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HERMENEUTICS IN THE CONTEXT OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION:
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE MPONDO PEOPLE IN
LUSIKISIKI, FLAGSTAFF AND BIZANA AREAS OF TRANSKEI

by

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PREFACE

The primary reason for writing a thesis on this particular theme is to focus on some of the explosive and obscure issues that touch on the lives of many Africans near and far. Much has already been said and written in this land about Black Theology and African Theology. About African Traditional Religion very little has been written. In actual fact there are some people who would not even credit it as an acceptable topic for academic debate. Yet it is a religion that lived and was practised by almost all African Christians in this country and further north in the continent.

In this thesis an endeavour is made to distil and analyze in a simple and digestible form the main features and claims of the African Theology. The emergence of Black Theology and African Theology signalled a need for a reviewed African Traditional Religion, something long aspired for, by the aboriginal people of this continent. However, this was perceived by Western Christians as syncretism. The problem of paying less heed to the African cry for real revival and revitalization of African culture by some mainline church leaders accelerated the spirit of African nationalism which is embodied in African culture.

The application of a hermeneutical approach to African Traditional Religion is an attempt to address the question of African culture as explicated and explored by the early

missionaries, anthropologists, sociologists, historians and theologians. It is also an attempt to survey the plight of African culture as it is now on the brink of being dealt a death blow by western civilization and western Christianity as well as other foreign religions which have been imported to Africa.

Thus a hermeneutical assessment of African Traditional Religion becomes imperative particularly in the present prevailing winds of change sweeping the whole continent of Africa. The revived spirit of nationalism amongst Africans is growing day by day as a demand for total decolonization of Africa is fast multiplying. A complete and thorough liberation of Africa will be achieved only when the political, social, economic, psychological, religious and spiritual oppression has been removed and eradicated. This implies that religion as aspect of life cannot escape or survive the strength of the call of times for change.

I should like to pay tribute, in closing, to Prof C.J.A. Greyling who tirelessly encouraged me to pursue the research of this thesis. I am highly appreciative of the helpful assistance that Rev M Stofile, Rev B Finca and Mrs N Bangeni have given me in preparation and proof reading of this thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

HERMENEUTICS IN THE CONTEXT OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION: WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE MPONDO PEOPLE IN LUSIKISIKI, FLAGSTAFF AND BIZANA AREAS IN TRANSKEI

1. Introduction

Understanding is the centre and the goal of any genuine and objective study of a situation rare or new to the learner or investigator in a particular field of study. Any better understanding can be reached only if there is an elucidation of facts and meaningful interpretation of data.

Any scarcely known subject, such as African Traditional Religion needs to be explored and explained so as to make it more exposed to people local and abroad. Religions of the world have emerged and spread, were preached and popularized, yet have not survived without being hermeneutically verified. It is for this reason that African Traditional Religion has to be put under a microscopic eye for analysis and synthesis. The basic skill to be employed to analyze African Traditional Religious data under investigation is the hermeneutical approach.

1.1 The Relevance of the Study

1.1.1 The Impact of Christianity on the African Societies

The planting of Christianity in Africa had both advantageous and disadvantageous connotations and contributions to the African communities. There are quite a number of instances that can be highlighted regarding the impact of Christianity on African societies. It cannot be denied that Christianity through its spread of gospel, also dispersed the seeds of civilization, knowledge and upliftment of the standard of living of the people. However besides these advantages and contributions, there are also quite a number of disadvantages and detestable outcomes of the spread of Christianity. To mention a few such disturbances and disadvantages: wars, persecutions, death, martyrdom, division among societies, expansionist urge, colonial power entrenchment etc.

Groves (1948 : 68) has this to say in connection with the above: "the church was recognized as a pillar of the state so that to propagate the Christian faith was at the same time to consolidate imperial power. Justinian pursued the policy in Africa of encouraging to become Christians all those Chiefs and Kings who sought his goodwill. He gave it as a definite instruction to his administrators that they should do all they could do to incline the people to

Christianity. In the case of native rulers an investitive with robes of office and the bestowal of honorific titles went with the change. Religious propaganda for imperial expansion was the policy."

It is through this political opportunism that cultural and ecclesiastical colonialism came to Africa. The western theology of the early missionaries was mingled with western culture and was implanted with the aim of changing African culture. Thus Christianity was looked at with suspect. Most African politicians and theologians suspected that Christianity was ambiguous as well as characterized by multiplicities and complexities of its intentions in Africa.

Furthermore Christianity was seen as having strong missionary zeal to spread western culture and politico-economic power under the cloak of religion. Many countries of Europe who embarked on missionary work in Africa did that in order to fulfil their imperial and expansionist motives. As Wilmore (1976 : 486) declared "most people would agree that the most potent impetus for the development of an African Christian theology has come swathed in western garb."

