – these were the followers of Ngwane who conquered many groups as they advanced to the Southern part of Swaziland.
- ii) *Emakhandzambili* (those found ahead) – those who accepted incorporation and thereby retained their identity and paid tribute to the Dlamini feudal lords.

²⁶ Matsebula, J.S.M.; *A History of Swaziland*, Cape Town: Longman, 1972, p5

²⁷ Bonner, P.; *Kings, Commoners and Concessionaires: The evolution and dissolution of the nineteenth century Swazi state*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press (Pty) Ltd, 1983, p34.

²⁸ Zigira, C.; *Religion, Culture and Gender: A Study of Women's search for gender equality in Swaziland*, PhD Thesis, University of South Africa, 2000, p30.

- iii) *Emafikamuva* (those who came later) – the clans that were living outside Swaziland but fled to King Mswati II for protection against their enemies and were given some land for settlement.

Grouped together, the above clans were eventually united into one established Swazi nation under one ruler.

The history of Royal Swazi genealogy and nation building is quite rich and extensive. For purposes of this study this section will, in broad lines, focus on the contribution of two Swazi renowned kings who left an indelible impression in the history of the nation. These are King Somhlolo or Sobhuza I and King Mswati II.

The role played by the King Somhlolo and King Mswati II in Swazi history.

King Somhlolo

King Somhlolo succeeded his father King Ndvungunye who died in 1815 after being struck by lightning.²⁹ According to Matsebula, by consolidating his father's (Ngwane III) conquests, Ndvungunye paved the way for his successor, King Somhlolo to become famous by introducing the beginnings of the Swazi army.³⁰ Hence the inference that King Somhlolo is often referred to as the founder of the Swazi Nation because it was he who engineered those defensive strategies, which created a sense of communal belonging and difference against a

²⁹ King Ndvungunye was struck by lightning, and this disaster was thought to have been caused by the anger of the ancestral spirits, he was buried in a different burial ground from his father. See Matsebula, J.S.M.; *A History of Swaziland*, p7.

³⁰ Matsebula, *A History of Swaziland*, p7.

threatening enemy. His rule was marked by the “Mfecane” when the Zulu under Shaka threatened the entire subregion. He is often described as a “skilled diplomat” because he met his enemies’ advances with diplomacy. He repeatedly gave princesses to potential political rivals; for example he sent two of his own daughters to King Shaka to marry. He also married a daughter of the troublesome Zwide, named Tsandzile and he made her his principal wife.³¹ Gradually Somhlolo who was also known as Sobhuza I extended his campaigns and conquered and incorporated many tribes including the Sotho, Tsonga and Nguni chiefdoms into his nation. His regiments increased and his military power was strengthened, hence Matsebula’s conclusion that the campaigns gave Sobhuza the reputation of being a king of considerable power. “By the time he died in 1836 he left a fairly strong kingdom which was respected and feared by the neighbouring tribes”.³²

Swazi historical sources also acknowledge Somhlolo’s contribution towards shaping Swazi religiosity. One night shortly before his death he had a dream on his deathbed. He dreamt of people of a strange species entering the country emerging from the sea. They were the colour of red mealies, and their hair resembled the tail of cattle. They were bringing with them two things: *umculu* and *indilinga* between which he was expected to choose one for his nation. When translated these words respectively mean a scroll or book and a round piece of metal or money. Cautioned by an unknown voice he chose the *umculu*

³¹ Booth, A.R.; *Swaziland: Tradition and Change in a Southern African Kingdom*, p9.

³² Matsebula, J.S.M.; *A History of Swaziland*, p11.

and rejected the *indilinga*. The next morning, he called the royal councillors to relate the dream to them and he warned them to accept the scroll, which was taken to represent the Bible and reject money, and that they should never harm these strangers who were bringing into the country the two items, for that would lead to disaster. According to Mzizi ³³ the interpreters of the vision held three positions:

1. It was that these strangers should be accorded unconditional welcome in Swaziland.
2. Not a drop of their blood was to be shed under any circumstances.
3. King Mswati II the successor of King Somhlolo should take the initiative to “hunt” for these people with a purpose of bringing them into the Kingdom.

Underlining the importance of the dream, Matsebula remarks that the Swazi have tried ever since to observe the advice of listening to those who brought them the Bible, even though they have found it impossible to avoid the *indilinga*.³⁴ Gamedze A.B, who convincingly writes about the dream as God’s revelation to the Swazi, brings to our attention that a similar vision was brought to Chief Ntsikana of the *AmaXhosa*, except that “in the case of Ntsikana, our Lord appeared with bleeding wounds on his feet, hands and side, but the message, though more detailed, was basically the same”.³⁵

³³ Mzizi, J.B.; “Impediments to Religious tolerance in Swaziland:A Historical Survey” in *UNIWSA Journal* Vol.12, December 1998, pp43-54 (p46).

³⁴ Matsebula, J.S.M.; *A History of Swaziland*, p13.

³⁵ Gamedze, A.B.; “Somhloloism: Its place in political science” University of Swaziland, 23rd October 1980, p1 (unpublished paper).

King Mswati II

After King Somhlolo's demise in 1836, his son Mswati the child of his principal wife Tsandzile was installed King of Swaziland at the age of sixteen in 1840. Unlike his predecessor, Mswati who is often referred to as the eponym for Swaziland is presented in Swazi historiography as a fighting king. Under him (1840-1868) the Kingdom was consolidated and formally established. Quoting Jones, Kusel claims that at the time of his death Swaziland laid claim to "land extending as far as Caroline and Ermelo in the West, the Pongola River in the South, the Lubombo range in the East and beyond Barbeton in the North."³⁶ Mswati II is further credited with the class formations and social hierarchy which continue to exist in Swaziland today, as well as for instituting new measures that both practically and ritually centralized authority and strengthened Dlamini legitimacy.³⁷ In view of his achievements in establishing an infrastructure of state that was firm and cohesive, Mswati II deservedly earned a reputation as the greatest King in history of Swaziland. A similar sentiment is echoed by Cazziol who has rightly inferred that the fame brought to the people of Ngwane by Mswati II led to the acceptance of the name *Emaswati* (the Swazi) by all his subjects, as well as *Eswatini* (Swaziland) as the name of the country.³⁸ Citing Bryant A.T. in *Olden Times*, Matsebula asserts that Mswati was described as "a first magnitude star amid the galaxy of dusky empire-builders that shone forth in South-Eastern Bantuland in the early and middle decade of the last century".³⁹

³⁶ Kusel, H.; "Church Cooperation in Swaziland" University of Swaziland, p18 (unpublished paper).

³⁷ WLSA; *Charting the Maze: Women in pursuit of justice in Swaziland*, Mbabane: Pc-Soft, 2000, p19.

³⁸ Cazziol, R.J.; *A Comparative Study of Christian Missions*, p33.

³⁹ Matsebula, J.S.M.; *A History of Swaziland*, p22.

Mswati's early years of his reign also ushered a new phenomenon into Swazi history. Following his father's vision he sent emissaries to Grahamstown in South Africa to invite missionaries to come to Swaziland and bring the *umculu* to his country, hence Mzizi's remark, "Christianity had thus come to Swaziland by royal invitation".⁴⁰ The first missionaries arrived in June 24, 1844 and King Mswati and his nation warmly received them, as it shall be discussed later.

A new phase in Swazi history

Matsebula has noted that the death of King Mswati II ushered a new era of struggle for the future existence of the Swazi nation as a result of the invasion of white commercial interest, which threw the territory into a turmoil that was to last for the next hundred years.⁴¹ Booth terms this period "the time of concessions and foreign intrigues."⁴² After King Mswati II, King Mbandzeni ascended the throne in 1875 succeeding King Ludvonga, Mswati's heir who unfortunately died before his coronation. Though Swaziland witnessed an ever increasing number of Europeans steadily streaming into the Kingdom during Mswati II's reign, Cazziol has observed that contacts between the Swazi and Europeans were intensified during Mbandzeni's reign and their relations were on the whole friendly, partly on account of Somhlolo's vision.⁴³

⁴⁰ Mzizi, J.B.; "Impediments to Religious Tolerance in Swaziland" p47.

⁴¹ Matsebula, J.S.M.; *A History of Swaziland*, p25.

⁴² Booth, A.R.; *Swaziland*, p11.

⁴³ Cazziol, R.J.; *A Comparative Study of Christian Missions*, p33.

Eventually, the relations were strained when gold was discovered in Piggs Peak and European traders and mineral seekers pressurized Mbandzeni to grant them land concessions. Also the Transvaal highveld farmers sought for grazing rights to graze their sheep in winter as the Swazi did not cultivate winter crops. The news soon spread that Swaziland was a land rich in minerals. From 1880 onwards, more and more prospectors began to flock to Mbandzeni's court seeking mineral rights and land rights. Those who sought mineral concessions were of British stock, whilst those who sought land concessions were mostly Boers.

However, one needs to highlight that it was not by any stretch of imagination that Mbandzeni blindly and foolishly sold out Swaziland to fortune seekers. As Marwick would suggest, Mbandzeni looked at the foreigners from a Swazi point of view whereby, "land was vested in the whole nation and belonged to the generations also to follow; only the control of the use of it was in the hands of their ruler. Such use might be given to anybody.... and it was in the power of the ruler to vary his grants of land...."⁴⁴ The granting of any concessions by Mbandzeni, therefore, were not intended to be a permanent arrangement as the foreigners understood it to be, they were to be held for a specific time, as in accordance with Swazi law and custom, which did not recognize the alienation of national assets. Consequently, by the end of the century most of the land had been taken over by these Europeans who claimed to have gained land rights from the king.

⁴⁴ Marwick, B.A.; *The Swazi*, London: Cass, p38.

As part of the new phase in Swazi history, Swazi politics also took a new turn. Swaziland was recognized as an independent nation by Britain, Portugal and South Africa in a series of treaties, conventions and negotiations. In 1894 Swaziland requested to become a British Protectorate to halt the encroachments of Boers and Portuguese into the Kingdom. In 1885 the Republic of South Africa, with the consent of the British High Commissioner, declared Swaziland a protectorate. In 1899 at the outbreak of the Anglo Boer War, this control ceased, and Swaziland, regarding this war as a purely European affair, remained neutral throughout the war.⁴⁵ After their victory in the II Anglo-Boer War, the British assumed control over the territory and Swaziland became a British subject and was administered as part of the Transvaal. The initial arrangement was that Swaziland would become part of the Transvaal after the 1910 Union of South Africa. This never happened until Swaziland gained her independence "after 100 years of fighting to preserve her identity."⁴⁶ The initial plans to incorporate Swaziland into South Africa were later ignored; South Africa's intensification of racial discrimination induced Britain to prepare Swaziland for independence. As first step towards independence Swaziland was granted self-governance in 1967 when Sobhuza II who had assumed the throne as the *Ngwenyama* (The Lion) or head of the Swazi state in 1921, was recognized internationally as a constitutional monarch. He was granted the native authority for the territory to issue legally enforceable orders to the Swazi.

⁴⁵ Kusel, H.; "Church Cooperation in Swaziland," p22

⁴⁶ Kusel, H.; "Church Cooperation in Swaziland," p23.

To press Britain to grant independence to the Swazi, political activities intensified; several political parties were formed. Sobhuza II and his inner council also formed their party known as the *Imbokodvo* (grinding stone) National Movement, a political party that capitalized on its close identification with the Swazi way of life. The Swazi aristocracy skilfully managed the transition to independence with its *Imbokodvo* party winning every parliamentary seat in the first elections. Swaziland became independent on September 1968. Swaziland's post-independence elections were held in May 1972. The king's political party had a landslide victory. However, threatened by the radical Ngwane National Liberatory Congress (NNLC) which had gained the party only three seats in parliament, King Sobhuza repealed the 1968 constitution on April 12, 1973 and declared a state of emergency which has been in place ever since. He assumed all powers of government and prohibited all political activities and trade unions from operation. The authority of the monarch was made absolute.⁴⁷ He justified his actions as having removed alien and divisive political practices incompatible with the Swazi way of life.⁴⁸

The October, 13 1973 constitution which has been used to date vests supreme executive, judicial and legislative power in the hereditary king. Traditional law and custom govern succession to the throne. When the King dies the powers of Head of State are transferred to the constitutional dual monarch, the Queen Mother

⁴⁷ *Regional Surveys of the World, Africa*, 32nd edition, London: Europa Publishers, p1043. South of the Sahara 2003, 32nd edition, London: Europa Publishers, p1043.

⁴⁸ Kuper, H.; *The Swazi: A South African Kingdom*, New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1986, p2.

(*Indlovukati*-Great She Elephant) who is authorized to act as Regent until the designated successor attains the age of 21.⁴⁹ The current constitution provides for a bicameral legislative, comprising a House of Assembly and a Senate. In general practice, the monarch's power is delegated through a dualistic system: modern, statutory bodies like the cabinet, and less formal traditional government structures. The king must approve legislation passed by government before it becomes law. The Prime Minister who is appointed by the king as head of government, and his cabinet which is recommended by the prime minister and approved by the king, exercise executive authority. The Swaziland National Council, as a traditional body headed by the King and Queen Mother, advises on matters regulated by traditional law and custom.

Presently, King Mswati III who ascended the throne as king of Swaziland after his father King Sobhuza II the longest reigning monarch (61 years) remains Africa's last absolute monarch. To give the background of the context of the study, this section has given a picture of Swaziland and the people, tracing the nation's early beginnings to the present. The next section of the chapter focuses on the social organization of the Swazi primal people, which most likely created a suitable environment for Christianity to flourish.

Social Organization in the pre-Christian Swaziland

As alluded above, by the early 19th Century Swaziland had established a coherent and homogeneous nation. Because of cultural diffusion and borrowing

⁴⁹ Kusel, H; "Church Cooperation in Swaziland", p23.

and social adjustments within the broader Bantu group, Swaziland's social life was a synthesis of two cultural variants of the Bantu family, namely the Nguni and Sotho traditions. Migrating at different times from places further North, Kuper notes that the Swazi carried with them the heritage of all immigrants, which includes knowledge, memories and experiences of the past from societies they had left behind. "With this, they were able to shape their lives a new adapting as they forgot."⁵⁰ This section therefore concerns itself with an overview of the social organization of pre-Christian Swaziland, which has some striking similarities with other Bantu tribes, so as to provide a backdrop that will help in analyzing the early interactions between the Swazi and the Western missionaries.

It is probably worth noting that though the pre-Christian traditional structures came under great stress after foreign encroachment, they still exist in present day Swaziland but not in their pure form. Different traditions and systems have been modified in various ways, according to the impact of historic personalities and historic contact between ethnic groups. The social organization in the pre-Christian Swaziland was typical of any other African tribe. The family was considered to be an extremely important social structure. The Swazi definition of family extended beyond the single unit consisting of parents and their biological offspring. It was a large network extending across various kinship ties including the ancestors. A single homestead, which was the principal locus of the domestic life for the family, was headed by a patriarchal headman whose prestige was enhanced by the size of his family and the number of other dependents. Hence

⁵⁰ Kuper, H.; *The Swazi*, p4.

Booth's observation that a single homestead usually had more than one biological unit; "kinsmen of sorts, divorcees, widows and widowers returned to the family."⁵¹ Polygamy was regarded as a social ideal rather than a "sexual extravagance", as Kuper prefers to call it, and only aristocrats and the wealthy could afford it. As Kuper would emphasize, "many wives were symbols of status, and their children built up the lineage of the father and the size and influence of the homestead."⁵² The people lived in huts that were planned according to the relationships between its inhabitants. The huts were shaped like beehives with plaited ropes radiating from neat ornamental pinnacles and binding down the thatching grass.⁵³ In almost every homestead there was a central sacred structure, the cattle pen and grain storage units, which were underground flask shaped pits. The living quarters, which were enclosed with a reed fence for protection against wind, were grouped in a semicircle with the *indlunkhulu* (great hut) in the middle. The *indlunkhulu* was the sacred hut that was under the supervision of the most important elderly woman in the homestead, usually the mother of the headman.

In the homestead the people sat and slept on grass mats and used "Egyptian-style wooden" head rests as pillows (*nic*).⁵⁴ They cooked their food on an open fire in the hut or in the yard and as utensils they used wooden meat platters and clay bowls for drinking, designed for a group. When eating from one bowl the

⁵¹ Booth, A.R.; in Kunda's Weglog, "Aids and Traditional Family Structure in Swaziland" October, 28 2003. <http://wl.middleburg.edu/kchinku/family>

⁵² Kuper, H.; *The Swazi*, p4.

⁵³ Kuper, H.; *The Swazi*, p2..

⁵⁴ Kuper, H; *The Swazi*, p3

group would sit on the floor that was of “stamped earth smeared with moistened cow dung, to make it smooth, clean and sweet smelling”.⁵⁵ Age and sex were considered to be important aspects in the family. This was also demonstrated in their clothing, which reflected some major distinction of sex and age of the inhabitants within each homestead. In summary, this is how Kuper describes their clothing:⁵⁶ small children wore narrow waistbands of beads or plaited grass, with tiny charms to protect them against various evils. Older boys flaunted their manliness behind triangular flaps of animal skins and later wore these over materials tied like a skirt and reaching to the knees. Young unmarried girls wore prints tied around the hips with a separate piece of cloth knotted over one shoulder. Married women wore heavy skirts of cowhide and aprons of goatskins. Men dressed in loin skins and cloth. Kuper concludes her description with an observation that will be pursued later in the study. She asserts that missionaries condemned traditional clothing as immodestly revealing and Western clothing became for some Swazi synonymous with “Western civilization and a first essential of Christianity”.⁵⁷

Within the family, there was a strict hierarchy of authority, according to which the males ruled and held responsibility for the females and children. Brothers ruled their sisters, and sons, even their mothers, when they came of age or succeeded to the inheritance. Because the Swazi classified kin in broad categories, the term father (*babe*) was used in reference to various male figures. It went beyond the

⁵⁵ Kuper, H; *The Swazi*, p3

⁵⁶ Kuper, H.; *The Swazi*, p4

⁵⁷ Kuper, H.; *The Swazi*, p3

confines of "the walls of the house"⁵⁸ to encompass the domestic, chiefdom and kingdom. For example in the national family structure, the King was the father and the Queen mother was the mother of the nation. At chiefdom level, the chief was the father and his senior wife or his mother was the mother of the subjects. At domestic level, every parent was a father or mother of every child in the country. As Booth has asserted, children were taught to honor their elders, for the aged were considered to be the repositories of experience and wisdom."⁵⁹ This subdivision of age groups, each having a pivotal role to play within the society made the Swazi homesteads the home for different generations, each with specified functions to perform. Booth identifies the most important roles in the family as those that were carried out by the parents and grandparents in the education of the young. Whilst the father was the leader of the household, the mother often carried the greater responsibility of "maintaining the household, cultivating the fields and child bearing."⁶⁰ Grandparents were responsible for teaching the children the morals of the society through fables.

In traditional Swaziland, sexes were accorded inequality of status. Women were perceived as the caregivers and homemakers, whilst men were decision makers and authority figures. Children were important especially boys because they would continue the family line. As such there was even less personal intimacy between a father and his daughters than between him and his sons, after all the

⁵⁸ Sihlongonyane, M.F.; "The Invisible Hand of the Family in the Underdevelopment of African societies." <http://www.gdrc.org/icm/country/scholarly/fanafrica.html> June 04 2004

⁵⁹ Booth, A.R.; *Swaziland*, p35.

⁶⁰ Booth, A.R.; *Swaziland*, p52.

daughters would leave the fathers home upon marriage and produce children for another lineage. However, in spite of all that anthropologists and other scholars have interpreted as ill-treatment to women, using their "tinted" socio-cultural glasses, Swazi women who lived during this period perceived their status to be much higher than it could be imagined; the areas such as motherhood or role of bride earned them a high status and extensive rights. They therefore had no ambition to perform men's roles, neither did the men. Moreover, in this pre-industrial society there were no professional and other occupations in which women could compete with men. The occupations of both women and men were in relation with their familial roles, with clearly defined gender roles.