1.1.2

The Interpretation of African Culture and African Traditional Religion by Early Missionaries

The early missionaries or non-African Christians planting and preaching the gospel of the Christian Church had mistakenly or purposefully held a distorted interpretation of African culture and African Traditional Religion. There may be various tangible reasons for the distortion which cannot now be analyzed. However the reasons will be clarified in the course of the discussion.

To many non-African missionaries Africans had no idea of God, had no religion of their own. In confirmation to this, the words of Drapper have been paraphrased by Tutu (1971 : 364) who wrote thus, "no one however thoroughly has queried, has ever been able to trace among all the Kaffir, Hottentots and Beach-rangers any trace of religion or any show of honour to God or the devil."

This indicated clearly that the attitude of many early missionaries towards African culture, religion and dignity was bad and distorted.

In addition to this attitude of the early missionaries was the belief that Christianity was regarded as the superior and triumphant religion. In fact this type of thinking stemmed from the belief that Christ was

superior to death through the resurrection. Truly speaking, Christian belief does get its support and triumphantalism from the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But when this belief was distorted it was misinterpreted to mean that everything that is non-christian was inferior, bad, backward and barbaric.

To illustrate this, Robert Moffat (Tutu 1971 : 365) expressing the same view as the abovementioned that, "Satan has employed his agency with fatal success in erasing every vestige of religious impression from the minds of the Beehvanas, Hottentots and Bushmen." Once more this shows that any element of religiosity amongst Africans was doubted or even destroyed. This devaluated the African's way of life, their value of life and sense of humanity.

According to Parrinder (1969 : 19) non-African Christians made a great mistake by taking for granted that when they were introducing western orientated Christianity to Africa they were starting from **tabula rasa**. Actually this was not the case, for Africans had their own way of approach to God known to them long before Europeans came to Africa.

Most of the early missionaries condemned the African way of life while promoting the western way of life in clothing, language and music. As Tutu (1971 : 23) stated that "these poor creatures must be made to

worship in the white man's unconditional and individualistic way that had to think and speak of God and all the wonderful Gospel truth in the white man's well proven terms." This type of teaching was caused by the fact that most of the missionaries lacked knowledge about African culture, religious customs etc. When teaching about unity, western Christians failed to realize that Africans had their own sense of unity based on communal life, tribal ties, clan ties or national ties. Instead of strengthening these bonds of unity, the early missionaries sought to break the traditional unity by introducing western civilization. As a result many social ties, customs, values and norms of African societies suffered a great disaster. The dignity of the African peoples was degraded and many of their traditional customs were greatly disturbed with some of them neglected and totally forgotten. In all, the African culture and African Traditional Religion remained in a state of confusion.

1.1.3 Black Theology and African Theology

The notion of a Black Theology is normally regarded as somewhat novel in South Africa. The reality is that although the term may be new, the concept is old. It had its origin in the period when colonizers began to interact with the Blacks in South Africa. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Blacks and

1850-1900

whites in South African scrambled over land. The arrival of white colonists in South Africa deprived Blacks of their traditional rights of liberty they were previously enjoying as actual proprietors and governors of the land. Colonial rule weakened the power and the authority of the traditional Kings and Chiefs.

As a matter of fact colonization (as a settlement of a land by foreign people with the purpose of making a new home) was not presented singularly to South Africa. It was introduced in company with western civilization and with special emphasis on western culture and western standards of life. Consequently this serious threat posed by the colonists led to the emergence of some early elements of Black Theology. Apparently what occurred during this era was a general burning sentiment for liberation commonly expressed by the Black prophets or seers and religious leaders. The first Black prophet to react against the destruction of African society by the encroachment of Christianity and western civilization was Ntsikana the son of Gaba.

In the early 18th century the struggle for liberation from colonial power was marked by the wars of dispossession which manifested themselves in the rise of the spirit of African religions. Independentism (sometimes referred to as the separatist movement D D

T Jabavu was quoted by Hewson (1950 : 9) as saying that "the general ambition of the Bantu for liberation from being underlings to the Europeans in various places of life, namely economic, political and religious."

In the late 1960 and early 1970s Black Theology in South Africa commenced as a specifically enunciated theology. During this time Black Theology and African Theology were used as technical terms. The term Black Theology was imported from USA where it was first and foremost employed by J H Cone. This term was applied in a South African situation which is in various respects similar to and different from that of America. It emerged in South Africa because of the growing mood amongst blacks against racism. Black Theology came to the fore in South Africa because most of the political and cultural organizations were banned and most of their leaders were languishing in prison. As a result Black Theology was launched in South Africa with the purpose of making Christian theology become more situational. Moore (1972 : 19) stressing this point wrote thus "Black Theology seeks to cut across this classically arid detachment. It begins with specific people in a specific situation and with specific problems to face. Thus it starts with black people in South African situation facing the strangling problems of oppression, fear, hunger insults and dehumanisation. It tries to understand as

clearly as possible who these people are, what their life experience is and the nature and cause of their suffering. This is an indispensable datum of Black Theology." Black Theology has strong links with the African Theology, for Black Theology has a strong reassertion of African culture and Blackness. According to Buthelezi (1974 : 06) "Blackness is a life category that embraces the totality of my daily existence. It determines the circumstances of my growth as a child and the life possibilities open to me. It now determines where I live, worship, minister and the range of my close life associates."