Marriage was very important in the Swazi society; it permanently linked all members of the two families, including the ancestors. There were some cultural practices that reinforced the permanency of the marriage institution; for example if the man died, the women could be inherited by one of the male relatives of the deceased through the levirate custom, and would raise the children in the name of the deceased. Again, if the marriage was childless, the custom of the sororate was followed, whereby a relative of the woman, preferably her young full sister would be given to the man as his junior co-wife to bear children for her sister. Since Swaziland was (is) a cattle-owning society, cattle were paid as *lobola* or bride price to the girl's family. Divorce was rare in the traditional society. A special ox was slaughtered to seal the marriage covenant permanently, and both

the living and the dead shared this relationship. By a strict distribution, every category of relative would have a portion of the animal reserved for him by right.

Usually, the spirit of cohesion and solidarity extended beyond the family circles, to the entire community. Everyone in the community was a neighbour to the other. Neighbors co-operated in a thousand ways; e.g. working communally on each other's fields, taking part in hunting expeditions, celebrating each other's family and social events. Neighbors borrowed tools and utensils from each other and performed innumerable services for each other. As Shorter has noted, "for many African peoples the ideal of the good life was sharing...good company".⁶¹ For such a group-centered society, anyone who alienated himself/herself from the life and normal working of the society ran the risk of being regarded as a threat to the entire society. Usually the out- cast was branded as a witch, and witchcraft which symbolized anger, hatred, jealousy, greed, lust, poison and so on, was an anti-social activity punishable by dehumanizing ostracism, or even by death.

Traditional Swaziland had no formal systems of the law, and the community did not create laws in any literal sense. Custom was used as a guide in taking decisions concerning social control. Collective decisions that were obligatory to all community members were largely intended to contribute to social stability and harmonious relationships within the group.

⁶¹ Shorter, A.; "Concepts of social justice in traditional Africa", <http://www.africaworld.net/afrel/atri-socjustice.htm> June 19 2004.

The foregoing section has provided an understanding of the organizational, economic and socio-political background information of Swaziland and the people. A phenomenon that this chapter has not explored, yet it is so crucial because it extensively interacts with other socio-cultural institutions, is religion. Remarking on the significance of religion in the society, Malefijt has noted that religion finds expression in material, in human behavior, and in value systems, morals and ethics; "no other cultural institution presents so vast a range of expression and implication."⁶² Religion therefore deserves a wider space in the next chapter, which will present the systematic patterns of beliefs and values of the Swazi primal religion.

⁶² Malefijt de Waal Annemarie, *Religion and Culture: An Introduction to Anthropology of Religion*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968, p3.

CHAPTER 3

INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION

Religion is a complex phenomenon whose nature makes it to be "notoriously"⁶³ difficult to define. Over the centuries, influential theorists have offered their own definitions, with greater or lesser degree of assurance, but virtually all of these definitions have been found wanting by the majority of scholars. "All the definitions sound good, but all obviously need large amounts of 'unpacking' to give them sufficient scope and sufficient precision to be adequate as definitions," argues Tremmel.⁶⁴ Thus, he suggests that scholars should come up with a working definition that will address two aspects of the religious phenomena, the functional and the sacred,⁶⁵ if they expect to make any headway at all in religious scholarship. The functional and the sacred modes comprised in any religion give us the insight that religion can refer to the innate capacity and disposition which enable a human being to be engaged in operations and activities which relate to religious beliefs, ritual practices and thought, which are concerned with the Supreme Being, the super human beings, and the world in relation to the human condition.⁶⁶ It is in this sense that this section seeks to briefly explore the religious orientation of the Swazi primal people under six salient features which form their consolidated world view that is as old as humanity itself. These are the

⁶³ Thorpe, S.A.; *Primal Religions Worldwide: An introductory, descriptive review*. A project of the Institute for Theological Research, Pretoria, University of South Africa, 1992, p6.

⁶⁴ Tremmel, W.C.; *Religion: What Is It?* (2nd edition). New York: Holt, Renchart and Winston, 1983, p3.

⁶⁵ Tremmel, W.C.; *Religion*, p4

⁶⁶ Tremmel, W.C.; *Religion*, p6.

Supreme Being, the spirit universe, cosmic unity, religious personages, rituals and sacrifices.

Sharing similar sentiments with S.A. Thorpe, whose works are of special relevance to the study of primal religions, it is probably important to state from the outset that the purpose of this section is not to romanticize primal religions, but "to guide the reader to an increased awareness and appreciation for the way in which other people have responded in a religious manner to circumstances surrounding their life situations."⁶⁷ Hence our reservations on the attempts by some scholars to construct a hierarchy with primal religions at the bottom regarding it as something inconsequential, marginal, negligible and trivial, whilst other religions are successively placed above as "world religions". Furthermore, since the hypothesis guiding this study is that the Swazi primal religion contributed some "spiritual genes"⁶⁸ to Christianity, an overview treatment of the salient features of the primal religion will enable us to discern concrete demonstrations of affinity between the two religions. However, this task cannot be fully accomplished without first defining the term "primal religion."

THE DEFINITION OF PRIMAL RELIGION.

Etymologically, the word 'primal' is a positive term that is related to the word "primary" which in this context carries with it connotations of prior, earlier in

⁶⁷ Thorpe, S.A.; *Primal Religions Worldwide*, p2.

⁶⁸ Mbiti, J.S.; "General Manifestations of African Religiosity." An Explanatory Paper at the first meeting of the standing committee on the contributions of Africa to the religious heritage of the world.
www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/mbiti.htm 06/07/04

origin, basic or fundamental substratum to all religious systems. Harold Turner is therefore right in his definition of primal religion that the term conveys two ideas that: "the primal religious systems are the most basic or fundamental religious forms in the overall religious history of mankind" and "they have preceded and contributed to the other great religious systems."⁶⁹

According to James Cox, the term "primal religions" was introduced as an alternative to the classification "primitive" which was used widely in the academic study of religion to describe the religions of peoples with relatively simple subsistence basic technologies and localized political structures.⁷⁰ John B. Taylor, amongst others has explained that "primal" had become the preferred term by 1970's to a whole series of terms like primitive, pagan, heathen, native, ethnic, tribal and traditional,⁷¹ which were too evaluative in a derogatory sense and misleadingly inaccurate, reducing primal religions to the least possible amount of estimation. The choice of the term was therefore motivated in part by the desire to avoid injecting pejorative attitudes into the study of certain types of religious phenomena, thereby overcoming descriptive biases.⁷² Since "a bad name disadvantages its bearer"⁷³ a replacement of derogatory terms with

⁶⁹ Turner, H.; "The Primal Religions of the World and their Study" in Victor C. Hayes (ed), *Australian Essays in World Religions*, Bedford Park: The Australian Association for the Study of Religion, 1977, pp27-48 (27).

⁷⁰ Cox, J.L.; "The Classification 'Primal Religions' as a Non-Empirical Christian Theological Construct" in *Studies in World Christianity*, Vol 2, 1996, pp55-75 (55).

⁷¹ Taylor, J.B.; (ed), *Primal Worldviews, Christian Dialogue with Traditional Thought Forms*, Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1976, p3-4.

⁷² Cox, J.L. "The Classification Primal Religions" p55.

⁷³ A proverb of the Baganda, see Lugira, A.M.; *Africism: A Geontological Approach to African Religions and Philosophy* for the 26th Annual Third World Conference, March 15-18, Swissotel. www.2bc.edu/lugira/Africism.htm

positive ones would undoubtedly elucidate marginalization and minimization of primal religions. Walls, in Cox J. L., adds that the choice of "primal religions" does not only avoid the biases of the other terms, it overcomes the tendency of western scientific classifications to employ evolutionistic undertones.⁷⁴

Influenced by Turner's prolific writings on primal religions, Philippa Baylis, Roger Schmidt, Joseph Brown and David Burnett,⁷⁵ whilst exploring the definition of religion, have identified many characteristics of primal religions, which Thorpe has joined to make one main characteristic; "... it is that of a cosmic orienting, holistic view of individuals, groups and nature."⁷⁶ In this he is in line with Turner who goes a bit further to present what he terms, "the six feature framework." An in-depth exploration of this aspect under the definition of primal religion is, however beyond the scope of this work; it will suffice here to give an outline of Turner's six-feature framework as paraphrased by Gillian Bediako.⁷⁷

1. A sense of kinship with nature. People are as children to mother Earth, brothers to plants and animals, which have their own spiritual place in the universe. The environment is, therefore, used with respect and reverence. Primal religion demonstrates a religious attitude to the natural setting of human beings in the world.

⁷⁴ Cox, J.L. "The Classification" Primal Religions", p56.

⁷⁵ Cox, J.L. "The Classification "Primal Religions, p58-60

⁷⁶ Thorpe, S.A., *Primal Religions Worldwide*, p9.

⁷⁷ Bediako, G.M; "Primal Religion and Christian Faith: Antagonists of Soulmates? In *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol 3, No.1. June 2000, pp12-16 (p14).

2. A sense of human weakness, of the finiteness, impurity and sinfulness of humanity and the need for a power beyond one's own.
3. A sense that human beings are not alone, that there is a world of spiritual powers of beings more powerful and ultimate. The universe is personalised, there is a will behind events. These transcendent powers may be ambivalent - malevolent or benevolent - but the world of the gods provides an escape from the terrors of evil forces.
4. A belief that it is possible to enter into a relationship with the spirit world, to share its blessings and receive protection from evil forces. There is an emphasis on the transcendent source of true life, a longing for this true life that is not yet achieved. (The intuition of the need for sacrifice follows from this, though Turner does not refer to it.)
5. An intense belief in the afterlife, as an extension of the belief in the relationship with the spirit world, that one will share spiritual life and power beyond death. Ancestors, as living dead, figure prominently as united in affection and obligation with the living, and as having a mediatorial role. Life can be hopeful because of this sense of continuation beyond this life.
6. A sense of the physical as sacramental of the spiritual. There is no sharp dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual, the physical world being patterned on the spiritual. Human life is a microcosm of the macrocosm. It is an essentially monistic view; one set of powers, patterns, runs through all things on earth and in heaven and welds them into a unified cosmic system. This is qualified by ethical dualism in respect of good and evil.

It is within this framework that the religious orientation of the Swazi primal people can be placed. This framework therefore helps us to identify the following as important elements within the Swazi religious system, which were presumably fundamental to the subsequent religious development of the Swazi people.

1.The Supreme Being - *Mvelinchanti* / *Mkhulunchanti*

The primal Swazi expressed their religious world in myths. Ninian Smart defines myths as "stories concerning divinities (supernatural beings), typically in relation to men and the world,"⁷⁸ whose truth does not depend on historical or empirical verification; they are "true if they are held to be true and meaningful by the believer of a given religion."⁷⁹ Joseph Campbell⁸⁰ goes a bit further and informs us of the four categories under which the role of myths can be classified. Paraphrased, they are as follows:

- i. to highlight the sense of the mystery of the universe and human existence
- iii. to illustrate how the universe was created
- iii. to support and legitimize the social order
- iv. to teach persons how to live in this world under any circumstances from birth to death.

⁷⁸ Smart, N.; 1973, p81

⁷⁹ Ndlovu, H.L.; Phenomenology of Religion (IDE-TIP2-1), Kwaluseni: University of Swaziland, 1994, p39.

⁸⁰ Campbell, J., p31.

Over the centuries and before the arrival and establishment of Christianity, the Swazi had mapped out their universe and intuited some divine knowledge that was expressed in myths and sacred stories. It is undoubtedly their religious primal worldview that enabled them to understand events that did not apparently conform to the natural laws as well as to conceive the universe in an organized fashion. According to Swazi mythology, the Swazi believed in the existence of a Supreme Being known as *Mvelinchanti*, "The One Who Appeared First." His other name was *Mkhulumnchanti*, which refers to Him "anthropomorphically as Grandfather whose posterity is the whole of humanity."⁸¹ After creating the heavens He fashioned the earth and placed upon it its flora and fauna and peopled it with human beings.⁸² At first He stayed in the world enjoying the companionship with his creatures. He later withdrew to a remote place in the heavens, where He came from to take abode on earth. He left because He was angry that a certain animal had disobeyed his command.

Mvelinchanti had instructed *lunwabu* (chameleon) to relay a message to human beings that they were not going to die, but live-forever. Delayed by eating juicy berries along the way, *lunwabu* took long to report back to *Mvelinchanti*, until He decided to change His mind. He subsequently sent *intfulu* (blue-headed lizard) to communicate a different message contrary to the first one; that human beings would live for an appointed time and die. The lizard left in haste, overtook the chameleon along the way and successfully conveyed the fateful message to

⁸¹ Byakuhanga-Akiiki, A.B.T.; Religion of Swaziland, Vol.1 University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, Kwaluseni: Department of Religions Studies, 1975, p28.

⁸² Marwick, B.A., The Swazi, London: Cass& Co.Ltd, 1960, p68.

human beings. Since then He had not returned to earth and had remained aloof, except that He occasionally sent His messenger known as *Mlitemgamunye* (the One Legged Being) to remain in good contact with human beings. Furthermore, after God had withdrawn from the world He delegated lesser Divinities and the ancestors His manifestations to supervise and maintain the universe.⁸³ The ancestors in particular, as emissaries of God and intermediaries between God and man, were assigned to manage the daily affairs of their living relatives, hence the need for the latter to stay in contact with them in order to know their desires and wills, as we shall soon indicate.

The Nature of the Supreme Being

Traditional monotheism focused on God being the eternal creator and sustainer of all things. His unique nature and essence emerged in such a way as to distinguish Him from all other beings. These other beings were created, whereas God was described as self-existent.⁸⁴

The above-mentioned traditional names of God are a reflection of how the primal Swazi perceived His unique nature. When each segment of the names *Mvelinchanti* and *Mkhulumchanti* are analyzed they have these following implications:

(a) *Mvelinchanti*

* He was a being who became rather than being formed or created.

⁸³ Ndlovu, H.L.; *Phenomenology of Religion*, p.46.

⁸⁴ Mbiti, J.S.; *General Manifestation of African Religiosity*. www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/mbiti.htm

- * He was the first of all and the beginner or the cause of life.
- * He was the Creator Himself and what followed, all knowing and powerful to be manipulated by human control and was not limited in His relationship with any of the creatures.

(b) *Mkhulumnchanti*

To call God a grandfather implied that:

- * He was the embodiment of love and compassion.
- * He was related to man as a grandparent to his grandchildren - within the Swazi cultural background.
- * He had the deepest wisdom (age was associated with wisdom).
- * He was attributed with manliness and strength.

The above observations on the Swazi primal belief of God and His nature seem to suggest that the primal people had a certain concept of who God was. They perceived Him as both far away and nearby, active and inactive, immanent and transcendent. As Ndlovu would emphasize, God stood apart from the created universe while at the same time he was intimately present in it through blessings of human reproductions, abundance of food and the gift of life.⁸⁵ This confirms Thorpe's assertion that Africans believed in a Supreme Being with one of more names that describe Him in terms of His activities or place of abode. These names "are obviously indicative of opinions held regarding Him or of attributes which He is understood to possess."⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Ndlovu, H.L., *Phenomenology of Religion*, p46.

⁸⁶ Thorpe, S.A. *Primal Religions Wordword*, p30

c) ***Nkulunkulu***

This is a term that is commonly used today, which the early missionaries subsequently used to replace the indigenous names of God. Apparently, the missionaries preferred not to use these names because according to their assessment, the terms had a deep association with Swazi mythology and therefore heathen.

His Interaction with the Primal people

It has been established that *Mvelinchanti* was viewed as remote and could not be reached directly by man. The primal people could only have access to Him through lesser divinities and ancestors, whom He delegated to handle the mundane affairs. "He seemed to have been content to place people on the earth and instruct them in the things they were permitted to do and those which they were not,"⁸⁷ argues Marwick.

As indicated, although remote He used to keep in good contact with human beings. According to Swazi tradition the Creator would occasionally send His messenger *Mlentengamunye* "The One legged Being" to deliver messages to the people. *Mlentengamunye* ascended in a cloud on any high mountain in the country and His one leg would show hanging above the mountain whilst the rest of him would be concealed in the cloud. Children who were said to be pure and innocent before puberty usually saw him. Kuper, who records this as a historical

⁸⁷ Marwick, B.A., *The Swazi*, p68.

fact than a legend, claims that *Mlentengamunye* was last seen during the days of King Mbandzeni, 1875-1889.⁸⁸ Archival documents reveal that the ancient people interpreted the coming of this strange mysterious being, "the messenger of a more superior being", as a visit from heaven to give a warning against some forthcoming disaster. Agreeing, Vilakati adds that His appearance had some ambivalence in it. "Whilst the people were excited by his appearance, they also feared because it could also be a warning against an impending epidemic."⁸⁹ In fear of his arrival, people would all wear "necklaces made of mealies threaded onto grass, in his honor, for one month after his departure".⁹⁰

The visitation by *Mlentengamunye* was always marked by festivity and celebration in his honour. The chiefs would be notified of his appearance and all subjects would move together to the sacred mountaintop where he had appeared. They would bring all sorts of crops, beer and animals like bulls and goats whose blood would be offered as sacrifices to the messenger. Jane Motsa records that part of the meat was burnt with the belief that the being was with them in their feast and he would appreciate the smell of the burnt offering because he would not practically eat with them, whilst the rest was eaten by people in celebration.⁹¹ After the feast all the bones would be collected and burnt so that everything in connection with the days sacrifice was consumed. They

⁸⁸ Kuper, H., *An African Aristocracy: Rank Among the Swazi*, London: Oxford University Press, 1947, p51.

⁸⁹ Vilakati, L. "The Swazi Traditional concept of God" in *Religion in Swaziland*, Vol1. pp73-84 (79).

⁹⁰ Marwick A.B., "Swazi Traditional Religion: The Swazi Concept of God" in *Religion in Swaziland*, Vol 1, p228ff.

⁹¹ Motsa J., "God and Man in Swazi Traditional Religion" in Byakuhanga-Akiiki, A.B.T.(ed). *Religion in Swaziland*, Vol2, pp171-188 (172).

would then take it for granted that the messenger had taken all their requests to *Mvelinchanti*, and would wait in hope for blessings which included good rains, good harvest, good life, good cattle and so on. "The immediate good sign that God accepted their offering was that it rains immediately the people leave the mountain,"⁹² argues Motsa.

In case the appearance of *Mlentengamunye* could be a sign of a forth-coming disaster, the people went to sacrifice on the mountaintop in supplication to the supreme power. Marwick has documented that mothers took all children to a sandy riverbed to be momentarily buried in the sand up to their necks.⁹³ The mothers would then run out of sight wailing and would shortly afterwards return to take the children out. This was a symbolic sign that these children belonged to *Mvelinchanti* and they were being left to his care. At the seeming desertion, all the children were bound to cry in desperation. "This noise was believed to reach *Mvelinchanti* and moved Him to pity for the suffering."⁹⁴ He would thereby intervene and rescue the people from the impending disaster. The women would then proceed home with their children and never look back. Upon arrival at their respective villages fowls or goats were burned on a sort of funeral pyre with the smoke ascending to heaven where it was believed that *Mkhulumnchanti* lived. This was said to be a sign that they feared Him and the rite was called an *umnikelo* (offering).⁹⁵

⁹² Motsa, J., "God and Man in Swazi Traditional Religion", p173.

⁹³ Marwick, A.B., "Swazi Traditional Religion," p230.

⁹⁴ Vilakazi, L., "The Swazi Traditional Concept of God," p81.

⁹⁵ Marwick, A.B. "Swazi Traditional Religion" p 231.

The primal people believed that rain could be controlled by medicines allied with kingship and was a sign of ancestral blessing and goodwill. However, there were rare cases whereby the ruling king as the rainmaker failed to evoke rain. Many black cattle were taken from various chiefdoms to be sacrificed at the royal palace to appease the national ancestors. If that failed, the people would go to the sacred spots of *Mlentengamunye's* appearance to plead for rain. Also, before the sowing season came they would take their seeds to these spots to be blessed by the Creator's messenger.

As it will be expounded later, it will suffice here to mention that *Mvelinchanti* also interacted with the primal people indirectly through the ancestors (*labaphansi/labalele/emadloti*), who were nearer to Him as well as to men and thus acted as intermediaries. As the creator in the traditional concepts of the Swazi, God was Omniscient and Omnipotent. Like all kings, God did not run the mundane affairs of the people; He delegated His representatives, the ancestors who directly dealt with the people. As a child could not have direct access to his father according to the Swazi culture, men could not have a direct access to God.

The important points that the above discussion seeks to emphasize is that the names which the primal people gave to God were not just labels, they were an expression of their deepest thoughts of the Power whose working they discerned in the world. Though no specific form of worship was directed to the Supreme

Being, they viewed Him as both remote and nearby, hence their interaction with Him through intermediaries.

The Primal Swazi Spirit Universe

The widespread belief in the world of spirit power throughout Africa is one of the most distinguishing earmarks of African religious systems. Andrew Walls, in his analysis of these traditional African religious systems has identified four major component entities in the understanding of the transcendent.⁹⁶ These are God, divinities, ancestors and objects of power. He further observes that these systems vary as to which component is the dominating one, and that not all systems have all four components.⁹⁷

Harold Turner, an authority in primal religions, has insightfully argued that, from a primal perspective, a human being is not alone in the universe for there is a spiritual world of powers or beings more powerful and ultimate than himself/herself, which belong to a transcendent dimension.⁹⁸ However, transcendent powers are ambivalent; they may be either malevolent or benevolent depending on the relationship of humans to them and their feelings of human activity. Hence the assertion that not only is there the hierarchy of benevolent ancestors and of spirits, divinities and high gods in the primal

⁹⁶ Walls, A.F., *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002, pp 122-128.

⁹⁷ Walls A.F., *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*; p123.

⁹⁸ Turner, H. "The Primal Religions of the World and their Study", p31.

religions world, but there is also the range of evil spirits, of demons and malevolent divinities, occult powers of wizards and witches.⁹⁹

In his exploration of the heavily populated traditional Swazi spirit universe, Byakuhanga has classified these spirits, which can either be benevolent or malevolent, into various categories.¹⁰⁰ Notable about these spirits is that they were thought to be shaping all that happened within the primal society, and they showed a close identification with humans. They are as follows:

- * Nature spirits
- * Animal spirits
- * Spirits of the ancestors/ "living dead"
- * Spiritual forces
- * Mere spirits
- * The chief spirits

Let us briefly examine each category.

(a) Nature spirits

Primal people believed that spirits infused distinctive natural formations, and for that reason, they accorded some recognition to nature. Spirits were believed to inhabit natural objects as trees, mountains, waterfalls, stones and so on. These objects were regarded sacred. Heavenly objects like the sun, moon and stars

⁹⁹ Turner, H., "The Primal Religions of the World and their Study", p31.

¹⁰⁰ Byakuhanga -Akiiki, A.B.T., Religion in Swaziland, Vol.1 p.29.

were personified, in recognition of the intimacy they presumably shared with the traditional society.

(b) Animal Spirits

These were believed to possess animals, which were linked with kinship groupings, and such animals were observed to act in abnormal ways. For example, a poisonous snake that was viewed as an ancestral representative could, without fear, move with familiar sureness into the hut and play with the children without causing harm. Making the same point, Kuper adds that in the traditional society green mambas were associated with kings; harmless green snakes were associated with commoners and women. However, it was believed that the body of every Swazi had at least one snake that was associated with fertility and health.¹⁰¹ On another note witches could enter cats or baboons at night in order to accomplish their malevolent deeds.

For further clarification, a ritual that shows the personification of the earthly objects by the primal Swazi and the close identification between animals and humans, and nature and humans will serve as an illustration. Every year before the rains, ancestral cattle were driven into the sacred caves, which were believed to have been inhabited by the dead kings, and distinguished princes buried there in order their of seniority. The designated chiefs would respectfully report the affairs of the country to the dead and appeal for prosperity, health and rain. Kuper remarking on the close identification of humans with nature and animals in

¹⁰¹ Kuper, H., "The Supernatural" in *Byakuhanga Religion in Swaziland*, Akiiki, pp53-72 (54).

this ritual states, "the graves, described as frightening and awe inspiring, alive with the sound of majestic voices and the movement of great snakes, are in the charge of important chiefs in the vicinity."¹⁰² The ritual was concluded with the main sacrifice whereby each animal was dedicated to specific dead and eaten in a sacramental feast.

(c) Spirits of divinized humans.

These spirits possessed people who contributed immensely to the primal heritage of the Swazi; mostly kings, distinguished citizens and national war heroes.

(d) Spirits of ancestors and the "living-dead"

The primal people held the notion that death only annihilated the body; the spirit continued to live in the next life in the world of spirits. These formed their category in the spirit universe, but differed in age and social status. The "living dead", an all inclusive term coined by Mbiti to refer to those who are biologically related to the living and are still remembered up to four or five generations.¹⁰³ The "living-dead" had no age distinction or social status, whilst the ancestors were specifically those accorded some honour when they were still alive.

Those who attained ancestral status had met these important requirements: parenthood before death, goodness in the society, one whose body received a

¹⁰² Kuper, H., "The Supernatural" in Byakuhanga Akiiki, Religion in Swaziland, p62.

¹⁰³ Mbiti, J.S., African Religions and Philosophy, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969, p84.

ritually proper burial and a guardian of morality in families, clans and the entire nation. As pointed out earlier, after the creator had withdrawn to a remote place He entrusted lower spiritual beings, the ancestors to handle the mundane affairs of life and His disposition and desires were reflected through these spiritual beings. They therefore served as intermediaries that also set the guidelines of righteous living according to the will of *Mvelinchanti*. Of the four component entities found in all traditional systems, the ancestor component predominated the religious system of the Swazi primal people. The ancestors received much honour, recognition and respect from the primal people. No matter was beyond their reach; they could heal, provide material blessings and save their relatives from various dangers.¹⁰⁴ Failure to give ancestors their due respect would result to misfortunes, diseases and other calamities. Nevertheless, they were said to be incapable of inflicting sufferings through malice or wanton cruelty.¹⁰⁵

Turner has brought to our attention that the primal peoples "live in a personalized universe, where there is a will behind events, so that one asks not what caused this or that, but who did it?"¹⁰⁶ However, while death was interpreted as an act of witchcraft, it also added status and power to the person in that he would use the power he would acquire in his new residence "to benefit the living by bestowing blessings on them and protecting them from evil doers and misfortunes."¹⁰⁷ He was therefore elevated to a category in which he assumed an important position,

¹⁰⁴ Ndlovu, H.L., 'The Autonomy of African Traditional Religions: The Case of Swazi Religion', in UNISWA Research Journal, Vol.12 December, 1998 pp 69-75 (72).

¹⁰⁵ Kuper, H., "The Supernatural" p55.

¹⁰⁶ Turner, H., "The Primal Religions of the World and their Study" p31.

¹⁰⁷ Kasenene, P., *Religion in Swaziland*, Braamfontein: Skotaville Publishers, 1993, p5.

where he would be responsible for both the physical and the spiritual interests of the family; he could control sickness, health, fertility and all that was necessary to have the family grow in strength.

The privileged duty of appealing to the ancestors rested with the head of the family. Contact was usually made through the medium of food, meat, or beer and the ancestors, who were said to be often hungry, "licked" the essence of the offering laid at dusk on a sacred place in the shrine hut and left overnight. Failure to give them recognition angered them and they reacted negatively against the people.

Mortuary rites that would qualify the deceased into the category of the ancestors and the "living-dead" had to be performed. They varied according to the status of the deceased; the more important the dead, the more elaborate the rites given to the corpse. The "would be" ancestors were therefore accorded elaborate death rites. Kuper gives this example:¹⁰⁸ a headman was buried at the entrance of the cattle byre, and his widows, children, siblings and other relatives were constrained to undertake different demonstrations and periods of mourning. The widows shaved their heads and mourned for three years before a relative of the deceased through the levirate could inherit them. The spirit of the deceased was ritually 'brought back' to the family in a feast that ended all active mourning. The spirit continued to live and influenced the destinies of kinsmen.

¹⁰⁸ Kuper, H., "The Supernatural", p53.

In summary, the ancestors were believed to have greater wisdom, foresight and power than the rest of mankind. Whilst they maintained the good order of creation by chastising and punishing the living for their evil deeds, they also neutralized the evil caused by other spirits. However, the primal people did not regard them as omnipotent; they just acted as custodians of correct behaviour and tribal ethics.

(e) Mere spirits

These are all the dead in general, people who were in that state since creation.

(f) The Chief Spirit

This is *Mkhulunchanti/Mvelinchanti* referred to earlier. Within this context He could be referred to as the Chief Spirit by virtue of being the Creator of all spirits.

(g) Spiritual 'forces'

This category of spiritual forces is of malevolent impersonal spiritual beings that caused evil and suffering to the primal people. The most feared spirit associated with evil was *Lomkhubulwane*, a female deity that was said to be capable of sending sickness and death to human beings. Kasenene asserts that she appeared like *Mlentengamunye*, except that she was a messenger of evil.¹⁰⁹ When she appeared a ritual was performed on her honour to appease her. Marwick has recorded this illustration:¹¹⁰ When *Lomkhubulwane* had infested

¹⁰⁹ Kasenene, P.; *Religion in Swaziland*, p16.

¹¹⁰ Marwick, A.B. "Swazi Traditional Religion", p69.

crops with pests, girls took over the herding of the cattle and went about their task naked. The boys and men stayed at home quietly. After some days the girls took ears of the infested corn and went to the river where there was a waterfall and threw the seed over the fall. The crops were then cured. Also, in cases of an epidemic everyone took a pot of traditional beer or sour porridge to a hillside and left it there. If *Lomkhubulwane* was pleased with the offering she withdrew the sickness. Other evil spirits below in this category included *tipoko* (ghosts), *tikoloshi*, (short mystical man), *imikhobo* (zombies), *tilwane* (animals), the list is endless. However behind all the terrors of the impersonal spirits the primal people found comfort in that there were not left alone in this mysterious universe; there were the personal benevolent spirits that provided meaning, direction and the model for all human activities.

Although illnesses and other misfortunes were sometimes attributed to the anger of ancestors whom the people might have wronged by some unethical behaviour and lack of reverence, they were said to be incapable of killing. Death was interpreted as an act of evil doers known as *batsakatsi* (a collective term for all evil doers) who employed the spiritual forces in this category to cause evil that would retard any kind of progress in the families and the nation at large. Kuper asserts that, "Swazi *batsakatsi* include witches, whose evil is both physiological and psychological, and sorcerers, who rely on poisons, conscience violence, or other techniques for the deliberate destruction of property or person."¹¹¹ The primal people were overwhelmed by the many powers that might bring evil upon

¹¹¹ Kuper H., "The Supernatural", p55.

their life. When confronted with unexpected evil, they typically asked questions like, who has caused this affliction to come upon me? What power is troubling me? Has this been caused by ancestors, or some spirit or by witchcraft? Who can help me discover the cause and source of this evil? The spiritual forces category therefore remained a continual threat to Swazi primal people.

2. Cosmic Unity

One other salient feature of the Swazi primal religion is that the sacred and the secular were perceived as one reality; that is they did not make formal division between religious and nonreligious acts. Almost every form of human behaviour was imbued with religious significance within their cultural context. Put differently, their religion was a corporate religiosity; it assumed that the seen world is related to the unseen. As Mbiti has observed it permeated all the departments of life, without any formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and material areas of life.¹¹² Also, an interaction exists between the divine and the human, the sacred and the profane, the holy and the secular. This belief system is different from the religions of the highly industrialized countries that tend to cut reality into two big slices; the natural and super natural, the secular and the spiritual.

3. Religious rituals

Rituals comprise symbolic, formalised, repeatable and ceremonial actions often intended to express some fundamental truth or meaning. As alluded above, the

¹¹² Mbiti, J.S. *African Religions and Philosophy*, (Second Edition) 1989, p2.

cosmology of the primal Swazi society can be typified as integral and religious. That is, in the words of Malan, it accepted the existence and interaction between natural and supernatural forces in the universe; it elucidated the nature and potential of human and spiritual beings, as well as the relationship that was ideally to be observed between them; and it also entailed a functional view of the natural world with the various resources that may be exploited to sustain human life on earth.¹¹³ The people therefore held a strong belief that unity and wholeness of the universe, between the visible and invisible, could be sustained through ritualized actions. As Kasanene has observed, "it is ritual that expresses the togetherness of the people and their oneness with the departed members of their families or nations."¹¹⁴ Furthermore, through rituals the primal people preserved their basic belief, values and philosophies, given the fact that their religion was not codified in literacy forms. These rituals were performed in sacred places (cattle byre, grave yard, mountains, granny's hut etc) in which the people communicated with the ancestors, and that gave the rituals solemnity and importance. Thus, they provided a sacred frame for statements and actions made during the course of them.¹¹⁵

There were different rituals that were performed by the primal people to ensure the holistic well being of both of individuals and a group. These included life affirming rituals, protective rituals, family rituals, purification rituals and national rituals. Let us give a synopsis of each.

¹¹³ Malan, S., *Swazi Culture*, Pretoria: Pretoria printers, 1985, p8.

¹¹⁴ Kasenene, P. *Religion in Swaziland*, p17

¹¹⁵ Thorpe, S.A., *Primal Religions Worldwide*, p115.

- i) Life affirming rituals known as rites of passage were performed at each transitional stage in the cycle of life: birth, puberty, marriage and death. They transferred a new social status for the individual, as he/she interacted with members of his/her immediate and extended family, as well as the community. For example the most important ritual that was performed at birth was *kubhunyiselwa* whereby the mother and the newborn were taken to a tree that was struck by lightning and special charms called *tinyamatane* were burnt for the baby to inhale. During this ritual the child was dedicated to the family ancestors and their protection against any evil was sought. This also denoted the acceptance and socialization of the child as a full human being with all rights, privileges and obligations of childhood.¹¹⁶ At puberty members of the same age-set were initiated into adulthood. While the initiates were in seclusion (for a period of six months at the mountain), they were taught about Swazi traditions and values and good behaviour like sexual morality, respect for seniors, allegiance to the kingdom and chiefdoms and to the indigenous religion. The initiation rituals that included bathing with herbs in the river, circumcision, slitting of ears, metaphorically signified death to the life of a child prescribed and rebirth into the adult community.¹¹⁷ They were all performed in the sacred places in the presence of the family ancestors, the recipients of

¹¹⁶ Ndlovu, H.L. *Phenomenology of Religion*, p51

¹¹⁷ Thorpe, S.A., *Primal Religions Worldwide*, p115

all sacrifices. These places were protected by numerous taboos. Rites associated with marriage marked the transition from youth to full and responsible adulthood. Again, central in these rituals were the ancestors who were asked to protect and bless the marriage with children. Marriage was not only binding the bride and the groom but also the two families and the ancestors of both families. The last transitional stage was death in which one graduated from a condition of dependence and was ushered into a new spirit status of responsibility and place of abode. As implied in Malefijt's assessment of funeral rituals, amongst other purposes, funeral rites, served two major ones; "they are acts of reincorporation, readmitting the deceased to the community in their newly achieved status", and they "assist the soul in its readjustment to a new type of existence, in its journey to another world, and in its acceptance there after arrival."¹¹⁸ In summary, with the above briefly highlighted rites of transition performed by the primal people, we seek to emphasize that they aimed at maintaining social congruence and mutual interdependency between the visible and the invisible.

- ii) There were protective rituals that were performed periodically to "immunize" potential victims against witchcraft or any malicious and evil spirits. As indicated earlier, the relationship between the living and the ancestors was a reciprocal one. As the living showed their respect

¹¹⁸ Malefijt de Waal, A., *Religion and Culture: An Introduction to Anthropology of Religion*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968, P146.

and honor to their ancestors by continuing to remember and include them in family functions and decisions making, the ancestors would protect their relatives from witchcraft, heal the sick, reward good behavior and cause them to prosper, hence the ritualized actions.

- iii) Family rituals were performed to appease angry ancestors, thus ensuring their continued support and protection. An example of such rituals is *kuphahla* (the feast in honor of the ancestors), whereby the officiant who was usually a male elder in the family would address the ancestors loudly at the cattle byre and then present a beast to be slaughtered in their honor. They would then be given gifts of specific pieces of sacrificial meat and beer. Families also performed the "*kubuyisa*" (bringing back) ritual, which marked the acceptance of the spirit of the deceased into the family, as an ancestor that would be frequently remembered and honoured by the members of the family.
- iv) Purification rituals which cleansed people who, wittingly or unwittingly had transgressed or been defiled by breaking taboos that ensured cohesion in the society.
- v) National ritual, which included rain rituals, rituals to protect the ripening crops and festival of first fruits involved the entire nation. Notable amongst these rituals, is the most sacred of them all, the *Incwala*. This

important national ritual which is still practised today, held the primal society together. Among other things, the ritual involved sacrificing to the ancestors, tasting the first fruits of the season, rainmaking and general celebration. Also, the king as the chief priest (as it shall seen later) would rededicate the nation to the national ancestors who in turn blessed it, thus binding the nation together and renewing its collective strength. It was assumed that the ancestors as intermediaries would facilitate communication in a more personal and direct way between the people and *Mvelinchanti*.

The above discussion has shown that rituals, whose major functions were to avert evil, to atone for wrongdoing and to offer thanksgiving for protection, played a vital role in Swazi primal society. This underlines S.D.Gill's assertion quoted by Thorpe that in primal religions "ritual commonly accompanies the passage from one stage to another in the life cycle and in the annual cycles of nature; it accompanies moments of crisis, major moments of union and separation such as marriages; it embodies transcendence and immanence, of celebration and consecration."¹¹⁹

4. Sacrifices

Sacrifices as a part of ritual observances served as a mode of communication between the human beings and the super human to ensure the holistic well

¹¹⁹ Thorpe, S.A.; *Primal Religions Worldwide*, p115.

being both of individuals and of a group. As has been indicated, the recipients of these sacrifices were the ancestors. Selected animals that were offered as sacrifices included hens, cocks, sheep goats and cattle. Human sacrifices were offered too and were said to be the best sacrifice because it involved the act of taking the life of an individual for a good purpose. For example a deceased king used to be buried with his servants and some of his belonging and foodstuffs. His servants accompanied him to serve him in the next world.¹²⁰

After the officiant had presented the animal to be slaughtered to the ancestors as a sacrifice, it was supposed to bellow loudly if it was a beast or make some noise if it was any other animal. This was interpreted as an indication that the ancestors had fully accepted the sacrifice. Special portions of meat were kept in the sacred hut, to be “licked” by ancestors. The rest of the meat was shared as a communal meal uniting the living and the ancestors. Basically ancestors were remembered by offering gifts of animal blood, specific pieces of sacrificial meat and traditional beer. This was a way of reinforcing the bond that existed between the invisible members of the family or nation and those who were still alive.

5. Religious Personages

As depicted above, in all life pursuits, the primal people strove to maintain a dynamic relationship and a network of mutual interdependency between the

¹²⁰ Ndlovu, H.L., *Phenomenology of Religion*, p51.

visible and the invisible through rituals and sacrifices. The logical question to ask is; how did the visible get to know the intentions, will and plans of the invisible? Religious personages like diviners, medicinemen, prophets and priest-kings were set apart as sacred individuals, specifically selected for the task of mediation between the spiritual and the physical world. When balance and well-being of the society was threatened these human mediators, as visible representatives of the ancestors would be consulted at special times and special places in an effort to ascertain the cause of the problem. They would then prescribe an appropriate remedy. Again, religious personages is a broad subject which this paper cannot treat in-depth; it will just scratch the surface to illustrate the main idea in this section.

i) Diviners (*Sangoma*)

The diviner who Ndlovu has described as “the doctor of the bewitched”¹²¹ was the main specialist in Swazi primal society. Malefijt describes a diviner as a religious specialist whose major function is to discover the will and intentions of the supernatural or to ask for divine judgment.¹²² As indicated earlier the primal people blamed disruptions of life on evil spirits, malicious persons like sorcerers or witches or angry ancestors. Divinatory practices therefore played a significant role in diagnosing illnesses, in deciding the guilt or innocence of an individual, in finding best places for hunting, and in corroborating important

¹²¹ Ndlovu, H.L., *Phenomenology of Religion*, p48.