It is in this definition of Blackness that both Black Theology and African Theology meet. This means that Black Theology can be successful enough in its functions of relating God and Christ to the Black man and his daily problems, if it will start by articulating the basic facts in terms of which the African interprets and realizes his or her existence, situation and universe. "African Theology must take account of the myths of the African religion which may serve as a good conceptual frame of reference. The myths span the whole existence from heaven to the heart of the individual, in fact, from cosmos to clan (Sundkler 1961 : 28). In its development Black Theology in South Africa emphasized the embodiment of African Religion and Tradition and African culture within the existing western Christian system found in

Africa. African Theology encourages amongst other things Africanisation, culture and indigenization, that is, making Christianity to be more acceptable to African societies.

Through the emergence of the study of Black Theology and African Theology, African Traditional Religion was closely looked at in South Africa. Firstly African Traditional Religion appeared as part of African culture. Later it was clearly articulated as a religion of the African. This concept helped to set the record straight concerning the view generally held about the African people who were regarded by the Christians as having no religion of their own. To clarify this misconception it became necessary to re-interpret and review the Christian hermeneutics in the context of African Traditional Religion as part of the culture of the people of Africa.

1.2 Methodology

Previously and presently attempts have been made to investigate and explore the contents of the Science of Religion with the intention of elucidating and explicating the proper interpretation contained in it. The greater part of African Traditional Religion still requires thorough investigation and close observation. In order to bring to light various obscure intricacies

of African Traditional Religion, this subject needs a special attention. Because of its complexity African Traditional Religion still demands application of various scientific approaches when it is studied.

1.2.1 Phenomenology

Any objective study of Traditional Religion depends on the proper use of scientific methods of study such as hermeneutics, participant observation and phenomenology. These three concepts referred to above are closely related and useful techniques when data are gathered and processed for study purposes.

The concept phenomenology can be defined as "understanding of a phenomenon". This means having an experience about an event be it a theory or explanation of a situation, belief or incident. This understanding of an event must be concrete not just an abstract perception (Palmer 1969 : 68). The investigator must have a proper and sound understanding of the phenomenon he or she is studying. Such an understanding and knowledge must be realistic.

The meaning of participant observation is the participation of the investigator or observer in the phenomenon he or she is investigating. This means that the investigator must be present in the process of investigation. He must act, talk, sing etc and

participate practically in the phenomenon he or she is studying.

There is also the non-participant observation which basically means that the investigator only observes the phenomenon he or she is studying. He or she does not participate whatsoever in its deliberations. Here the investigator is the observer of the phenomenon without any type of participation.

1.2.2 Hermeneutics

The meaning of the term hermeneutics is based on the name 'Hermes' which is a Greek name for a Greek messenger god. The duty of this god was to transmit information from God to man. Therefore Hermes was an interpreter of the mind of God.

Hermeneutics are concerned with the understanding or interpretation of the thought or the mind and the meaning of the text or a historical record. The task of the interpreter must be to make something that is unfamiliar, distant and obscure in meaning something real, near and intelligible. (Palmer 1969 : 14)

It is for this reason that African Traditional Religion in this dissertation, has to be looked into in the perspective of hermeneutics. In order to explore those complicated sections of African

Traditional Religion the hermeneutical approach seemed to be necessary. Hermeneutics as a key to understanding or getting deep into the meaning contained in the text or cultural tradition is an indispensable tool for a researcher of Science of Religion. In this vein Kruger (1982 : 21) has this to say about Science of Religion and Hermeneutics: "To do Science of Religion in this spirit (i.e. Hermeneutical thinking) is to respect the dignity of whatever I am trying to understand and allow it to speak for itself. I become an attentive listener to the human spirit reaching out to me across the barriers of time and cultural difference."

Hermeneutics as art of interpreting critically the traditional history and cultural history, is concerned with understanding the truth contained in the primitive human experience stored in myths, tales, music and poetry. The purpose of the hermeneutical approach to African Traditional Religion is to interpret the vast material recorded, unrecorded, stored and circulating through oral tradition in order to make the meaning contained in it to be realized and grasped by the present generation.

In this sense hermeneutical thinking about traditional human experience totally alien to the interpreter demands the preparedness from the side of interpreter to learn, observe and analyze unbiased the new

situation being studied. This means that the investigator or interpreter must not allow himself or herself to be influenced by the preconceived ideas of his or her tradition. This approach is in many ways similar to phenomenology.

"Like phenomenology it is an effort to regain the vital contact with the will of primitive human experience although it can never return to primitive naivety. It is not destructive. On the contrary, it wants to hear clearly or at least as closely as possible, what was said and heard in a world to which the interpreter is a stranger" (Kruger, 1982 : 22).