¹²² Malefijt de Waal, A. *Religion and Culture*, p215

social decisions such as marriage choice and royal succession.¹²³ Divination involved long and arduous training during which the aspiring diviner wandered over the countryside, ate little, slept little, tormented by scary dreams- of snakes encircling his limbs, of drowning in flooded rivers.¹²⁴ After graduating, he would perform his duties under the guidance of some spirits who would “possess” and use him as a medium for communicating messages from the invisible world and as a visible representative of the ancestors who were the custodians of the society and its continuing well being. His diagnosis for extensive and varied range of difficulties would be followed by a prescribed therapy, which might include the taking of special herbs and the performance of rituals and offering of sacrifices. The skill and ability of the diviners to discover the plans and intentions of the spiritual beings earned them great respect amongst the primal people. Their pronouncements that provided answers to potential problems were accepted as infallible.

ii) Medicine men (*Tinyanga Temitsi*)

As it was the case with the diviners, the Swazi consulted medicine men to obtain esoteric knowledge for all life situations. Whilst diviners diagnosed the cause of the problems, the medicine men, relying on spirit possession for insight, offered panaceas for causes of the misfortunes and social ills. The careers of the medicine men were destined from birth or sanctioned by the powerful dead. According to Kuper, knowledge of rituals and medicine bags

¹²³ Malefijt de Waal, A., *Religion and Culture*, p216.

¹²⁴ Kuper, H., ‘The Supernatural’, p57.

were retained in certain families as an important part of the inheritance.¹²⁵ The owner imparted to his favorite son, a younger brother, or close kinsman who, once qualified to hold this sacred position would use the “father spirit” to perform his duties. He would regularly replenish the power of the bags in ritual reaffirmation of his spiritual reliance.

iii) Prophets (*Babholofidi*)

These were charismatic religious specialists who rose during times of upheavals, to proclaim messages from the ancestors to the people. They received divine revelations usually by means of visions and dreams. These revelations were not induced by any means; the ancestors took the initiative. The prophet earned his respect by the power of his personality and the type of message he conveyed to the people. The messages he received were direct and explicit and he ought to extend them to the people against all odds. Prophets often, received revelations on the anger of the ancestors and they (ancestors) instructed them to convince the people to change their evil ways. In the words of Malefijt, prophets were “potential agents of change.”¹²⁶

iv) Priest-Kings

The historical background of the Swazi documented in chapter 2 has shown us that the office of kingship was hereditary and was a prerogative of a single lineage. It was believed that this office was initiated and validated by divine call and therefore sacred. The kingly occupations regulated by hereditary

¹²⁵ Kuper, H., “The Supernatural” p57.

¹²⁶ Malefijt de Waal, A., *Religion and Culture*, p242.

descent patterns earned the kings and queens reverence and greater prestige amongst the people.

However, Ndlovu brings to our attention that the reverence accorded to the kings and queens emanated from the sacredness of their official religious duties.¹²⁷ They were designated national priests. They performed a wide variety of rituals on behalf of the nation, which were not scheduled or calendrical, as well as those that were periodical and commemorative in nature. The main functions of the priest-kings are twofold: they served as a link between the people and the national ancestors. Also they served as a living symbol of the nation; the health of the king was identified with the general well being of the nation.¹²⁸ The importance and sacredness of this office can be best illustrated in a brief account of the *Incwala* ritual. This is an elaborate and the most sacred ritual in the Swazi society that was first observed and practised by the primal people. It has survived all generations and has remained intact up to the present generation. For that reason, the account will be in present tense.

The main celebrant in the *Incwala* ritual is the king-priest accompanied by other religious personages like diviners, medicine men and others. His most significant function in this context is to serve as the chief priest of the Swazi nation. This sacred ritual performed annually involves several rites and it lasts

¹²⁷ Ndlovu, H.L., *Phenomenology of Religion*, p.50

¹²⁸ Kasenene, P., *Religion in Swaziland*, p25

for eighteen days. The king as the chief priest sends off water priests to the Red Sea in Mozambique and to where all the country's tributaries meet; to fetch water. The water fetched from the tributaries symbolize the filth of the whole nation that needs to be cleansed before it could venture into the New Year, whilst the medicated holy water from the sea will cleanse the nation from all the sins the Swazi have committed during the course of the year.¹²⁹

They are many rituals that are performed in the honor of the national ancestors in the national cattle byre. The sanctuary is the most sacred place in 180 feet wide national cattle byre. It is called *inhlambelo* (sacred enclosure). It is covered with branches of a sacred tree known as *lusekwane* right round leaving only a small arched door way which is later closed with heavy logs to "hide the secrets of kingship."¹³⁰ This tree is fetched by "pure" youths from Gundwini annually. The king as the chief priest performs some rituals in this sacred enclosure, on behalf of nation. Also it is where it is assumed he is born again with new strength and vitality.

During the course of the ritual the designated religious personages sacrifice a number of pitch-black bulls and oxen at the sanctuary to the national ancestors. Each has a religious significance.

¹²⁹ Gamedze, A.B., "Church and State", in Mzizi J.B. (ed) First National Seminar for a Relevant Theology for Swaziland, Manzini, p31.

¹³⁰ Kuper, H., *An African Aristocracy*, p207.

Notable amongst the ritual black oxen is a sacred ox known as *incwambo*, (a term applied to a muscle near the testicles) which is driven into the sanctuary by the 'pure' youth. The *incwambo* is observed for a year and it holds a unique position in the royal herd. It must not be beaten, battered or used for any mundane task, until it is sacrificed.¹³¹ During the *Incwala* the king priest, embodying the sins of the nation sits on this ox as he washes with the sacred water from the sea. That symbolises the cleansing of the entire nation from all sins committed as the year progressed. The *incwambo* is then released to the wilderness and the original belief is that the sins of the past year are removed from the entire nation.¹³² Another outstanding large strong ox is *umdvutjulwa*; a name derived from *kudvubula*-to thump or pummel. It is first driven into the sacred enclosure, through the narrow doorway to be presented to the ancestors by the King as the chief priest. When it emerges out the 'pure' youths pounce on it and pummel it with their strong young hands until it dies; none of its bones must be broken.¹³³ It is then taken to the sanctuary and special portions are seized and are used for the cleansing ritual. From the sacred enclosure the king walks to the sacred hut in his natural suite, sufficiently strong to bite the most powerful of the new season's crops, and thereafter his people can eat the first fruits. Another ritual cow is offered during the final purification known as *kushisa lukhuni* (burning the wood) and its gall bladder is taken to the sacred enclosure for ritual purposes. During this purification rite all the objects used throughout the *Incwala* ceremony are

¹³¹ Kuper, H., *An African Aristocracy*, p214.

¹³² Gamedze A.B. "Church and State", p7

¹³³ Kuper, H; *An African Aristocracy*, p210

burnt in the fire meaning that all the “filth of the king priest and all his people lies here on the fire.”¹³⁴ Also, the king-priest bathes with the sacred water and as the water drops down, rain that will quench the fire will fall, hence his title that he is the rainmaker. According to Malan who quotes Kuper, the people who witness the event speak of the fire as purification and an offering to the ancestors, who must acknowledge it with rain.¹³⁵ The king then dresses in his normal, *Incwala* clothing and he joins his subjects as they sing and dance in jubilation. That concludes his role as the chief-priest who receives and transmits important messages from the national ancestors to the people. It is then taken for granted that the ancestors will relay all the messages to *Mvelinchanti* as at an appropriate time.

The above account has attempted to succinctly demonstrate the sacredness of the official religious duties of the king as the embodiment of the national ancestors. Through the ritual he strengthens and binds the nation together as well as linking it with its ancestors, the custodians of its well-being.

This chapter has discussed the indigenous worldview of the Swazi under six salient features, which are said to have contributed immensely towards the growth of the new religious system. The resonance between the two systems, to be discussed later, cannot be traced without first highlighting the basic

¹³⁴ Kuper, H., *An African Aristocracy*, p220

¹³⁵ Malan, S., *Swazi Culture*, p46.

features of the primal religion of the Swazi. The next chapter, which precedes the findings on the affinity between the two systems, focuses on the inception of Christianity in Swaziland, with special focus on the establishment of the Evangelical Church.

CHAPTER 4

A NEW RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION FOR THE SWAZI

...she had a special gift. Some other missionaries might sit on their grass mats, sleep in their huts, and eat their food. But, Malla did it as though she belonged there. Thus she found open hearts as well as open huts.¹³⁶

This chapter presents a new era in the religious “itinerary” of the Swazi people. Though its focus is largely on the interactions between the Swazi and Miss Malla Moe, the missionary pioneer of the Evangelical Church (E.C.), it will first give a synopsis of the advent of Christianity in Swaziland, as the background information that will give the reader a historical context in which the early interactions that resulted to the establishment of the E.C. occurred. It will then narrow its focus on the interactions between the Swazi and Miss Malla Moe.

THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY

In the previous chapter we mentioned that the history of the interactions between the Swazi and the early Western Missionaries begins with a dream, whereby King Somhlolo dreamt of strange people emerging from the sea, carrying two objects, *umculu* and *indilinga*. According to Cazziol, the King had heard from his representatives at the Zulu court, that the son and heir of Sekonyela, chief of the Mantatees was being instructed by the Missionaries, and was staying with them

¹³⁶ Nilsen, M.; *Malla Moe*, (eighth edition), Chicago: Moody Press, 1980, p52.

at the Mparani Mission station.¹³⁷ Sobhuza then decided to send a delegation to Mparani to request a missionary to come and reside at his royal kraal in Swaziland and instruct his son and successor, Mswati. "It was just before taking this decision that the Swazi King had had his dream of the *umculu* (scroll) and the *indilinga* (coin).¹³⁸ Unfortunately, because of financial constraints, the missionaries could not immediately respond to Sobhuza's request. Nonetheless at his death bed the dying king made his son and successor promise that he would pursue his father's vision.¹³⁹ The Swazi accepted this dream as a revelation from national ancestors about the unknown future of the nation in the midst of some external threats.

In pursuit of the historic dream, young Mswati, after his installation as king of Swaziland, sent two headmen in 1838 to fetch the missionaries to bring the *umculu* to Swaziland. These were Majuba Mndzebele and Mkonkoni Kunene. Matsebula further notes that the Swazi also longed to meet the missionaries because; "they heard that there were white people who were preaching the Word of *Mvelinchanti*, who evidently took it from the *umculu*."¹⁴⁰ After a considerable delay, in 1844, the Wesleyan Missionary Conference, held at Grahamstown took heed of Mswati's request, and sent missionaries to Swaziland. Eventually Rev. James Allison and Rev. Richard Giddy with two Basotho evangelists, Barnabas

¹³⁷ Cazziol, R. J.; *A Comparative study of Christian Missions in Swaziland*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Natal, 1989, p.96

¹³⁸ Cazziol, R.J. *A Comparative Study of Christian Missions*, p.96

¹³⁹ Mabundza, L.; *The Influence of Christianity on the Swazi*. M.A. Thesis, Canadian Nazarene College, 1976, p.37.

¹⁴⁰ Matsebula, J.M.S.; *A History of Swaziland*. Cape Town: Longman, 1972, p.16.

and Job decided on an exploratory visit to Swaziland before establishing a permanent settlement there. They got a friendly reception from a gathering of 'notables' at Lozitha Royal Palace, which included the young King Mswati II, Queen Mother Tsandzile, the King's uncle Prince Mbukwane, and about 200 chiefs and tindvunas.¹⁴¹ At the King's instruction they were designated some land at the southern portion of the Swazi domain, known as Dlovunga. After a two days journey they reached Dlovunga and received a warm welcome from the local people. Having received orders to help the missionaries in every possible way in the construction of the buildings, the local people completed a chapel and a large residential house, surrounded by a high fence, within a week. Also, they laid out a garden where they planted 150 fruit trees. The first Sunday Service in which a Holy Communion was conducted was on 7th July, 1844. The attendance on record in this newly built chapel was 400 people.¹⁴² The white missionaries left the following day for South Africa, taking along with them two young Swazi to be trained as teachers. The entire scenario on the first missionaries coming to Swaziland leads Kasanene, amongst other scholars, to the conclusion that "unlike in the most African countries, missionaries did not come to Swaziland on their own initiative; they were invited by the Swazi authorities and received an enthusiastic welcome when they arrived. All this was because of Sobhuza's dream."¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Cazziol, R.J.; *A Comparative Study of Christianity on the Swazi Missions*, p.98

¹⁴² Matsebula, J.S.M.; *A History of Swaziland* (2nd edition), 1987, p35.

¹⁴³ Kasanene, P.; *Religion in Swaziland*. Braamfontein: Skotaville, Publishers, p.44

Whilst Allison was in South Africa to raise enough funds for the second expedition and final settlement amongst the Swazi, Job and Barnabas, the African evangelists became aggressive in the task of converting the Swazi to Christianity and teaching them to read and write.¹⁴⁴ Quoting Kasenene, Mzizi notes that the lifestyle of the converts who accepted Christianity soon changed. Something that estranged them from the rest of the community; "they changed their way of dressing; those who had been polygamous chased away all their wives except one; they did not take part in beer parties or other traditional gatherings, and they boycotted Swazi national ceremonies and rituals".¹⁴⁵ In a letter directed to the Wesleyan Missionary Committee soliciting some funds, the seemingly impressed Rev. Giddy and Rev. Allison by what they termed a "good reception" of the gospel by the Swazi, had this to say about the Swazi:

...this nation of whom as yet we know comparatively nothing; excepting that they are numerous, peaceable, much in need of the Gospel and very anxious to obtain it.¹⁴⁶

Allison was able to raise enough money for the second expedition and on 13th June 1845 the party trekked to Swaziland for a permanent settlement. It comprised Rev Allison and his wife, Rev John Bertram, 12 Sotho teachers and their families and the two Swazi youth, Jacob and Johannes, who had been trained for almost a year as teacher evangelists.¹⁴⁷ They found that Barnabas and Job had opened a school where they taught and preached the good news

¹⁴⁴ Matsebula, J.S.M., *A History of Swaziland*, p.36

¹⁴⁵ Mzizi, J.B., "Impediments to Religions Tolerance in Swaziland: A Historical Survey" in *UNISWA Research Journal*, Vol 12, December 1998, p.43-54,(47).

¹⁴⁶ Cazziol, R.J.; *A Comparative Study of Christian Missions*, p.98.

¹⁴⁷ Perkins, F.J. *A History of Christian Missions in Swaziland to 1910*. M.A. Thesis, University of Witwatersrand, 1974: p.96.

contained in the *Umculu* to a large congregation of about 600 Swazi,¹⁴⁸ in a population of approximately 50 000 people residing in the Southern region. The missionaries were greatly encouraged by this achievement; as a result they established another mission station at Mahamba, a few kilometres away from the old one.

The smooth progress of missionary work was disturbed by some internal disputes within the royal family over some royal cattle.¹⁴⁹ Three rebellious chiefs and some people within the Kunene clan fled to the mission station seeking for refuge and Allison refused to surrender them to Mswati's commanders. On September 14, 1846, the mission station was attacked, but with Mswati's orders not to harm the missionaries or any of the assistants, and they were spared.¹⁵⁰ However, this caused terror amongst the people and an estimated 1000 Swazi fled to Pietermaritzburg following the missionaries, hence the area from which they ran away became known as Mahamba, "the runaways."¹⁵¹ This voluntary flight put an end to mission work in Swaziland for at least 35 years,¹⁵² while Mswati was king. Consequently Mswati became hostile against any missionary who wanted to establish mission stations in the country. For example, Rev. S.A. Merensky, a German missionary and his co-worker Rev. E. Grutner explored the

¹⁴⁸ Perkins, F.J.; *A History of Christian Missions*, p.97.

¹⁴⁹ Matsebula, J.S.M. *A History of Swaziland*, p.16. When Malambule handed the reigns of government to the young Mswati, he appropriated some of the royal cattle for himself and hid them. When Mswati found this out later, he sent his men to demand the return of the cattle and to punish Malambule. Malambule fled with his brothers Ndlela and Fokotsi to the south of the country to seek refuge among the Kunene clan. When Mswati sent his regiments to attack this clan for giving protection to the refugees, they fled to the mission station.

¹⁵⁰ Kasenene, P.; *Religion in Swaziland*, p.45

¹⁵¹ Matsebula, J.S.M., *A History of Swaziland*, p.36

¹⁵² Kasenene, P. *Religion in Swaziland*, p.46

possibility of expanding the Lutheran work in Swaziland, but were denied a friendly welcome. Perkins has documented that, "the king angrily retorted that he was not interested in the missionaries religion and contemptuously dismissed them."¹⁵³ Also, Rev. R. Robertson experienced that kind of reception from Prince Ndwandwe when he sought to meet the king at Zombodze royal kraal in 1871. He is quoted saying "we are happy to be left as we are. In all our troubles we consult Mr. Shepstone and he is enough missionary to us".¹⁵⁴ Cazziol suggests two reasons for the king's resentfulness against missionaries. Firstly, Mswati was surprised that Allison was now engaged in a new project down south without his consent, instead of coming up to the royal kraal at Lozitha. "This was a serious breach of etiquette on the part of Allison which later had disastrous consequences."¹⁵⁵ Secondly, it seemed Mswati held a grudge against the missionaries for what he suspected to be collusion with his enemies against him and for stealing some of his subjects to Natal.¹⁵⁶ Otherwise, this missionary venture, which had begun under auspicious circumstances, would not have come to an abrupt end if only "Allison had been less hasty in his wish to build new missionary stations and a bit more cautious in dealing with Swazi customs and sensibilities."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Perkins, F.J. *A History of Christian Missions*, p.169

¹⁵⁴ Shepstone was the then Natives agent in Natal who liaised between the British Government and African tribes, See Perkins, F.J. p.107

¹⁵⁵ Cazziol R.J. *A Comparative Study of Christian Missions*, p.102-103

¹⁵⁶ Cazziol, R.J. *A Comparative Study of Christian Missions*, p.103

¹⁵⁷ Cazziol, R.J. *A Comparative Study of Christian Missions*, p.103

It was during King Mbandzeni's reign, beginning in 1880, that Christianity made inroads to Swaziland again. Pressed by pressure from the concessionaires, Mbandzeni realised the importance of the education once offered by the missionaries. Out of his own initiative in May 1880, he invited Rev. Jackson to Swaziland to build a mission station at Usuthu, in Luyengo, that would have educational and industrial buildings. His sole aim was to send his nine children to receive education. Kasenene observes that "with the invitation of Rev. Jackson, doors were once more opened for missionary competition, and scramble for Swazi souls began."¹⁵⁸ Amongst these missionaries were Rev. Msimango and Rev. Mangena, Swazi ministers who had fled from Mahamba mission for the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Pietermaritzburg. In 1887 the Berlin Lutheran Missionary Society followed, but "did not commence active missionary work until 1902 when they were joined by Rev. Johannes Mndziniso, a Swazi Lutheran Church Minister."¹⁵⁹ In 1890 the South African General Mission (the present day A.E.C.) began its work in Bethany, under Rev. Dudley Kidd and John Baille. The Scandinavian Alliance Mission (S.A.M.), which gave birth to the Evangelical Church came next led by Miss Malla Moe. It started work at Bulunga in 1892. A lot more followed, but one cannot venture into those because of the scope of the thesis. Considering the history of the Evangelical Church in Swaziland and its early pioneer missionary, Miss Malla Moe, the questions which confront us are primarily these: who was she? Of what character was she? How did she relate to

¹⁵⁸ Kasenene, P. *Religion in Swaziland*, p.47

¹⁵⁹ Kasenene, P.; *Religion in Swaziland*, p.47

the Swazi? How did she establish the E.C.? What did she accomplish in the 84 years of her life?

The next section therefore seeks to answer these questions in an attempt to further portray the interactions between the Swazi and the early missionaries, using Malla as an example. Before one engages in this task, it is important that we show in broad lines the foundations or origins of the Evangelical Church.

THE ORIGINS OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH

The history of the early stages of the Evangelical Church is unavoidably intertwined with that of the Scandinavian Alliance Mission (S.A.M.), whose founder was Frederick Franson. S.A.M., which originated from Scandinavia, but had its headquarters in North America, later changed its name to TEAM after the missionaries who originally came from Scandinavian countries, thus legitimizing the name, had seceded to form their own autonomous mission societies. Born in June 1852 in Sweden, at the age of 23, Franson joined the Moody Church in Chicago under the leadership of the popular world evangelist D.L. Moody. As his disciple, Franson adopted Moody's objectives and methods of spreading the gospel. It was in 1878 that Moody's Church conferred ministerial credentials upon him and he became its first commissioned missionary. Franson is described in *"Fifty Wonderful Years"* as a Swedish young man with a mind clear

and intelligent, able to see visions, seek knowledge, understand truth, and with a yearning to be something and do something in the world.¹⁶⁰

By 1881 he became famous as an Evangelist in America, Scandinavia and European countries. On his crusade trips he heard about Hudson Taylor, pioneer missionary to China, who made an urgent appeal for 1000 young recruits for missionary work in China. Franson was inspired by this stirring appeal, and he began to pray and to secure recruits for mission work. He then founded the S.A.M., which had a vision for the worldwide ministry. He shared this vision with the missionaries who were to go to the world mission fields. To equip them for the task, he trained them, emphasizing on the importance of:¹⁶¹

- i. Knowing and trusting God
- ii. Being spirit – filled
- iii. Being a prayer warrior.

By 1819 and 1892, Franson had trained and sent out 97 consecrated, zealous young people as pioneer missionaries of the S.A.M. Amongst those, were 15 missionaries to Japan sent in November, 1892, 12 to China in February, 1892, 12 to Indian in March and 8 to Africa in April. The four men and four women who were sent to South Africa were;¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Grauer O.C. (ed) *Fifty Wonderful Years: Missionary Service in Foreign Lands*, Illinois: S.A.M., 1940, p.9

¹⁶¹ Gamedze, A.B. *A Brief History of the Evangelical Church from 1892 – 1982* (unpublished) p.3

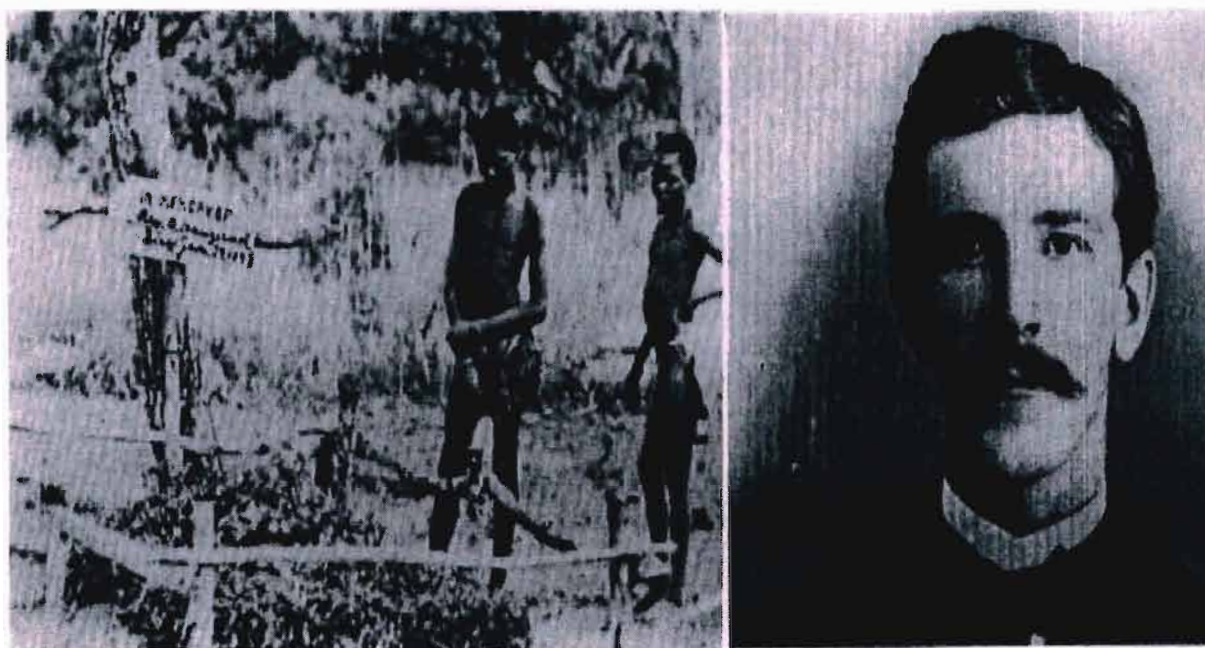
¹⁶² Grauer, O.C. (ed) *Wonderful Years*, p.188.

- i. Paul Gulander – a student in Chicago Theological Seminary
- ii. Andrew Hangerud - a student in Moody Bible Institute
- iii. Augusta Hultberg - a nurse from Stockholm
- iv. Care Poulsen – a student in Chicago Theological Seminary
- v. Lizzie Jorgensen
- vi. **Malla Moe**
- vii. Emma Homme
- viii. Emelia Forbord

This group of missionaries left New York City in April 2, 1892.¹⁶³ They reached their destination, which was Durban, after a 6 weeks voyage. As counted in the list of zealous missionaries that came to Africa, Miss Malla Moe is the woman missionary who is closely associated with the pioneering work and ultimate establishment of the Evangelical Church (E.C.) in Swaziland.

After resting for a few weeks the missionaries went to Ekuthandaneni a Norwegian mission stations to study the Zulu language. Their initial plan was to explore Mashonaland that was popularised by David Livingstone some two decades earlier. The ruling king who denied Mr Haugerud and Mr Nielsen entry into the country whilst on an exploratory trip eventually aborted their plan. They then selected Swaziland as the virgin field for their labour. Unfortunately their

¹⁶³ Swanson, J.F., (ed) *Three Score Years... and Their Sixty years of Worldwide Missionary Advance*, Illinois: TEAM, p.450.



The first missionary grave in our Africa Field was that of Missionary Andrew Haugerud. He died January 29, 1893 while on an exploration trip to Mashonaland.

choice of location Bulunga, was at that time a deadly fever district. Missionary Andrew Haugerud, the leader of the group was stricken with malaria, whilst undertaking an exploratory tour to spy out for land settlement. He was buried in Bulunga; "here the first seed was planted, from the ranks of the missionaries, in African soil."¹⁶⁴

It was on this sad note that the S.A.M. made its entrance upon the Swazi missionary scene. The death of Haugerud in January 1893 and three others from the original eight devastated the group, and it began to have doubts and regrets that made the future look bleak. Whilst in that despair, the remaining missionaries received a letter from a Mr. Fischer, a resident at Bulunga, inviting them to come to Swaziland. He promised them some land where they could erect a building and also use as fields for food production. Travelling by ox carts, the four lady missionaries accompanied by Mr. Dawsen (the builder) and Mr Theunnissen (a pioneer farmer and sugar planter) reached Bulunga in Swaziland on July 6th 1892 after a 5 weeks journey. As promised, Mr Fischer leased 500 acres of his concession to the mission and the S.A.M., which gave birth to the E.C. was thus planted in Swaziland.¹⁶⁵ With the help of the Swazi, the missionaries built a three-room house, whilst they used tents as temporary shelters. They used Saturdays to reach out to the Swazi people. Because they had learnt Zulu in Natal and were using Zulu Bibles and 'native' books, they were able to communicate with the Swazi.

¹⁶⁴ Swanson, J.F., *Three Score Years*, p.197

¹⁶⁵ Perkins J.F., *A History of Christian Mission*, p.292

Since the study gives a special attention to the pioneering work of Miss Malla Moe, as indicated earlier, details of the contribution of the other three lady pioneer missionaries towards the development of Christianity in Swaziland are passed over, but it is a matter of record that their hard work against tremendous odds left an indelible mark in the history of the Christian Church in Swaziland.

MISS MALLA MOE AND THE SWAZI

Before one ventures into the interactions between the Swazi and Miss Malla Moe a brief comment on who she was is in order. She was born in September 12, 1863 in Norway. After the death of her parents, she and her sister Dorothea migrated to Chicago in 1884. Whilst attending Moody Church she was challenged by Moody's campaigns on missions. As earlier indicated Frederick Franson ultimately commissioned her to missionary work in Africa, where she spent 54 years of vigorous service. She had an all consuming passion for souls; "motivated by her unflagging burning love for God, her sacrificial love for His work and consuming passion for lost souls...her unsurpassed hospitality and prompt response to the hurting and needy,"¹⁶⁶ she was able to win the hearts of the Swazi, and they said of her, "she eats our food, she knows our names, she never forgets us."¹⁶⁷ However, there was another side of Miss Moe that sometimes got her into trouble, particularly with her fellow workers; she was

¹⁶⁶ Gamedze, A.B.; *A brief history of the Evangelical Church*, p1

¹⁶⁷ Nilsen, M.; Malla Moe, cover page comment.

impatient and domineering, too direct and frank; "she made man face issues they would have escaped if possible."¹⁶⁸

Together with the African co-workers, she trekked thousands of miles by foot and later by donkey wagon to establish and develop the Evangelical Church in Swaziland, Zululand and Natal and Transvaal. The following is 1915 statistics of Evangelical Church mission stations.¹⁶⁹

In Swaziland	Zululand	Natal and Transvaal
1. Five main stations Bethel, Mhlosheni, Esinceni, Bethany, Florence.	5 main stations Opondweni, Magwazana, Ingwavuma, Nongoma, Ekuzeni.	3 main stations Louwsburg, Gwaliweni, Magudu.
2. 53 out stations		

Most of these mission stations were located in 'native' areas whereby Miss Moe would first secure consent of the local chief before she could start a school or a church.

Evidently, Malla had "the burden for lost souls and an intense desire to win the people of Africa to Christ,"¹⁷⁰ which had compelled her as a Norwegian

¹⁶⁸ Nilsen, M.; *Malla Moe*, (eighth edition), Chicago: Moody Press, 1980, p169.

¹⁶⁹ Graner, O.C. (ed) *Wonderful Years*, p.186.

¹⁷⁰ Swanson, J.F., *Three Score Years*, p.196.

immigrant to America, to sail with the original party of the S.A.M. missionaries. But, her first year in Africa was filled with doubts and regrets. Her slow progress in learning the strange word forms and clicks of the Zulu language was sprinkled with discouragement. Also, the death of Haugerud who succumbed to fever in Bulunga greatly devastated Malla; he was more than a leader to her, he had proposed marriage to her before he embarked on the survey trip to Swaziland. Though she did not accept the proposal, "her heart now was saying that when she answered him she did not anticipate this loneliness, and had he returned, she might have changed her answer."¹⁷¹ Also, her first impression of the Africans depressed her;

....they were much less attractive to Malla than her preconceived notions of them...their minds and hearts were darker than their windowless huts. True, they were bothered little about the wishes of the God above, but they were in constant fear and terror about the evil spirits, so much nearer and so much more capable of doing them harm. Their very culture had become degraded by succeeding generations of the practice of black magic and blind obedience to the tribal witch doctor.¹⁷²

According to Nilsen, the depressed Malla told the Lord that if she were ever to work among the Africans, He would have to give her a divine love; her own would never reach them.¹⁷³ These three challenges amongst others, made Malla's future look bleak. She began to seriously question why she had come to Africa in the first place. "Her enemy said to her that Franson was a

¹⁷¹Nilsen, M; *Malla Moe*, (eight edition) Chicago: Moody Press, 1980, p.39.

¹⁷² Nilsen, M; *Malla Moe*, p.33.

¹⁷³ Nilsen, M; *Malla Moe*, p.32.

blundering idealist, and she had better return home".¹⁷⁴ Whilst in that confusion the day of their departure came, and the group trekked to Bulunga in Swaziland. The question that the study seeks to explore next is, how did the confused and depressed Malla interact with the Swazi? Did her doubts and regrets persist or she managed to overcome them?

As indicated above Miss Moe spent more than half a century in Swaziland-interrupted by only two furloughs. She lived in two mission stations; first in Bulunga and in Bethel, which later became the head quarters for the Evangelical in Church.

IN BULUNGA

As shown above Malla and the other three women missionaries settled in the newly built mission station at Bulunga. At first they used Saturdays to contact the Swazi and they held their Sunday services at the building site. Their first efforts were, however, disappointing; the Swazi did not seem to be receptive to the message preached by the missionaries. This was probably because of their painful experience during the reign of Mbandzeni in the 1880s whereby he bargained away almost all his country's land to European concessionaries in return for tinkers, guns, money, grey hounds, horses and other white man's products. The Swazi therefore distrusted any newcomer, especially if he/she was white. When the missionaries introduced themselves as people who had come to build a school to teach the Swazi children about the King of Heaven, the Swazi

¹⁷⁴ Nilsen, M; *Malla Moe*, p.34.



REV. JOHN GAMEDZE AND MISS MALLA MOE

showed some resistance. The Swazi probably thought that the King of Heaven would compete with their Swazi king (King Bhunu) who they feared and cherished that they would not want to betray to serve another king. Miss Moe, the more venturesome of the four lady missionaries conceived a new step to reach out to the Swazi. She realized that the best way to interact with the Swazi and “have their eyes opened to the love of God and salvation in Jesus Christ”¹⁷⁵ would not only to visit the Swazi in their kraals, but to “make her home among them, and she would go alone.”¹⁷⁶ She embarked on itinerant village evangelism.

Her first experience of village life and close contact with the Swazi was at Mahahane’s kraal where she got a warm welcome from the headman, Mahahane. Introducing her to the crowd that had gathered for festivity, Mahahane explained that Malla was not a trader, but a visitor who would tell them about *Mvelinchanti*, the King in Heaven and also learn their culture. This is where she seemed to have made a breakthrough in her ministry amongst the Swazi.¹⁷⁷ That night, before she retired to sleep in the small beehive offered by Mahahane, with her meager command of the Swazi language, she only managed to tell the people that God loved them. The following morning, before she could wake up, her hut was again filled with “inquisitive black faces”, for whom she had special love.¹⁷⁸ With the consuming passion for souls, her earnest wish was to demonstrate that God loved the Swazi, but how? It was in this frame of mind that

¹⁷⁵ Nilsen, M; *Malla Moe*, p.44

¹⁷⁶ Nilsen M; *Malla Moe*, p.45

¹⁷⁷ Perkins, J.F. *A History of Christian Mission*, p.321.

¹⁷⁸ Nilsen, M; *Malla, Moe*, p.46.

Malla adopted a new strategy to interact with the Swazi. She bought little gifts from the Fischer's store, which included salt, matches, bits of colored cloth and sugar to distribute to her audience to demonstrate God's love for the people. This became her practice in all the 9 kraals she stayed in, about a month at each, within one year. One then wonders, what if the gifts were the attraction to the Gospel? Malla would always argue that, "as long as they heard...if she could get these people to believe that God in Heaven loved them, she believed they would turn to Him.... love would have to be proved with gifts."¹⁷⁹

Her daytime audience in the kraals was usually elderly women and children. The younger wives were too busy with daily chores to sit down and listen. The young men were lounging around the cattle kraals, discussing the news of the day. Boys were out in the fields chasing birds out of the corn or minding cattle at the velds. But, in the evenings they all came to her hut and let her teach them songs, read from the Bible and answer their questions. In their interactions, she realized that the Swazi lived in perpetual fear and that disturbed her. "They were frantically afraid of death, and, at times of sickness would resort to hysterical manipulations – cutting the flesh or administering obnoxious concoctions – to drive away the evil spirits causing it."¹⁸⁰ She introduced the custom of praying for them before they dispersed for the night, amongst other things asking for God's protection against all evil, and "it made them feel good, even sleep better."¹⁸¹ In spite of all discouragement from the contemporary missionaries that she should

¹⁷⁹ Nilsen, M; *Malla Moe*, p.46.

¹⁸⁰ Nilsen, M; *Malla, Moe*, p.48.

¹⁸¹ Nilsen, M; *Malla Moe*, p.50.

not stay with the Swazi because they were “heathens”, Malla was determined and convinced that she should stay with them to prove that God loved them. One elderly lady who had often sat and listened during the day at her kraal had this to say in appreciation of Malla, on the last day before her departure to the next kraal:

Now I am happy. You have wiped away my tears. I can see you are from God. You are not like other white people. We sit with you, we talk with you, you make us happy. You are one of us. May I kiss you?¹⁸²

On the other hand, though Malla had established good rapport with the Swazi through her intimate association with them in their homes, she felt that she had not yet fully reached them to touch the inner most of their hearts. She therefore fasted and prayed for an African co-worker. In a dream, the Lord appeared and said, “I will send someone to help you.”¹⁸³ She eventually met a young man named Mbulawa “*Pelepele*” (hot pepper) Gamedze who one day came to the mission station “looking for Jesus,” (an answer he gave to Malla when she asked him where he was going). “*Pelepele*” was an aspiring diviner due to be trained to protect the society from those who practised magic to serve their selfish ends. However, his family tried to cut off the spirit of divination to protect his right to head a kraal. A goat was killed and its blood was cooked and Mbulawa had to perform various rituals with it. All this did not work. As he worked in various places to earn a living he experienced a deep quest for the Book. He decided to

¹⁸² Nilsen, M.; *Malla Moe*, p52

¹⁸³ Nilsen, M.; *Malla Moe*, p49



MALLA MOE'S GOSPEL WAGON AND TENT

stop working to begin the search for the Book. When asked by his friends where he was going, his answer was, "I want to learn the Book, and I'll go to the end of the earth find some missionaries to teach me."¹⁸⁴ He became a pupil and a special helper sent by God to Malla, as answer to her prayer. Mbulawa, baptized Johan, was amongst the first three converts to be baptized and was the first fully commissioned or consecrated African minister in the S.A.M.¹⁸⁵ After three years in Africa Malla noted, in her diary, that she was convinced that the future of the mission work and the growth of the church in Swaziland depended upon using young men like Johan. The people listened to him more intently, understood him better.¹⁸⁶ As a close companion and a disciple, she taught Johan the principles of fasting and praying, of casting out demons, healing the sick, solving demon-caused problems, and winning souls to Christ.¹⁸⁷ Hence the miracle that happened at the mountain after the illiterate Johan had fasted and prayed for several days; he was able to read and write.

These are the same Christian principles which Miss Moe imparted on women converts, who organized themselves to form Evangelistic bands known as *Lumenyano* in 1934. "These groups of women have been the means in God's hand of winning hundreds for the Lord. They walk 30-40 miles for evangelistic

¹⁸⁴ Nilsen, M.; *Malla Moe*, p58.

¹⁸⁵ Perkins, F.J.; *A History of Christian Missions*, p320.

¹⁸⁶ Nilsen, M.; *Malla Moe*, p91

¹⁸⁷ Gamedze, A.M. Informal interview, Manzini, 23 July 2004.



THE "LUMENYANO", WOMEN CRUSADERS

meetings, and God has richly honored their efforts to reach the lost and backsliders...”,¹⁸⁸ argued Grauer.