This implies that hermeneutics is a proper methodology for understanding any human experience, tradition and culture other than your own. It is also relevant to the study of African Traditional Religion. A foreigner to this religion would have to engage in a dialogue of some kind in order to hear what is being said.

The investigator should seek to understand the human experience rooted in history and culture of the people practising the religion in question. In many ways religion is cultural. Just as Sharpe (1983 : 127) puts it that, "at least nothing observable in religion can be separated from cultural forms in which it expresses itself. Every last detail, every idea,

every organisation has arisen out of the needs and concerns of a specific culture and must be viewed in that light." This is how African Traditional Religion should be viewed in the hermeneutical perspective. The hermeneutics in the context of Traditional Religion would be an attempt to employ hermeneutical techniques in the study of African religion.

The intention of this thesis is to look into African Traditional Religion in the light of hermeneutical thinking. Hence it is difficult to speak about one or singular African Traditional Religion I will speak about African religions. This is due to the fact that there are many religions found amongst African societies based on African cultural diversity. For this reason special attention will be given to the study of Mpondo religion which is a section of African Traditional Religions.

Before this task is tackled, a brief look into the historical background of the Mpondo people would be traced in order to explore and locate the origin and the geographic position of these people. The greater part of this thesis will be dedicated to the rituals, worship and beliefs of Mpondo, which would be interpreted from the hermeneutical point of view in order to explore the religious truths contained in them.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 The Mpondo People

2.1.1 The Historical Background of the Mpondo People

Like all other Ntu groups of Africa the Mpondo originated from the great lakes in central Africa. According to Bryant (1919:10) "The Mpondo belong to a Nguni sub-group called Mbo. The Mbo group is composed of Swazi, Bhele, Ndwandwa and Mpondo."

"In the fifteenth century there came a great eruption of the devastating band from the north-west into the lower valley of the Zambezi River, the largest of which was known as the Amaziba. They drove before them a horde of fugitives and the remnants of many tribes destroyed on their way from the Atlantic Ocean. This horde made its first appearance above Tete on the lower Zambesi River in 1570" (Bryant 1917 : 10). In 1594 a Vambe group or abaMbo was already at St Lucia Bay.

This shows that the abaMbo group was already moving southwards as early as 1600. In support of this Theal (1919 : 45) maintains that "the Mpondo, Xhosa, Tembu ancestors having found the coast occupied by the abaThonga, turned south and entered Natal scattered themselves along the coast as far south as Umzimvubu River." In 1859 a Vambe or Abambo group lived in the

southern areas of Delagoa Bay. But one section had already moved down to the East coast (most probably this Mbo group was AmaMpondo, a Mbo sub-section of Nguni).

The story gathered from the Alberto ship-wreck in the 1500's suggests that the Mpondo people were already living near Umzimvubu river as early as 1593 (Krige 1936 : 5). The Mpondo people originated from the Lake Nyasa area from a place called eLubhelu (Ndamase 1925 : 13). By 1620 a Mpondo group lived near Dedeni coastal area of Lusikisiki in Mpondoland. This is further confirmed by the report made by the people from a ship called the Stavenisse wrecked near Mpondoland coast in 1886. The survivors of this ship reported that they passed through the country of the people called Mpondo and Mpondomise on their way from the sea-shore to Cape Town (Theal 1919 : 15).

The Mbo chief by the name of Sibiside gave birth to Dlamini. Dlamini's son Luswazi was the father of Njanya and Swazi. Njanya gave birth to Mpondo and Mpondomise the two brothers of Qwathi, Cwerha and Xesibe, the last born. (Ndamase 1925 : 12).

Between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries Mpondo, Mpondomise, Xesibe, Cwerha and Qwethi were already established in the vicinity between Tugela River and Bashee River (Ndamase 1925 : 13). This theory is

further confirmed by an interviewee (Laqwela 1989) who stated that King Tshaka of the Zulus in the 1830s still regarded the area south of Tugela as King Faku's territory.

The sovereign Mpondo territory stretches from the Umzimkulu river on the northern boundary to Umtata River on the south. In the east the frontier is the Indian Ocean. The western boundary is the Drakensberg mountains known as uLundi (Native Affairs Bluebook, 1885 : 220). It is because of this geographic position which helped the Mpondo nation to be well established, to be protected, to grow up and multiply tremendously. The insurmountable coastal area, great rivers and huge mountains and thick jungles and forests all proved to be sufficient support to the developing Mpondo culture and nationality. As pastoralists and cultivators of mullet and maize they felt secure in this geographic area. The Mpondo religion, economic life and socio-political life can be observed in this area. (See Map of the land of AmaMpondo - From: Cape of Good Hope Blue Book Native Affairs, 1885 : 105, W A Richards and Sons, Cape Town).

2.2 The Cultural Background of Mpondo People

2.2.1 Language

The people of Mpondoland have a language of their own. By language we mean the art of speaking and producing sounds which can be understood by another person you speak to. "When you know a language you can speak and be understood by others who know that language. This means you are able to produce sounds which signify certain meaning and to understand or interpret the sounds (Fromkin V and Rodman R, 1978 : 1-2).

Language has the following characteristics such as syntax, phonology, semantics and grammar. Mpondo language bears these qualities although it has not yet been scientifically studied. It is alive because Mpondo people speak it. It can be noticed in their daily lives where they interact with other people either socially, politically, economically and religiously. This language is still spoken despite the fact that it has been influenced by the Xhosa language which is the official language taught at schools of this region.

The following observations on Mpondo language are the characteristics and the evidence of the existence of this language.

Thus Prof Mzamane G M in Pahl H W, Ntusi D M, Burns-
Ncamashe Ulwini Lwesixhosa Std 10 (1971 : 246-49)
makes the following remarks:

1. Mpondo Sounds

- a. ntr - umntru - person
- b. ndr - ndriyahamba - I am going
- c. kr - umnkram - my wife
- d. tsh - tshutshu - hot

2. Mpondo Nouns Xhosa Nouns English

- a. inkrazinyana intombazana girl
- b. ukuxoxo ukuthetha to speak
- c. ukwecija ukuphosisa to tell lies
- d. ukugamla ukuqumla to cut
- e. ukutshuba ukugqiba to finish

These are just a few examples which show that this language is different from Xhosa. The Mpondo language is not just a similarity to Xhosa but is related to all other Nguni languages. This language is common amongst Mpondomise, Cwerha and amaXesibe people of Transkei region.

2.2.2

The Mpondo Art, Music and Attire

In the work of art Mpondo also show some kind of peculiarity which makes them to be identifiable as a nation with their own culture, their own music and attire. They have their own designation of pottery such as earthen pots called igengqe and ikhanzi. The art of grass-work can be seen in mats for serving meat, sleeping mats, izicamba, wooden spoon uthiniko, grass baskets ingceke or umnyazi, a grass pot for drinking beer is called iqaku or isitya sotyalwa. Works of art can also be observed in weapons for defence such as a short handled knob-kierie called umanggekwana. This weapon is usually thrown at the enemy when there is a fight.

Mpondo people have their special instruments for their own music such as uqumpu, umqange, ugempe, istweletwele etc. These musical instruments are a symbol of the existence of Mpondo music. They also have their special dances such as indlame, ingadla ukuqaja for indlavini and ukuqwaba for unoMbola.

There is also a special type of attire by which Mpondo people can be identified. They have their special attire such as izitshuba, intsiyana, izidumza used by males and females. These are all types of blankets which are put on by these people. A special attire called ixhetsha is a skin made as robe or a blanket

used by both females and males. Special attire for the females is a skirt made of a hard cotton. This skirt is called iqwanqquza.

Another symbol of identification amongst Mpondo people can be observed in the decoration of their faces and hair styles. The Mpondo males and females do make some black spots on the face and black lines on the forehead called oogesi, for decorative purposes.

There are hair styles which are common to Mpondo males and females only which mark the peculiarity of Mpondo work of art. For instance, they have special methods of plaiting or braiding hair such as: ukupikipa or ukuqakida. For females special long hair falling at the back are called ilibhu. On their arms, ankles, legs and around the neck decorating amulets, bangles made from grass, wire, rubber etc are worn. This style of putting on ornamental attire is called ukutsikila. The bangles put on the arms and ankles are called aubusengi and amamboza. The style of putting on such ornamental attire is called in one word ithihli.

2.2.3 Customs and Rituals

As it is with other nations in Africa, Mpondo society has some rites of passage which are followed to mark the development of a child. These rites of passage

are performed as a symbol of initiation of a child to the ancestors of the family or community.

A short while after birth a child undergoes an initiation rite called ukuchaza. These are small lines or cuts on the face, arms, legs and body. Then follows cutting of the small finger if the child is the first born. The finger usually cut is on the right hand. This initiation rite is called ukumqgitha.

Another initiation rite for a newly born child is Imbeleko by which a child is introduced to the ancestors through preparation of a sacramental meal. Then there is a circumcision rite for males and initiation rite for females at puberty stage. For males it is called Ukuya ethontwemi and that of females is Umnqguzo. However these initiation rites will be explained more thoroughly in the following chapter.

2.2.4 Economics

Traditional Mpondo practice certain trades peculiar to them only. They usually make exchange of ornamental attire with live stock, fowls etc. This shows that trade amongst traditional Mpondo used to take the form of exchange of goods.

To ensure genuine circulation of goods practices such as ukusisa, that is, keeping some of the live stock with a friend, so that, he or she can have a share. People interested in the exchange and distribution of goods work hard although they are not employed. Such people produce goods for consumption. This is shown by production of bead work, embroidery work called ukurhasela. Making of sleeping mats (izicamba and izithebe), food mats, baskets (ingceke or umnyazi), brooms imitshayelo, earthen pots imiqengqo etc. is common amongst Mpondo. The production of goods is usually done for family and public consumption.