As teammates, Malla and Johan became aggressive in itinerant village evangelism. Of the kraals they lodged in, one that deserves special mention is that of Nyathini because it is where Malla's ministry had another breakthrough. Whilst there Malla would travel some 30 miles to collect her mail from a store owned by James Henwood, an Englishman who had married a Swazi woman. Mrs Henwood met Malla and that seemed to be an answer to Mrs Henwood's prayer. She had an earnest desire to interact with missionaries ever since the sudden death of her 2-year-old first child. Before she succumbed to death the girl said "*mame pezulu ezulwini*" (Mother, up to Heaven). From that day the mother wanted to learn how to become a Christian and get proper religious training for her children.¹⁸⁹ Eventually, Malla became acquainted with the Henwoods. It was this acquaintance that opened the way for the establishment of the Bethel mission station, the centre of Malla's activity and the headquarters of the Evangelical Church in Swaziland. When Nyathini faced severe famine and Johan had to go to look for a job because of family obligations, Malla approached the Henwoods to ask for a piece of land in their farm to build a mission station.

Her request was granted and she was given a little deserted broken sod hut in Henwood's farm as her home. Without delay, she moved in with 8 children from

¹⁸⁸ Grauer, *Wonderful Years*, p200.

¹⁸⁹ Nilsen, M.; *Malla Moe*, p81

other times with converts and evangelists, she made numerous trips to the kraals to preach and to ask for pupils to attend school in the mission station. She did this until she was 65. To keep up with her youthful vision and intensifying passion for souls, the Berger brothers in Durban built her a self-contained house wagon, which she used when traveling to distant kraals. It was lettered *Inqola YeVangeli* (Gospel Wagon) on the side. It was driven by Sonias Sibiya and Mafika, one of Malla's converts led and took care of the 8 pairs of donkeys that pulled it. Three ladies converts, Josephine Khumalo, Lizzie Shabangu and Leah Gama accompanied Malla as cooks and helpers. As bait for making friends whilst interacting, she would load 200 pounds of salt and three or four bags of matches and quantities of used clothing to give to new converts."¹⁹⁴ The wagon also served as a headquarters for visits at these distant kraals. Every Sunday there would be teaching all day and the cooks would serve the crowds with tea and bread.

Through the Gospel Wagon, Malla was able to establish a close contact between her and the then Queen Mother of Swaziland, Madvolomafishatanyana. She became "my white child" to the queen.¹⁹⁵ After securing permission from the queen to stay at her homestead, she was placed in a hut with 10 young girls, the king's daughters. The queen appreciated a prayer at retiring time and she expressed some desire that her people should be taught about *Mvelinchanti*. As

¹⁹⁴ Nilsen, M.; Malla Moe, p175

¹⁹⁵ Perkins, F.J.; A history of Christian Missions, p320



A GROUP OF EVANGELISTS WON AND CONVERTED AND SET TO WORK
PREACHING THE GOSPEL BEFORE THE YEAR 1916

Malla explained the gospel to her, Malla noted, "it appeared that the gospel message was beginning to penetrate into the understanding of the old queen."¹⁹⁶

She also had an influence in the development of education, though indirectly. She had started a school in Bethel where she taught the Swazi children how to read and write. Other missionaries, the Dawsens, the Lohnes, the Olsens and the Pagards later joined her to carry out the vision. This led to the development of Franson Memorial Bible School (F.M.B.S.), named after Frederick Franson, where a number of Swazi young people received some training. F.M.B.S. offered training from the beginning grades through high school. The early missionaries took an advantage of the growing hunger for education among the Swazi, "to present Christ to them as their Saviour and having done this, to lay a firm foundation for the Christian life through daily Bible teaching."¹⁹⁷ The missionaries under the banner of the TEAM, built many more schools. They ran these schools until 1950 when TEAM handed over the instruments of self-government to the Africans and the indigenous church was registered as the "Bantu Evangelical Church."

THE CONVERTS AT BETHEL

Through the aggressive preaching of Malla and her dedicated Swazi co-workers, her acts of love, a new light entered many kraals and huts and many people were converted to Christianity;

¹⁹⁶ Perkins, F.J.; A history of Christian Missions, p321

¹⁹⁷ Swanson, J.F.:(ed). *Three Score Years*, p211

...beer drinks were exchanged for song services, black magic for prayer meetings, and witchdoctors for native evangelists.¹⁹⁸

After the declaration of the Swazi converts that they “love the King” (bayayitsandza Inkhosi), they would be led into the mission house room to be given second-hand European clothing, which distinguished them as “Christians.”¹⁹⁹

A blind man whom she named Barnabas, the first convert in Bethel, was instrumental in preaching the gospel around the nearby homesteads. Malla engaged a young man she named Paul to lead Barnabas. A young lady named Mary, who amongst others, was healed through prayer after being bed ridden, without a single administration of medicine or magic, became an aggressive soul winner after conversion. Having escaped from an arranged marriage, she resided with Malla at the mission station and they became teammates. Johan who had returned from the mines to be a full time evangelist preached in the open air and many Swazi, holding branches over their heads to provide shade waited patiently to hear the gospel.²⁰⁰ The converted came in their numbers to the mission and she trained them to preach and witness to one another because she realized that “they had a special gift; they could preach better than the missionaries”.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Nilsen, M.; *Malla Moe*, p194.

¹⁹⁹ Gamedze A.B. written interview, 17 May 2004.

²⁰⁰ Gamedze, A.M. ; oral interview, at Manzini, 10 June, 2004.

²⁰¹ Nilsen, M.; *Malla Moe*, p91.

Malla's great concern, however, was that the new life the Swazi had received should be more than a profession of beliefs, putting on European clothes, attending school, traveling around the country preaching, it must be an inward, sincere conviction exhibited in their daily, personal habits. She refrained from drawing up arbitrary codes of ethics for the converts, which she often argued, produced hypocritical, legalistic Christians. Instead, she entrusted the converts to go to the mountain to fast and pray and search from scriptures for solutions and direction on interpretation of Christian ethical standards. For example, the converts sought for God's will concerning the drinking of alcoholic beverages and smoking. Having unanimously agreed on abstinence from these habits, this "became a form custom among Christians of the Scandinavian Alliance Mission and was later adopted as a precept by the Bantu Evangelical Church".²⁰²

Bethel became the center for many strange events that aroused the curiosity of the Swazi and convinced them that "this little white lady had some kind of an 'in' with the Great One."²⁰³ Because of time and space the thesis cannot discuss all these numerous events. One spectacular miracle, which the residents in Bethel still talk about, occurred in 14th June, 1897 when there was severe drought in the whole country. This is how the Gamedzes relate the miracle.²⁰⁴ Thousands of people led by Johan and other five Swazi converts went to the top of Mount Mkhwakhweni to pray for rain. As the six walked slowly up, they sang the hymn: "*UJehova unamandla, Zonk'izinto Zenziwe Uye...*" (Jehovah is almighty, all

²⁰² Perkins, F.J.; *A history of Christian Missions*, p333

²⁰³ Nilsen, M.; *Malla Moe*, p96.

²⁰⁴ A.M. and A.B. Gamedze, oral interviews, Manzini, 23 July 2004, 3 August 2004.

things were created by Him). After forming a circle, they started praying to Jehovah, commanding the rain to come “now”, for the glory and honor of God and for the sake of the thousands who were heading for the Christ less eternity. In a matter of minutes, a small cloud appeared in the sky. Drops of rain started to fall. Engulfed with fear the people dispersed and ran to their homes. A lightening thunderbolt struck about one hundred metres from the prayer spot, whilst it was raining heavily. From that time on, the spot the lightening struck has always retained water as some kind of a shallow pond. After this miracle there was a big crusade and hundreds of Swazis were converted to Christianity.

In summary, the chapter has shown the special bond that existed between the Swazi and Miss Moe as a result of their interactions. It has implicitly attributed the success of the gospel story in Swaziland to Malla’s close identification with the Swazi; as stated by the introductory quotation “thus she found open hearts as well as open huts.” However, this paper assumes that the Swazi religious categories discussed in the previous descriptive chapter were the most crucial factor in the early interactions between the Swazi and the missionaries, hence the good response to the gospel of the good news. As a nation that had always been religious, worshipping *Mvelinchanti*, the Swazi recognized what they had been searching for in the gospel story; it was a fulfillment of their spiritual quest. On the other hand it is worth noting that the good reception of the gospel by Swazi does not suggest that the Swazi were accepted as they were in the new faith; the missionaries heavily criticized some of their customs. Their Swazi

traditional names, ceremonies and attires, for example were regarded as “heathen.”²⁰⁵ This leads us to the next chapter, which seeks to identify the continuity between the Swazi traditional religious categories and Christianity.

²⁰⁵ Gamedze A.B. recorded interview at Mbabane, 2 October 2004.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS ON AFFINITY BETWEEN SWAZI RELIGION AND CHRISTIANITY

In our opening chapters we sketched a general historical background of Swaziland, the people and their indigenous religious orientation, and also the inception of a new religious orientation by early Christian missionaries with specific reference to Miss Moe in relation to the establishment of the Evangelical Church in Swaziland.

The primary assumption that has guided this exploration is that God in His ineffable providence provided in the Swazi soil a providential preparation for the seed of Christianity. Thus, the study gives special recognition to the Swazi primal religious orientation for its potential salutary effect on the new religious orientation initiated by the pioneer missionaries in Swaziland.

In its careful exploration of the subject the study has challenged us to leave our present day world and phenomenologically enter into a world, which existed more than 100 years ago, to enable this chapter identify an affinity between two religious orientations that influenced the Swazi primal people. This helps us realize that Christianity is a continuation of the extolled earlier heritage, not a total negation of the indigenous beliefs, as it has been believed to be so.

The preceding chapters attempted to argue that the whole concept of religion was not an imported ideology to the primal religionists but was part of their

cultural heritage, which permeated all the facets of their life. Their understanding of religion evidenced itself in their system of beliefs, practices, ceremonies and festivals, religious objects and places, values and morals and religious officials, which this study has identified in five salient features. Through documentary analysis, supplemented with in-depth interviews on these religious tenets, the study has identified some connective strands between Swazi primal religion and Christianity. This serves as a confirmation that the primal worldview laid down the foundation for Christianity, whose tenets consisted of reformulations of the pre-existing primal categories.

This chapter therefore presents the researcher's findings, specifically on the affinity between some aspects of the Swazi primal religion and Christianity. But, before tackling the real issue, it is imperative that we remind the reader of the general perspective of the study and also explain the methods and procedures used to collect the data and how the data has been analyzed.

METHODOLOGY

1. General perspective

The methodology in this historical research could be described as qualitative. Various perspectives that were theological, anthropological, phenomenological and social in nature informed the study. It therefore reflects the following characteristics:

1. The data collected through scrutiny of archival documents and in depth interviews have been merged to draw up themes that revealed the findings on the research problem.
2. The collected data has been transcribed and synthesized into a coherent description of the subject under investigation.
3. The data is composed of a detailed, lucid description of events, inquiry in depth, direct quotations capturing the participants' personal perspectives and experiences. Also, the researcher's own insights contributed to the relevant data, whilst she took a neutral non-judgmental stance toward the content that emerged.
4. The data has not been collected at the end of the study; it has been an ongoing exercise. Examination of various documents and records relevant to the study, supplemented with in depth interviews of the selected participants has been an ongoing process since February 2004 until October 2004. The questions that guided the inquiries are attached as appendix 2.

2. Context and Participants

The research journeys have taken the researcher to the southern part of Swaziland, the original base of the Evangelical Church to interview some participants. Other participants, who are originally from the south but relocated to Manzini and Mbabane, were also consulted. The researcher has not interviewed whoever was available; instead she used her judgment to select a sample that had the relevant information to provide the data she needed. She therefore took a purposive sample to represent the larger population. She based her selection of participants on the following independent variables:

- Age (50+ years).
- Religion (Senior members of the E.C.)
- Education (theological Training).

Following is a list of the key informants of the study, purposefully selected using the above criteria.

- 1) Rev. Dr. A.B. Gamedze – The son to Rev. J. Gamedze, Miss Moe's co-worker and the first consecrated Minister of the Bantu Evangelical Church. Miss Moe schooled A.B. Gamedze up to University level. He was the 4th president of the Bantu Evangelical Church.
- 2) Rev. A.M.Gamedze – The younger son to Rev. Johan Gamedze. He was brought up and schooled by Miss Moe. He is an ordained and retired minister of the E.C.
- 3) Rev. S. Simelane – An ordained Minister of the Evangelical Church.

- 4) Professor C.M. Mndzebele – An elder in the Evangelical Church and the son to the first president of the Bantu Evangelical Church, Rev. A.Mndzebele,
- 5) Mr. M.P. Simelane – An elder in the Evangelical Church and a Bible student.
- 6) Rev. A. Simelane – An ordained minister and the 3rd National secretary of the Bantu Evangelical Church.
- 7) Gogo E. Mamba – A contemporary of Miss Moe and the 4th leader of *Lumenyano* (Women Crusaders).
- 8) Rev. Dr. N.T. Nyawo – Son to the 2nd president of the Bantu Evangelical Church and the current president of the Evangelical Church internationally.
- 9) Rev. Bruce Britten – A Scandinavian missionary presently living in Swaziland, and former chairman of TEAM.
- 10) Mr. J.B.J.S. Dlamini – An elder in the Evangelical Church.
- 11) Rev. E.T. Dlamini – An ordained minister of the Evangelical Church and principal of the Evangelical Church Bible School.
- 12) Gogo Mndzebele – The wife of the first president of the Bantu Evangelical Church and a member of the women crusaders.

3. Procedures followed in Data Collection

In collecting the data for the research, several procedures were followed. Interview schedules with the above participants were set, in which the

researcher, using structured questions orally interviewed the participants. The interview schedules took 2 hours 30 minutes at the most, and each informant was visited twice. These retrospective interviews were sometimes informal. The analysis of early records and documents was done concurrently with the interview schedules. Relevant historical, theological and anthropological documents were selected from the books and Africana collections in the libraries of the Universities of Swaziland and Kwa-Zulu Natal-Pietermaritzburg and Akrofi-Christaler Memorial Centre. Records from TEAM head office in Johannesburg have shared some invaluable insights on the subject. Archival documents from Swaziland National Archives have also yielded valuable material. Pertaining the selection of the documents, the researcher has used pertinent ones that relevant to her purpose.

Since this study is a qualitative historical research, implying that it has relied heavily on documented historical accounts and people's perceptions, the researcher has applied certain procedures to check and enhance validity and reliability of the data. These include checking one informant's descriptions against another informant's viewpoint on the same point; examining and comparing historical accounts; writing down questions asked to reduce distortions owing to selective forgetting; documenting the sources of remarks; using of an audio-type and interviewing some informants more than once to check consistency.

4. Data analysis

Data has been analyzed using several strategies. The researcher has combined the collected data and organized it into themes that show the affinity between Swazi primal categories and Christianity. With the interview data in particular, she has transcribed interviews and read the transcripts to identify categories of the responses of the participants, which she then merged with the document analysis into final themes. The following are the findings on the investigated problem, presented in nine different themes.

FINDINGS

The Concept of God

Evidence abounds that before the inception of Christianity, the Swazi had a lively concept of God that was monotheistic in nature. One informant attributed this to natural instincts that God endowed in human beings saying; "...it is the in born impulses implanted within the creature to enable it to instinctively do what is humane and acceptable to the Supreme Being."²⁰⁶ St Paul attesting to this truth, the informant argues, said the primal people who knew nothing about God's law conducted themselves so well; it was as though they knew about Him and His laws. He said, naturally, primal people's behavior reflected a spontaneous reverence for the Supreme Being. His laws were written in their hearts (Rom2:14-16). Another informant further observed that stories about creation, which shaped the religious world of the primal Swazi, however inadequate, lend support to this view. The indigenous names ascribed to Him by the primal

²⁰⁶ M.P. Simelane, written interview, 14 September, 2004, Manzini.

people, prove that He enjoyed a higher and unique status than any other being.²⁰⁷

So lofty was the Swazi view of God that it neatly resonated with the Biblical concept of God. For example, the primal Swazi spoke of *Mvelinchanti*, “the One Who Appeared first”, whilst the Bible states that “in the beginning was God” (Gen 1:1) His attributes that He is Omnipotent, Omniscient, wise, immutable and the Creator of all things, as stated in a previous chapter, has an obvious linkage with the Christian categories.

Again, the primal Swazi did not have questions about *Mvelinchanti's* dwelling place; “they knew that His abode was remote, up above and beyond the sky. And as a respected fatherly figure, He was too great to be approached directly and to intermingle with the mundane affairs of man, hence the active participation of His emissaries, the ancestors.”²⁰⁸ However, His withdrawal did not mean that He was not intimately involved or concerned with the world of human beings. He had a direct interest in the people's welfare; He minded how they lived, whether they had good or bad harvest, whether they were in good or bad health, rich or poor, alive or dead. This is affirmed in Mbiti's comment on the nature of God as perceived by traditional societies. He states,

Many visualize God as Father, both in terms of His position as the universal Creator and Provider, and in the sense of His personal availability to them in time of need.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Rev N.T. Nyawo, written interview, 5 October 2004, Manzini.

²⁰⁸ Rev. A. Simelane, written interview, 3 October 2004, Manzini.

²⁰⁹ Mbiti, J.S. *African Religions and Philosophy*, second edition, Ibadin: Heinemann, 1990, p48.

When the early missionaries came they introduced a Christian concept that God is "Our father who art in Heaven" (Matthew 6:9), and this linked with the Traditional concept of God.²¹⁰ He was introduced as the God of love, who always sought reconciliation with His creation. If these assertions embody substantial truth, the obvious inference must be that the traditional concept of God amongst the Swazi built a foundation for the Christian concept of God to grow and flourish and be easily comprehended by the recipients.

The Concept of the Immortality of the Soul

Death is not the dark door that shuts forever behind man, but the opened door through which he enters into true life.²¹¹

The early missionaries taught the Swazi about the sacredness of life and its immortality. The latter found this concept to be an extension of their religion-cultural belief. As indicated earlier, though a primal Swazi feared death, and would undergo ritual ablutions to purify himself/herself from any evil that was life threatening, he/she also perceived death as a journey into a better world where a person lived forever. Informed by the death myth cited earlier, they knew that *Mvelinchanti* had appointed that they would die once and be promoted to a new status in which the soul readjusted itself to the new type of existence whilst retaining its old individuality and personality. This underlines the unity between

²¹⁰ Rev. N.T. Nyawo, written interview, 5 October 2004, Manzini.

²¹¹ Penoukou, E.J. "Christology in the village" in Robert J. Schreier (ed.) *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, Maryknoll: Orbis Book, 1986, p31.

the spiritual universe and the physical, which Mbiti has repeatedly emphasized, saying, "these two intermingle and dovetail each other so much that it is not easy, or even necessary, at times to draw the distinction or separate them."²¹² As explained in details in chapter two, in that new world the person would be so alive that he/she would be actively involved with the mundane affairs of his/her living relatives, as *Mvelinchanti's* lieutenant. Hence the ancestors were approached in a human pragmatic way with life's problems. Flowing from this idea of the immortality of the soul is the notion of retribution. They believed that a person would be judged after his/her death in accordance with deeds done on earth. As observed by one informant²¹³, deviants would never be elevated to be ancestors, but would be punished and be evil spirits that would linger around haunting the living relatives. Put differently, culturally approved behavior would be rewarded after death, whilst disapproved behavior would be punished. However, we must hasten to emphasize that this does not mean that the spirit universe is composed of two realms, one for good people and the other for deviants; dualism does not exist in the traditional categories.

An analysis of the primal concept of the immortality of the soul shows clearly that there is an affinity with the Christian belief in this respect; the primal perception of death as a natural organic fact constitutive of human destiny is believed to have prepared the ground for the Christian doctrine on the immortality of the soul. As

²¹² Mbiti. J.S; *African Religions and Philosophy*, p74.