Another traditional Mpondo economic base is lobolo custom and ukunyoba custom. Lobolo custom is the payment of dowry by the bridegroom to the parents of the bride.

Although the practise is not aimed at making profit by parents of the girls to be married, basically the intention of the custom is to strengthen the marriage ties and establish family relations between the two families involved in the marriage contract. However it has some economic implications, for the married couples get involved in a wide friendly goods and live-stock exchange.

Unmarried daughters are also an asset to their fathers and mothers. When a young man has fallen in love with

an unmarried girl he is expected to give a goat or sheep called umnyobo. This practice is not aimed at collecting property but at making the young man known to the parents of the girl that he is in love with his daughter, so as to encourage responsibility.

Production of food in the field is also part of Mpondo economic growth. Labour is the basic need for the profitable agricultural produce. The practice of isithembu, that is, polygamous marriage amongst Mpondo helps to supply the nation with enough labour. Males look after the live-stock and later use the live-stock to get wives who will later produce the labour supply. In this way property circulates in the society.

2.3 Religion of the Mpondo People

The existence of a Supernatural power is beyond the control and human understanding. It is self-revealing and spontaneous knowledge acquired by human beings. This knowledge knows no time limits, cultural or geographical boundaries. There is no part of the world where this power, in some one way or other is not yet revealed. The validity of this statement is supported by the number of the established religions of the world. The greatness of the power is so wonderful that it cannot be confined to one place. The Supernatural power revealed to many different people of different nationalities with different

languages happened to be known in different designations.

The same attitude and concept about the names given to a Deity by Africans is observed amongst the South African religions, that is, Ntu group. The choice of the terms and the original meaning of such terms illustrate a broad and profound belief in the existence of a Supernatural Being.

This view is also endorsed by Barrette (1982 : 37) when he writes saying that, "The general revelation of God to mankind does not depend on where people are living. On the contrary it goes beyond time and geographical barriers. It reaches mankind everywhere simply because man is made in God's image and likeness. In fact God reveals himself to all times and in all places."

It becomes crystal clear from the above explanation that African religions are a reality. These religions are another wonderful manner through which God employed to reveal Himself. By definition African religion (Mpondo religion included) falls in line with other religions which are recognized and respected in the world. Like major religious books of the world, African religions are based on a set of beliefs and practices which are held by Africans about the existence of a Supra-mundane being.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Worship in Mpondo Religion

3.1.1 Belief in the Super Natural Being

Like most African Traditional Religions Mpondo religion is monotheistic. The belief in a Supernatural Being is undoubted. The existence of a Supernatural Being is clear in the minds of Mpondo as it is with other followers of African Traditional Religion. God's existence is proved by God's self-revelation. As Setiloane (1986 : 32) remarked that "god was being revealed to Hebrew of old as Yaweh as recorded in myths and story of Biblical Literature, so also He was being revealed to Africans as Modimo, Thixo, Lea in their myth and stories." The self-revelation of God is without doubt a fact amongst Africans of any village. If one goes out and meets a handful of people about ordinary everyday things, then almost before you know where you are one would hear them all talking eagerly about God.

The worship and belief of Mpondo dates back from African Traditional Religion which is a product of the thinking and experiences of our fore-fathers. "They formed religious ideas, they formulated religious beliefs, they observed religious ceremonies and rituals, they told proverbs and myths which carried religious meanings and they evolved laws and customs

which safeguarded the life of the individual and his community - religion is found in all African peoples (Mbiti 1975 : 12). Belief in a Supernatural Being is a God-given gift to all peoples of the world. The whole life of an African is full of religious experiences. Hodgson (1982 : 20) asserted that "In traditional Xhosa world view God remained in the background and was only called upon in times of national crisis such as drought, epidemic disease and war. The ancestors, the spirits of the dead members of the language were the focus of religious activity." Through belief in God religious people gain a sense of security in life. With that religious way of life, they know who they are, how to act in different situations and how to solve their problems (Mbiti 1975 : 13).

Furthermore the names attributed to the super-mundane being by Mpondo people explains their deep belief in the existence of God. The name Mdali (i.e. Creator) is found amongst Mpondo, Zulu and Xhosa groups. This term refers to God who is regarded as a creator of all nature. Another term for God according to Mpondo language and Zulu language is Nkulu-Nkulu meaning the 'Most great'. The term is a clear indicator that the concept of the existence of God is deeply embedded in the lives of these people. This also explains that these people have their own religion (i.e. Imkolo yesiNtu).

The term used by Mpondo people alone is uMagojela meaning that God's power reaches every part of the world. The power of God is seen as encompassing and far reaching. Such a power cannot be equalled to any earthly powers. This is an indication that the Supernatural Being is the most high, the omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. This explains the basic meaning of this Mpondo word is uMagojela which explains that God is everywhere and eternal.

On the other hand a belief of a certain place in the sky which is regarded as God's abode is also held. The word izulu meaning heaven is traditional amongst Mpondo people as well. This is an indication that Mpondos believe in the existence of a place which is the house of Supernatural Being. Mpondo people have a law which prevents people from pointing to the sky with a finger. When someone has to point to the sky, according to Mpondo law, a fist is used not a finger. This taboo suggests that Mpondo people believe that the place of dwelling for the Supernatural Being is izulu somewhere near the sky.

The nature of Magojela is apparently spiritual. The term uMagojela stems from a verb ukuqojela which means the ability to reach even the most difficult part of something or to defeat. Thus Mpondo idea of the existence of a Supernatural power is beyond doubt. The Supernatural is understood as to be a spiritual

power. It is this spiritual power that is believed to be dwelling in heaven.

The Supernatural Being is not at all physical but is spiritual. Communications with this spirit is only spiritual. Such a God cannot be approached by the ordinary man but only through mediation of spirits called Amakhosi or Amathongo. The Supernatural Being in Mpondo belief is far from concrete experience by human beings, for, He is invisible and holy, that is, special and set aside. The term Magojela shows that God cannot be categorized under masculine and feminine genders. The prefix which is Ma means One who. It is not the prefix common among the Nguni languages which means mother, for example MaFaku, that is, mother Faku.

Magojela as a Supernatural being cannot be diagrammatically or symbolically represented through the use of stones, trees, clay, iron and gold. This is the greater source of power. From this power all others come. The power of life, the power to end life, the rain, the nature, the healing power, the divination power etc. comes from this source.

The existence of a Supernatural Being can be shown by looking into the daily lives of Mpondo people. This means exploring their activities from birth to death or even after death. In this way, the far reaching

power of God can be heard talking to certain special people. It can be put into practice in prayers, worship, sacrifices ceremonies, celebrations and festivals. In the following chapters this is going to be shown and explained in detail.

3.2 The Living Dead

Africans generally believe in the existence of ancestors. This stems from the fact that life, according to Africans, does not end with death. There is strong belief in the life after death and life continuity and thus the existence of the living dead. The ancestors, that is izinyanya in Mpondo are the spirits of the people who have passed away. The term comes from ukwenyanya, to detest. Izinyanya are supposed to be clean, for, they hate dirty works. As spirits, the ancestors communicate with the members of the community. "The interaction of one's 'Seriti' (vital forces) with those of other people in the community does not terminate with death. Even after death 'the vital participation of the deceased is experienced in the community in general and in the home and clan circle in particular. What has been described as The Ancestor Cult of the Africans refers to this experience in the life of the people (Setiloane 1986 : 17).

The place of ancestors in Mpondo worship is intermediary. Their role in worship is like that of a prophet. They are a link between God and the people living in the community. In the community they are approached by people whenever there is a need. Hodgson, (1982 : 22) has this to say in connection with ancestors: "the chiefs were buried in their cattle kraals the place of the ancestors. All these grave sites were holy places where men went to meet their ancestors and the land became sanctified by this association. The ancestors were believed to be the guardian of the land and men could not move away at will without fear of alienating the blessings and protection of the ancestors." The life of the Mpondo nation is centred around the belief in Izinyanya. It is for this reason that in most African societies one cannot make a clear demarcating line between religious life and secular life. From birth to death life is celebrated in a religious manner. In the centre of any African worship ancestors are always involved and they play a major role. The belief is that, since, they are connected with the living world and the atrocities of this world they are also a relevant link with the unseen world. They are holy, hence they are called izinyanya for they are loathsome. They are anti-evil as they are godly and spiritual. In support of this Peires (1981 : 67) stated that "like most other African religions, Xhosa religion was logical enough given the assumption that the unseen world was

active in that one and exercised an important causal influence. Health and fertility were accepted as the natural condition of things and any deficiency was attributed to dereliction of duty or to the influence of malevolent persons."

The worship in Mpondo religion is always concerned with continuity of life and prosperity. Any disturbance of the peaceful course of life is always regarded as evil. Such an event or occurrence is always protected in order to be avoided by proper worship of God and good respect given to izinyanya.

3.3 Good and Bad Spirits

3.3.1 Good Spirits

"We have seen that according to African views, the universe is composed of visible and invisible parts. It is sometimes also believed that between God and human beings there are other beings who populate the universe. These are the spirits. There are many types of spirits. God is their Creator, just as He is the Creator of all things. The Spirits have a status between God and men and are not identical with either" (Mbiti 1975 : 65). This statement supports the view that there are spirits who are good and bad just as there are bad and good people. The good spirits are concerned with the well-being of the people. They help people to pursue good actions and deeds. The

spirits are divided into two main groups namely, natural spirits and human spirits. Good spirits are natural in the sense that they come or operate directly from God to men. This type of spirits regarded as good are those spirits that give good behaviour, kindness, humility and love to human beings. A man with a good spirit in Mpondo is usually referred to as 'Umntu onomoya omhle'. A man with good behaviour is regarded as having a good spirit.