²¹³ Dr A.B. Gamedze, recorded interview, 2 October 2004, Mbabane.

noted by the informants,²¹⁴ the missionaries preached that a person is a knit unit; he/she is body and soul at the same time. Death only annihilates the body, not the soul, but what one does whilst alive on the physical earth has a direct bearing on the spiritual world. Hence there are two places of abode in the spiritual universe; there is heaven and hell. One that has lived according to the precepts of the Bible will inherit eternal life as his/her reward, whilst deviants will suffer eternal condemnation in the place of torment. As stated in Hebrews 9:27 "it is appointed for men to die once and after that judgement". Who is the Judge?

Three informants²¹⁵ admitted that in the primal religion *Mvelinchanti* was not explicitly upheld as the Judge that will judge the dead. According to the informants, the missionaries stretched the concept to categorically present the Creator God as the just Judge who in the other world, will not look at persons but will mete out what they deserve. However, He assures believers who die in Christ that death is swallowed up in victory; "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Corinthians 15: 54-55). Further, He guarantees the future life to believers in these words, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believes in me though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever...believeth in me shall never die..." (John 11:25-26).

²¹⁴ Mr M.P. Simelane, written interview, 14 October 2004, Manzini.

Dr A.B. Gamedze, written interview, 17 May 2004, Mbabane.

Mr J.B.J.S. Dlamini, recorded interview, 15 June 2004, Mbabane.

²¹⁵ Dr A.B. Gamedze, written interview, 17 May 2004, Mbabane.

Rev. A. Simelane, written interview, 3 October 2004, Manzini.

Rev N.T. Nyawo, written interview, 5 October 2004, Manzini.

Having said that, we need to note the point of departure between Swazi primal religion and Christianity on the concept of immortality. Dualism, which states that there is heaven and hell, God and evil, spirit and body, did not exist in primal set up; it was an innovation of the immortality concept by the Christian faith. As opposed to Christian dualism,

the indigenous people had a holistic or organic view of the universe, meaning that the world was conceived as a complex structure of interdependent and subordinate elements of parts and wholes, whose relations are largely determined by their function in the whole.²¹⁶

In echoes with the introductory quotation we would like to infer that in both the primal and Christian worldview the soul is immortal; death is a transition to eternal life, not final, only provisional. Also, though at varying degrees, there is an element of retribution in both worldviews; hence our submission that there is an affinity on the immortality concept. This leads us to another concept, which is closely linked to the concept of immortality of the soul.

The Concept of Mediation

As portrayed earlier, the dominant notion of the foundational account of the death myth depicts the organic order of all things at the beginning of the time, which was disturbed and disrupted by the arrival of death. Subsequently, humans made attempts to rediscover the original balance, hence the need for intermediaries. According to one informant the primal Swazi had a sense of unworthiness to approach the holy *Mvelinchanti* directly. They perceived their universe as

²¹⁶ Steyne, P.M. *Gods of Power, a Study of the beliefs and practices of Animists*, Houston: Touch, 1990, p59.

hierarchical, whereby all beings shared in the life of the Supreme Being on different levels according to their nature. In between the distinct sectors are ancestors who act as intermediaries. In the words of Kabasele F., "it is the distinction of these sectors that required a mediation for contact among the three degrees."²¹⁷ However, not everyone could be an ancestor or a "go-between" representing human beings to *Mvelinchanti* and *Mvelinchanti* to human beings; it was people whose relatives looked up to as role models of respectable citizens, and were now believed to be holier and therefore closer to the holy *Mvelinchanti*.

The missionaries presented a similar picture to the primal people, of an original organic order that was later polluted as a result of the encroachment of sin.²¹⁸ In the creation stories God pronounced death to man as a punishment for the lost intimate fellowship He enjoyed with humans, but through Christ, the mediator, humans could recover the original balance. The Christ event was therefore presented as a pathway to the completion and fulfillment of a project of being. Pre-existing all things, stripping Himself of every divine prerogative and becoming a being like all others, Jesus traversed death as a necessary passage to new life. Hence the assurance stated above that death is swallowed up in victory – "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1Corinthians 15:54-55). As alluded above, Christ exemplary life on earth and his victory over death qualified him to be the Mediator between God and Man. As Paul would argue, "for there is one God and One Mediator between God and

²¹⁷ Kabasele, F. "Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother" in Robert J. Schreter (ed.) p122.

²¹⁸ Mr. M.P. Simelane, written interview, 14 October 2004, Manzini.
Rev. S. Simelane, written interview, 2 September 2004, Bhunya.

Man, the man Christ Jesus.” The missionaries, as one informant observed, would uncompromisingly emphasize that Christ is the door of access to the Father (John10:9), no one, He says, knows the Father but the Son, and no one has ever seen God except Jesus, who has come down from Heaven, and those to whom it pleases Him to reveal God (Luke 10:22).²¹⁹

In the light of what has been said, one can safely conclude that the concept of a mediator and his responsibilities was familiar to the primal Swazi. The informants perceive its existence in the primal worldview as a shadow, whose complete truth was fully realized in Christ, as the mediator to substitute ancestral intercession; “for there is... one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (1Timothy 2:5).²²⁰

The Family Concept

Reference has been made to the fact that the primal Swazi had a well-organized social order, which was strongly patriarchal. The family, with a strict hierarchy of authority was considered to be an extremely important component within their social structure. The most powerful principle within the family was the concept of brotherhood derived from blood relationship characterized by kinship affinity and obligations of relatives. Membership in a group was permanent; it continued beyond death into the life beyond. “The dead, the living, and the yet unborn,

²¹⁹ Rev N.T. Nyawo written interview, 5 October 2004.

²²⁰ Rev N.T. Nyawo, written interview, 5 October 2004, Manzini, Dr A.B. Gamedze, written interview, 17 May 2004, Mbabane, Rev. A. Simelane, written interview, 3 October, 2004, Manzini.

formed an unbroken family, argued one informant."²²¹ This concept was given emphasis in rites, rituals and religious ceremonies observed by the families. Also, there were some religious and social norms and codes of behaviour that guided the social interactions of the kinsfolk and how they were expected to relate to outsiders and strangers.

Christianity, upon its inception, presented a divine order that was in everything similar to that of the primal people. It was that of authority and responsibility. The missionaries taught that first in the hierarchy of the divine order was God, then Christ the head of a man, and the husband who is the head of family. The family was ordered by God to function according to the principle of headship. Christianity also taught that far and above the earthly family is a spiritual family which comprises the believers, the "blood-washed". God is the father and leader of this extended family. Christ, His son, through His blood saves those who want to be part of God's family; that marks their rebirth in the spiritual community. Two informants²²² made an astute remark that, as it was the case with the family rites performed at each transitional stage, through baptism one is incorporated into the family of Christ, which has no racial or national or even continental boundaries. Once one becomes a member of such a family one has specific duties to perform in order to support, promote and uphold the whole family unit.

²²¹ Rev. A. Simelane, written interview, 3rd October, 2004, Manzini.

²²² Rev. N.T. Nyawo, recorded interview, May 10, 2004, Manzini.

Dr. A.B. Gamedze, written and recorded interview, May 17 2004, 2 October 2004, Mbabane.

One has the Bible as his “road map”²²³ to guide life, including daily interactions with the “kinsfolk”. Like in the primal Swazi, the extended family in Christianity includes spiritual beings, the angels. The angels also subject themselves to the will of the father. They are often sent to give messages that will enhance the spiritual welfare of the members of God’s family.²²⁴

As noted earlier, the primal Swazi were too conscious of the dominance of the impersonal, the unseen and unpredictable spirit powers which posed a threat to the well being of the family; hence the quest for power to secure them from the dangerous world through ritual manipulation, in the form of sacrifices, offerings, ceremonies, or even witchcraft. Some informants have noted that when Christianity came, it had no difficulty advising indigenous people against Satan and his evil spirits because they had living experiences with malevolent spirits. The missionaries introduced the concept of power of the Holy Spirit, which the converted could use as the most powerful weapon in the face of spirit caprice, and the rigors of life. They secured this power by the laying on of hands or by encountering a spirit being either directly or through ritual means.

In summary Christianity also acknowledges the threat of malevolent spirits to people, but added that the gospel grants of freedom from fear of the capriciousness of spirits. It becomes pointless for families to indulge in elaborate

²²³ An expression taken from Bediako, K. “Scripture as the hermeneutic of culture and tradition” in *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 4, No. 1, June 2001, p2.

²²⁴ Rev N.T. Nyawo, recorded interview, May 10 2004, Manzini

rituals that serve to pacify malevolent spirits because Christ won victory over them through His death and resurrection.

The Concept of Communalism

Related to the above concept is that of communalism. The primal people's practice and concept of communalism aptly prepared them for their positive acceptance of the spiritual communalism which Christianity taught, propagated and stood for. As shown in their historical background and religion discussed in the previous chapters, the primal people held that an individual did not live independently and in terms of himself, but dependently and in terms of the human community which composed of a network of relationships built around a common ancestral nucleus and nature. As Penoukou would argue,

"Becoming a person, a responsible, complete subject, is not an individualist act, it is a common project, the relationship of a commitment of solidarity in being-in-history to those who share the same becoming."²²⁵

Hence the rites discussed previously, which incorporated one into the community, underlining that his existence would be devoid of all sense and meaning outside the community. A fulfilled existence included health, productivity, acceptance in the community, and perpetual remembrance after death.

As it was the case in the primal society, Christianity inculcated a life of communion, union and responsibility. The early missionaries taught about an

²²⁵ Penoukon, E.J. "Christology in the village" p34.

indispensable mutual co-existence and interdependence first within the Godhead, and it is extended to the believers in Christ. One informant²²⁶ quoted the Apostle Paul when he underlines the importance of this unique communalism in a fascinating imagery of a human body, saying Christ is the head of this mystical body (1Cor12:12 pp, Eph, 5:23). Elaborating, the informant states that from Paul's letters it is crystal clear that this mystical body, although diverse in its gifts and functions, should work co-coordinately and in community as each other's keeper, bounded by the love of God. The missionaries also emphasized the human values that were upheld by the primal community as promoting fidelity in human relationships, and these included hospitality, unity, love, hard work, kindness, gratitude, self-help and others.²²⁷

The Holism Concept

The Universe, the spirit world and man are all part of the same fabric. Each needs the other to activate it.²²⁸

Traditional holism is another concept that we regard to have contributed some "spiritual genes" to Christianity. A previous chapter has shown a picture of the Swazi primal universe as replete with the dominant and pervasive presence of spiritual beings that interact and react in consort with the physical world. One works on the other and one part cannot exist nor be explained without the other.

²²⁶ Dr. Gamedze, recorded interview, October 2 2004, Mbabane.

²²⁷ Dr. A.B. Gamedze, recorded interview, October 2 2004, Mbabane.

²²⁸ Steyne, P.M. *Gods of Power, a Study of the beliefs and practices of Animists*. Houston: Touch, 1990, p58.

The sky, the spirits, the earth, the physical world, the living and the deceased all act or constitute one fluid coherent unit, which was created by God.

This seems to confirm the argument by avant-garde African scholars who have enough insight to say that the African world exists in two spheres but one world, interconnected and indivisible, with one touching on the other. As one African proverb has stated, "Our world is like a drum; strike any part of it and the vibration is felt all over."²²⁹ To an African, therefore, a dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, the secular and the religious, the material and the immaterial, is artificial.

As mentioned earlier this holistic view of the world by the primal Swazi was governed by the law of harmony, which simply implies a state of agreement or peacefulness with the entire universe. On account of this the people developed various religious practices, rituals and ceremonies (as shown in a previous chapter), as means to serve and meet their needs. In their quest to establish links and relationships with the other part of the whole country, they employed the services of religious personages. These could effectively link them up with unseen world because whatever happened in the physical realm had a spiritual co-ordinate and what transpired in the spiritual realm had direct bearing on the physical world. However, these religious leaders would function within moral

²²⁹ Turaki, Y.; "Understanding Christian Spiritual Warfare" www.gospel.net/icwe/papers/turaki.htm 6-10-04.

laws that governed the inter-relationship and integration of the spirit beings and humans.

The concept of holism is found very clearly in Christianity.²³⁰ Upon its inception in Swaziland, Christianity introduced Jesus Christ as both man and God. That one person had the nature of God and the nature of man, He was God visible and He was man, the victim of human's sins. Yet He did not draw a rigid dichotomy between His Godhead and His humanity; He was at the same time both. He was whole, not truncated. Furthermore, the missionaries emphasized the Godhead holism in the salvation of human kind. They taught, that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were interdependent in that the Father founded salvation, the Son manifested it by dying on the cross and the Holy Spirit activated it. Hence if anyone loved and obeyed Christ's teachings the Godhead Father, Son and Holy Spirit would make their home in him/her.

According to one informant,²³¹ the concept of holism was further extended to the human person in that he/she is created in God's likeness as a composite of spirit and body. He/she is a human being precisely because of the inseparable combination of body and spirit and the two ought to be treated as such. Hence Paul's remark that "... may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Thes5:23) a human being is

²³⁰ Rev A Simelane, written interview, 3 October 2004, Manzini.

Rev Bruce Britten, written interview, 19 October 2004, Manzini.

²³¹ Rev N.T. Nyawo, written interview, 5 October 2004, Manzini

therefore holistic, whatever he/she does with his/her body has a direct or indirect bearing on his/her soul and spirit.

The above observations lead one to conclude that the wholeness idea which missionaries introduced as they interacted with the Swazi was not a new one to a people who did not dichotomize the spiritual and physical, but viewed them in totality. Though the missionaries narrowed their emphasis to the inseparable combination of the body and the spirit and the composite Godhead, other than the interconnectedness of the entire universe, we would like to maintain that the traditional holistic concept prepared the ground for the seed of Christianity in this respect.

The Concept of Blood

...without the shedding of blood there is no remission (Hebrew 9:22).

An examination of the primal concept of blood reveals that there are elements of continuity with the Christian concept of blood. The discussion on Swazi primal religion specifically the ritual sacrifice and the use of blood has demonstrated the human being's deep quest and search for fellowship, communion and harmony with the spirit world. The primal people have been portrayed by the informants²³² to believe strongly in good proper relations with the ancestors in an effort to ensure the continuation of life force, facilitating circulation of life and increasing the vigour and the potency of spiritual and mystical powers. Hence the use of

²³² Rev N.T. Nyawo, written interview, 5 October 2004, Manzini
Rev A Simelane, written interview, 3 October 2004, Manzini.
Rev Bruce Britten, written interview, 19 October 2004, Manzini.

blood in their ritual sacrifices, which was closely associated with life; "life is in the blood. There could be no life without blood" so argue the scientists. These sentiments are shared by S.E.M. Pheko who asserts that the inhabitants of old Africa knew that without the shedding of blood no person could be cleansed from "ill luck", nor could God be appeased without shedding of blood. "This is the reason why animal blood was always flowing in African society."²³³

As shown by the religious rites and rituals discussed in a previous chapter, sacrifices and the use of blood served various purposes which included removing sickness, paying homage to *Mvelinchanti* through ancestors, cleansing and purifying of the society from its sins, removing all guilt "arising out of fear lest insufficient recognition has been given or appeasement made to the spirit world,"²³⁴ propitiating and pacifying the spiritual powers as well as mending broken relationships and disruption of peace.

As alluded above the traditional view of blood and its purposes which pervasively dominated the Swazi primal society seems to have an affinity with the Christian concept of the blood taught by the early missionaries. The missionaries traced the concept from the Old Testament times up to the life of Jesus Christ who died and resurrected and His blood was shed to restore the breached relations between God and Man. When Jesus had not yet been sacrificed, God accepted the life of an animal in the place of the life of a sinner. The animal's shed blood

²³³ Pheko, S.E.M. *Christianity Through African Eyes*, Lusaka: Daystar Publications LTD, 1969,p18

²³⁴ Steyne, P.M. *Gods of power*, p138

was proof that life had been given for another. Therefore, on one hand, blood symbolized the death of the animal, whilst on the other hand it symbolized the life that was spared, notes an informant.²³⁵ However, the death of the animal that brought forgiveness in the Old Testament was only a temporary provision, looking forward to the death of Jesus, whose shed blood offers total and permanent forgiveness of sins thus making animal sacrifice no longer necessary. "For if the blood of bulls and goats sanctified to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from the dead works to serve the living God" (Hebrew 9:13-14).²³⁶ One informant further noted that the Old Testament shows a regular priesthood that was finally recognized in Jesus.²³⁷ The Old Testament high priest went before God once a year to plead for the forgiveness of the nation's sins, and so did Swazi priest-kings. But, Christ's high priestly role is superior to these religious personages in that as an advocate and mediator between God and Man, He makes perpetual intercession for all believers before God. His continuous presence in heaven with God the Father is an assurance that the sins of human beings have been paid for and forgiven.

In summary, there is continuity between the traditional concept of the blood and in Christianity, with the later being perceived as a fulfillment of the former. Because Jesus, the perfect sacrifice died once and for all (Hebrew 9:26), He

²³⁵ Rev A.M. Gamedze, recorded interview, 10 June 2004, Nhlangano.

²³⁶ Rev A.M. Gamedze, recorded interview, 10 June 2004, Nhlangano.

²³⁷ Rev Bruce Britten, written interview, 19 October 2004, Manzini.

brought the animal sacrificial system to an end, thus bringing the work of redemption to completion.

The “Word Power” Concept

The belief in words, that they have inherent innate power to deal with all realms of life was strong and pervasive amongst the primal Swazi.²³⁸ They held that words had a magic power and all that was essential was to employ the appropriate words correctly and they would produce the looked-for results. However, not anyone could utter words that had power. Only religious personages, whose professional functions were described earlier, could pronounce words that would have strong efficacy. Through words used in recitations, chants, repetitious singing, they were able to control, propitiate and call up the Supreme Being and other spirits to the physical world. For example, as noted earlier, when all their attempts had failed to break a drought they would approach *Mvelinchanti* directly, addressing their prayers without any intermediary. But more usually they communicated their prayers through His emissaries, the ancestors. Some informants added that they also used words as powerful instruments to provide protection against the contingencies of life caused by the destructive malevolent spirits.²³⁹

²³⁸ Dr a.b. Gamedze, recorded interview, 2 October 2004, Mbabane.

²³⁹ Dr. A.B. Gamedze, recorded interview, 2 October 2004, Mbabane
Rev A.M. Gmedze, recorded interview, 12 June 2004, Nhlangano
Gogo E. Mamba, recorded interview, 24 October, 2004, Bethel.

At the advent of Christianity one notes the word power concept assuming some prominence; prayer proved to be an integral part of this new religious orientation. Devotees were taught that they could communicate with God through the name of Jesus to present any request, be it spiritual or material. As John 14: 13, 14 reads, "and whatsoever you shall ask in my name, will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." As noted in the preceding chapter prayer was stressed as the most powerful weapon to deal with the evil spirits as well as to protect the devotees against any principalities. Highlighting the word power, the informants²⁴⁰ noted that Rev. J. Gamedze, Miss Moe's co-worker was once attacked by a Zulu warrior, whilst in his (Gamedze) preaching campaigns in Bethel. Lying down and bleeding after being stabbed by the warrior, he uttered a few words, cursing his assailant in the name of Jesus, and he (warrior) died on the spot. In another instance a warrior assaulted some women converts, who were witnessing. They said a few words, praying to God in the powerful name of Jesus and the man changed into an antelope and he was killed by hunters "...this is not a legend, I witnessed it,"²⁴¹ argued one informant.

Just like a primal Swazi who survived within an array of spiritual hosts who were both malevolent and benevolent, Christian converts were also made conscious of evil spirits that always posed a threat to their well-being; hence "the need for

²⁴⁰ Dr. A.B. Gamedze, recorded interview, 2 October 2004, Mbabane
Rev A.M. Gamedze, recorded interview, 12 June 2004, Nhlangano.
Gogo E. Mamba, recorded interview, 24 March 2004, Bethel.

²⁴¹ Rev. A.M. Gamedze, recorded interview, 10 June 2004, Manzini, 28 June 2004, Nhlangano.

prayer as a powerful instrument to cast out demons and to protect the converts against all evil spirits.”²⁴² Confirming what other informants had said, one lady informant who was once a leader of the Women Crusaders during Miss Moe related their various encounters with evil spirits. “After fasting and praying and in the power of the Holy Spirit we would go to preach; singing *Wendodana KaDavid Ngihawukele* (Son of David have mercy on me), demon possessed persons in a kraal 500 metres away screamed in torment until the women crusaders came to cast them out in the name of Jesus. We would also lay hands on the sick and they would be healed.”²⁴³ All these example serve to underline that the word power concept held by the primal people was closely allied with that of Christianity; the theological words and terms couched in Christian language were fundamentally rooted in the foundations of the Swazi primal world view.

Their Close Identification with the Bible

The Jewish culture, which is the vessel in which the gospel was carried, has an affinity with the Swazi culture. This made the Swazi converts to identify closely with the Bible, thus making it their “own story” too. Evidently, there are some parallels between Swazi thought forms and that of the Old Testament, and therefore the entire Bible because the Old Testament is the shadow of the New Testament. Three informants²⁴⁴ gave an example of the Israel society and the Swazi primal society being patriarchal Kingdoms. They observed that both

²⁴² Gogo Mdzebele, recorded interview, 2 September 2004, Manzini.

²⁴³ Gogo E. Mamba, recorded interview, 24 March 2004, Bethel.

²⁴⁴ Dr. Gamedze, recorded interview, 2 October 2004, Mbabane
Rev A Simelane, written interview, 3 October 2004, Manzini
Rev Bruce Britten, written interview, 19 October 2004, Manzini.

societies attached great importance on the perpetuation of the family name, hence the practice of polygamy as an acceptable cultural norm. Both societies would also place some value on bearing children as the glory and purpose of women. Barrenness, which was always blamed on the woman, was a disgrace. Both societies theoretically treated women as second-rate to men, and that was accepted as normal and religious. One other parallel that can be noted is the special value both societies put on ancestors; that man does not live in solitude, he is linked backwards to the ancestors who he reveres and forward to the generations yet to be born. When the Bible showed Israelites passionately speaking of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, their ancestors, the Swazi who lived in a similar thought world felt accommodated²⁴⁵ and that they belonged in the Bible "world" too.

Another cultural practice that demonstrates a real affinity with the Bible is the *Incwala* festivals, discussed earlier. Though it is outside the purpose of the study to delve into the parallels between this sacred festival first celebrated by the primal people, and the three sacred Jewish festivals (the Pentecost, Passover, tabernacles), it is worth mentioning that they have some resemblance. Both societies celebrated the festivals annually, with the same intent, which was primarily to purify the nations and enhance their life force.²⁴⁶ Persons of superior religious status, the high priest in the Jewish Society and the priest-king in the

²⁴⁵ Rev A.B. Gamedze, recorded interview, 2 October 2004,
Rev A Simelane, written interview, 3 October, Manzini.

²⁴⁶ Rev Bruce Britten, written interview, 19 October 2004, Manzini.

Swazi Society were the main actors who facilitated the cleansing of the nations from sins committed individually and collectively.²⁴⁷

With these illustrations amongst others, we can safely conclude that the resemblance between some traditional insights and the Old Testament is yet another factor that immensely contributed towards the good reception of the Bible by the Swazi. The close identification of the Swazi with the Bible can therefore be recognized as yet another important building block for Christianity.

An Element of Coercion

Other than the concrete parallelism between Swazi primal religion and Christianity acknowledged above, three informants²⁴⁸ identified an element of coercion by the early missionaries as they interacted with the Swazi. Using Miss Moe the pioneer missionary of the E.C., they noted that though she interacted well with the Swazi and they loved her, there was the other side of her, which was sometimes intimidating to the Swazi. She had domineering and forceful tactics that made her master and commander of everything. Pushed by her intensifying passion for souls, she would forcefully share Christ such that the people would feel coerced into the new faith. Some observers are said to have criticised her that she was too direct and frank, lacking tact in her dealings with

²⁴⁷ Dr A.B. Gamedze, recorded interview, 2 October 2004, Mbabane.

²⁴⁸ Rev S. Simelane, written interview, 2 September 2004, Bhunya.

Mr. J.B.J.S. Dlamini, recorded interview, 15 June 2004, Mbabane.

Prof. C.M. Mdzebele, informal interview, 19 August 2004, Manzini.

people. Some informant²⁴⁹ noted that at church if she thought the preacher was getting dry and tiresome, she would interrupt him or even tell him to sit down and let somebody else preach. Her strong character therefore made her audience feel pressurized to accept the gospel. However, they pointed out that Miss Moe had no political inclinations in her dealings with the Swazi; "in fact she knew very little or nothing at all about the Kingdom's political affairs. She was too involved in village visitation and evangelism in the remote south of Swaziland, to be concerned about politics",²⁵⁰ noted one informant. What the informants interpreted as coercion was solely attributed to Malla's independent and firm character and her burning passion for lost souls.

In summary, this chapter has first explained the methods and procedures used in this historical qualitative study in order to identify continuity between two religious orientations. Then it has presented results reduced into themes, which confirm the assumed answer to the research question, that some concepts in Swazi primal religion had an affinity with Christianity, hence the people's willingness to embrace the later as a new religious orientation that fulfilled their religious aspirations. A more detailed summary and discussion of the findings are presented in the next final chapter.

²⁴⁹ Dr. A.B. Gamedze, recorded interview, Rev. A.M. Gamedze, recorded interview, Rev. A. Simelane, written interview, Rev. E.T. Dlamini, informal interview, 21 October 2004, Ezulwini, Gogo Mndzebele, recorded interview, 2 September 2004, Manzini.

²⁵⁰ Gogo E. Mamba recorded interview, 24 March 2004, Bethel.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

To remind us of the focus of the study, the final chapter of the thesis restates the research problem and reviews the major methods used in the study. The major sections of this chapter summarize the results and discuss their implications. As explained in the introductory chapter, the study reported here was a historical research, which adopted three approaches; the narrative, the analytical and the descriptive. As a historical writing, this study primarily used a qualitative perspective in an attempt to discern concrete demonstrations of affinity between Swazi primal religion and Christianity. To collect the data between February and October it has relied chiefly on document analysis of published and unpublished documents, which included books, theses, journals internet extracts, dairies, church minutes, newspapers and papers delivered at various forums. Information accrued from documents was supplemented with in-depth interviews with twelve key informants purposefully selected as a representative sample of the larger population. The researcher interviewed each key informant two times, in each instance spending 2 hours 30 minutes.

The gist of what constitutes the data is to be found expressed in the earlier quoted statement by R. Smith who prefers to adopt the suggestion that an effective new religious orientation would not discard the recipients' religio-cultural categories which reveal their depth of devotion and their religion's existential wisdom; it would appeal to their religious instincts and susceptibilities

that already existed. Stimulated by Smith's insight, Tutu remarks: "African religious experience and heritage were not illusory, they formed the vehicle for conveying the gospel verities to Africa."²⁵¹ Thus, indigenous religions, their languages and their conventions provided the framework in which the gospel could find expression within the respective cultures. The study has therefore given credence to primal religion for being a stratum whose worldview provided the ground for the understanding of the gospel. In pursuit of its laudable objective, the study has attempted to redeem primal religion from any disfavor, rejection, misrepresentation and denunciation to which it has been subjected. Sharing similar sentiments with scholars like H. Turner, S.A. Thorpe, G. Bediako, amongst others, it has maintained that primal religions are fundamental religious forms and all the stereotyping epithets that have reduced African religious heritage to the least possible amount of estimation are based on subjectivism. They deserve credit in that, in the words of G. Bediako, "they are the soil in which Christian faith took root and flourished."²⁵² While religious phenomena in Africa have certain commonality factors it is also essential to place specific phenomena in the particular framework to which they belong or within their respective cultural settings. Thus, the study confined itself to a specific context Swaziland. It has used the interactions between the Swazi and the early missionaries and the establishment of the Evangelical Church as an example to illustrate the encounter. The study has further illustrated the "worth" of the primal heritage by

²⁵¹ Tutu, D; "whiter African Theology?" in Fashole-Luke et al. (eds) *Christianity in Independent Africa*, London: Rex Collings, 1978, p364-368 (366).

²⁵² Bediako, G.M; "primal religion and Christian faith: Antagonists or soul-mates?" in *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol.3, No.1, June 2000, p15.

identifying some continuity elements between it and a new religious orientation. The central concepts in Christianity were presented not as new, but as reformulations of the old concepts.

The study therefore attributes the people's the overwhelming reception of the new religious orientation to the recognition that the long anticipated gospel resonated with their indigenous religio-cultural aspirations, thus fulfilling their spiritual quest.

Various contributors to African Scholarship have explored and critically analyzed the missionary project in Africa and have come up with numerous concerns and observations. One general conclusion they have arrived at, which cannot be dismissed as irrational, is that the missionary enterprise is "the arm of European political imperialism" in that it was "an out growth of social and economic currents prevailing in the West."²⁵³ There were those European immigrants who had no missionary interest, but only interest in sustaining the vested interest of European immigrants, as exemplified by the Dutch Reformed Church that sustained the apartheid policy in South Africa. That strained the relationship between the missionaries and the missionized; it became conflictual and adversarial in some contexts. Whilst not all the missionaries deserve to be put in one basket wearing the same label, as the study has illustrated, there is one grave mistake most missionaries seem to have made, that was to assume that Africans were too

²⁵³ Sanneh, L; *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, New York: Orbis Books, 1989, p4.

ignorant and their (missionaries) duty was to expose the Africans to the knowledge of God in an attempt to remedy this defect. Tutu's language in "Some African insights and The Old Testament", concerning the same point, clearly adumbrates this kind of understanding. He writes:

"What I wish to point out is that most non-Africans just did not believe there could be any good. They might have said with sincerity what Nathaniel said of Nazareth, "can anything good come out of Africa?"²⁵⁴

One would then ask, what about Miss Moe whom this study has discussed at length, pointing out her good relations with the Swazi, to the extent that "she sat with them, she ate the food, she knew their names and she never forgot them?"²⁵⁵

As much as Miss Moe had good relations with the Swazi and was like one of them as the converts would always argue her soul aim seems not to have been to learn from their primal heritage and appreciate the good in it to an extent of using its treasures as tools to reach the people for Christ within their own reference frame. It was to introduce Christianity as a foreign religion to "heathens", and this religion had no connection with the primal worldview of the people. This is probably because her perceptions and expectations were largely determined by "home bred ideas"²⁵⁶ and personal experiences. Many narrative writings of Europeans travelers on Africa had the impression that Africans were

²⁵⁴ Tutu, D; "Some African Insight and The Old Testament" in Hans-Jurgen Becken (ed.) *Relevant Theology For Africa*, Report on a Consultation of the Missiological Institute at Lutheran Theological College, Maphumulo, Natal, September 12-21, 1972, Durban: Lutheran Publishing House, 1973, p41.

²⁵⁵ Nilsen, M; *Malla Moe*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1980, p52.

²⁵⁶ Sanneh, L; *Translating the Message*, p5.

devoid of a system of religious beliefs, ritual practices and thought worth of the name religion. Statements on Africa made by prolific writers like Sir Samuel White Baker among others, seem to have brainwashed the missionaries. Denying the existence of anything like religion to Africans, he wrote:

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... the mind is as stagnant as the morass, which forms its puny world.²⁵⁷

This attitude was extended to the cultural practices and norms of the Swazi listed earlier; most were regarded as heathen and evil. This was probably because the early missionaries, including Miss Moe, viewed themselves as “Christian soldiers marching as to war”,²⁵⁸ against demonic powers and principalities, which had heavily infested the Swazi land. Their aim was to liberate the land for Christ and save the hell-bound souls of their helpless inhabitants. As a result, their eyes were blind to recognize anything good in these cultural practices, let alone the religious “ingredient” in them. They were quick to brand everything evil. Whilst we cannot deceive ourselves that all was well in the Swazi primal “garden”, we believe that the good in it could have been given credence and be profitably utilized to provide mutual enrichment to the gospel.

²⁵⁷ Lugira, A.M; *Africism: “A geontological approach to African Religion and Philosophy”* for the 26th Annual Third World Conference, March 15-18, 2000, Swissotel www.2.bc.ed/lugira/Africism.htm October 26 2004.

²⁵⁸ An expression taken from a Christian song from the hymn book, *Icilongo LeVangeli*.

However, Miss Moe's holistic social service, seasoned with her exceptional hospitality resulted to an empowerment to the Swazi, in that the food and clothes is not all that Miss Moe gave out; she freely and readily distributed lots of Bibles in which the Swazi rediscovered themselves. Also, she shared the gospel with the Swazi, which acted as catalyst towards fuller development and blossoming of their innate potentials.

On another note, when one objectively assesses the missionary project one would argue that the element of culture interference was unavoidable in the interactions between the missionaries and the missionized. Since the beginning to be relevant to human beings, God used cultural beings as carriers of the gospel to transmit it to a different cultural context. That implies that stripping of the gospel from cultural entanglements would be like trying to square a ring. The gospel would be too abstract and irrelevant to the people's realities of life. An inevitable temptation therefore would be for the developed culture, to try to pull the recipient culture to its level and envy to be emulated as the model. Some cultural practices which, according to the standards of the developed foreign culture that were unacceptable, would be replaced with European equivalents. However, in spite of these shortcomings of the transmitters of the gospel, the paper has inferred that the "translatable" gospel has its own intrinsic power that makes it to be more than a cultural ideology, but the power of God. Its transcending and transforming character appeals to the inward God given values imbedded in one's worldview and effect a spiritual renewal much to the surprise

of the transcultural advocates, hence conversion. It is probably this unexpected outcome that has made V. Donovan, a missionary in Sierra Leone, to conclude that missionaries in the mission fields were able to rediscover the gospel, making them "their own first converts."²⁵⁹

Considering the interactions between the Swazi and the early missionaries from yet another perspective, we would like to suggest that the shift toward the outsider's value orientation done by the converts was sometimes an unintended consequence on the part of the transcultural advocates, the missionaries. As D. Jacobs has rightly observed,

...converts are usually well disposed toward the converter, and in symbolising their new allegiance to Christ they may well espouse some of the outsider's values. Or, it might be that in the mind of the new believers there lingers the assumption that the advocate has filtered the anti-Christian factors out of his or her own cultural experience, so that the converter's culture is viewed as a tried and tested variety of Christian living.²⁶⁰

This is possibly the kind of relationship that Miss Moe had with some of the converts. They looked up to her as their role model and therefore yielded to her value system. That is why many young ladies for example, ran away from arranged marriages in their homes to take refuge in the mission station and they remained single like Miss Moe until death.

²⁵⁹ Donovan, V; *Christianity Rediscovered, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000, p157.

²⁶⁰ Jacobs, D.R; Culture and the Phenomena of Conversion: Reflections in an East African setting, in *Gospel in Context*, Vol.1 No.3, July 1978, p10.

Returning to the theme already raised, the findings recorded in the preceding chapter depicted continuity between traditional categories and Christian concepts, underlining that the Christian concepts were not new per se, but reformulations of the indigenous concepts. The primal religious heritage was accredited to have provided the framework in which the gospel could find expression. The findings confirm the assertions by African scholars that God in His mysterious ways, preceded gospel transmitters to reach out the various cultures. In his contributory remarks on this subject, Lugira quotes the testimony of an African intellectual luminary, St. Augustine, who is often been given the title of "Founder of Christian Theology". He writes:

What is now called Christian religion, has existed among the ancients, and was not absent from the beginning of the human race, until Christ came in flesh: from which time the true religion, which existed already, began to be called Christianity.²⁶¹

This citation which virtually stands as the 'golden text' of the 'continuity' tradition, as it is a concise epitome and summary of its central theme, stimulated other exponents of the continuity tradition in the likes of Mbiti, Bediako, Sanneh and Walls, whose arguments have been used by this study as its interpretative guide. As stated above, the concepts chronicled in the previous chapter as findings on the continuity tradition have demonstrated the affinity between Swazi primal religion and Christianity, as well as the retaining, reinterpretation and reorientation of the old concepts at integration, which Walls has referred to as the

²⁶¹ Lugira, A.M. "Africism", p5.

“turning of the already existing to new account.”²⁶² Briefly it has shown how the Swazi primal people perceived God *Mvelinchanti*, that He is transcendent, too majestic, remote but near, fatherly, Omnipotent and Omniscient and so on. When God of the Bible come into the scene He makes use of these positive attributes. At the same time He transforms them and gives them “a new dimension, new direction, a new depth of wealth and fullness.”²⁶³ Again, in the primal set up, the one interconnected universe is populated with spiritual beings, whose authority, power, influence and legitimacy depend upon their position within ontological order of beings. The ways powers work and interact is what Jacobs refers to as kinetology.²⁶⁴ The study has shown Christianity building on the pre-conversion kinetology and flourishing. In the words of Jacobs, the primal people’s “sensitivity to the kinetological world had beautifully prepared them to comprehend Jesus whose name is above every name.”²⁶⁵ Furthermore, instead of ancestors who were regularly appeased with blood to effectively carry out their mediatory functions as divine envoys and delegates, Christ enters the scene as The Mediator who offered His own blood for the remission of sin. The gospel also used the traditional concept of the immortality of the soul to reorient and refine the people’s meagre ideas about rewards and punishment to be given after death. Traditional values like family and communalism and all rituals and rites performed for identification purposes within a group were adopted and reformulated by Christianity. The identified links between the above concepts

²⁶² Walls, A.F; *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, New York: Orbis Books; Edinburgh:T&T Clark, 1996, p28.

²⁶³ Bosch, D; “God Through African Eyes”, in *Relevant Theology for Africa*, p74.

²⁶⁴ Jacobs, D.R; *Culture and the Phenomena of Conversion*, p8.

²⁶⁵ Jacobs, D.R; *Culture and the Phenomena of Conversion*, p8.

therefore serve as a confirmation of the research hypothesis that guided the study, that Swazi religious categories were a crucial factor in the interactions between the Swazi and the early Christian missionaries.

In conclusion, the historical background sketched in an early chapter succinctly described interactions between the Swazi and other European foreigners after Britain had assumed control of the territory. Additional research therefore seems needed to explore the effects of the colonial laws on the development of Christianity in Swaziland, which will include the emergence of the African Independent Churches (AIC) as a protest movement against what was perceived as foreign interference.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEWS: INFORMANTS, ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS, PLACES AND DATES.

Rev. Dr. A.B. Gamedze, interviewed by author, written -May, 2004, recorded – October, 2004, Mbabane.

Rev. A.M.Gamedze, interviewed by the author, recorded June, 2004, Manzini and Nhlangano

Rev. S. Simelane , interviewed by the author, written, September, 2004, Bhunya.

Professor C.M. Mndzebele, interviewed by the author, informally, August 2004, written October, 2004, Manzini.

Mr. M.P. Simelane, interviewed by the author, written, October 2004, Manzini.

Rev. A. Simelane , interviewed by the author, written, October 2004, Manzini.

Gogo E. Mamba, interviewed by the author, recorded, March 2004, Bethel.

Rev. Dr. N.T. Nyawo, interviewed by the author, informally, May 2004, recorded, September 2004, written, October 2004, Manzini.

Rev. Bruce Britten, interviewed by the author, written, October 2004, Manzini.

Mr. J.B.J.S. Dlamini, interviewed by the author, recorded, June 2004, Mbabane.

Rev. E.T. Dlamini, interviewed by the author, informally, October 2004, Ezulwini.

Gogo Mndzebele, interviewed by the author, recorded, September 2004, Manzini.

APPENDIX 2

Guiding Questions.

1. How did the early missionaries view Swazi culture, including the primal religion? Support your answer.
2. What was the perception of the converts in the Evangelical Church of their Swazi religious heritage?
3. Do you know Miss Moe personally? Can you briefly describe Miss Moe's character?
4. Did missionaries, with specific reference to Miss Moe encounter any opposition from the Swazi? Support.
5. What attracted the Swazi to Miss Moe?
6. Can you identify any affinity between certain concepts of the Swazi traditional/primal religion and Christianity? State the concepts and support your claim.