There are also human spirits which are good. The human spirits do their work via man or human beings. These are the spirits found in man as well as the living dead. A living man in possession of spirits of good nature would also do good work to the fellow living man. This is the type of spirit which is possessed by the diviners and medical practitioners. The human spirit dwells among the living dead as they communicate with living people in their communities. This spirit guides and protects the people in the community. Good spirits in good people living or the living dead act enhance goodness.

Some good spirits dwell in some woods, rivers, pools and in springs of water. Woods with good spirits are Amakhubalo, Amaso, Amaqwili, Umabophe etc. These woods are known to be in possession of good spirit, for, if one puts on a piece of wood of good spirit on his head, in the mouth, around the neck etc one is

sure to be followed by goodness. For example ikhubalo is one of the popular kinds of wood with spirit of good luck possessing protective powers, in the sense that all evil spirit and evil deeds go away in its presence. Amaso is a woody substance which is known amongst Mpondo. Usually it is worn around the neck so as to gain good spirit of good omen, good health, healing from sicknesses affecting eye sight. Another woody substance believed to be a dwelling of spiritual power of good is Umabophe. The good spirit in this wood is believed to be able to make the words uttered whilst it is under the tongue or in the mouth to sound good and to be appreciated easily.

In the river good spirits are found. Amongst the Mpondo clan of amaNgcikwa there is a religious practice closely related to interaction with good spirits living in the river or pool. Whenever there is a need to appease or approach them in the pool a ritual is arranged for them. They are a family or a clan of good spirits dwelling in a particular known pool. They are good to the clan for they protect and guide the clan towards a correct trend to prosperity and growth of the clan.

Another good spirit which is a source of life, fertility, health, good luck etc. dwells in a spring of salty water called Isinuka near Port St Johns (Transkei). The Isinuka is water which almost tastes

like sea-water. This water is believed to possess wonderful healing power. Any type of disease is driven away through this water. Where it is found, there is also a healing gas good for headaches etc. This spring is not even surrounded by a fence. It is free for all. The knowledge circulating around Mpondoland is that this spring was earmarked for an area to be fenced so as to control the people coming for health purpose. The idea held by the white municipality of Port St Johns was that the health services obtained from this Isinuka should be payable to the municipality. The good spirit waters of the spring ceased to be found in the fenced area. Instead the spring appeared in another spot outside the fence. As a result people still get their health services free of charge at Isinuka water.

In the deep pools of most big rivers it is believed that good spirits are found. This is what is often reported by the AmaThwasa, that is, the diviners who are still in training. It is common amongst AmaThwasa who are still under call to be ordered by the good spirits in the pool to visit the deepest depths of the pool. Most of the AmaThwasa report that on their arrival in the deep pools they usually notice the presence of a well established family and homestead under the waters. Here they meet people of the ancestor class who were once well known old men and women active in traditional earthly life. They even

report that it is from these people that they receive divination instruction lessons. This is the work of the good spirits dwelling in the river. All good spirits are for the promotion of good life and good spirit of the community.

3.3.2 Bad Spirits

Bad spirits are so called because they act badly or their actions have evil purposes. Unlike good spirits bad spirits are harmful and detrimental to life. Death, illness and bad luck are in most cases regarded as caused by bad spirits. The presence of bad spirits is usually noticed in the general bad or evil behaviour of a person. A person doing or acting badly is usually regarded as being possessed by bad spirits, that is, unomoya ombi. The signs of this bad spirit is cruelty, a wish to kill or an ill-feeling about other people. Such signs in a person possessed by bad spirits cannot be clearly traced. Its origin is not known. However, it can be said that, bad spirits of this nature come from God, hence all spirits are God's creation. These can collectively be called natural bad spirits.

Most of the bad spirits are human spirits. This set of bad spirits range from the living dead bad spirits to the man-made bad spirits. The living-dead bad spirits refers to the ordinary living-dead good spirit

acting badly. Sundkler (1948 : 21) declared that, "illness, misfortune or death in the kraal are sure signs that he regards himself as neglected. The spirit, therefore must be appeased by various means especially by sacrifices in order to restore health, happiness and harmony in the kraal and among his kinsmen. When the spirits are annoyed by mistake or some misdeeds of the community or family members they let sickness befall one of the family or community members. Sometimes illness may occur due to the call made by the ancestors to one member of the family who will have to respond to the call to divination. The bad spirits in possession of a sick man on call to divination can be healed only if he or she accepts the call being made by the ancestors acting as bad spirits."

Another type of bad spirits are those which are natural but can be manipulated by man for evil purposes. For example the lightening is used to destroy other people's lives or property by evil-doers. Pieres (1981 : 67) maintained that, "It was further assumed that the unseen world was comprehensible that its forces behaved according to set patterns, and that it was therefore open to manipulation and control. This made religious practice an inseparable part of secular activity. On the one level it was a technique of getting things done and its practitioners, the diviners were not

metaphysicians but technicians who understood the mechanics of the unseen world."

The lightening, that is, ukududuma is regarded as an act of a certain bad spiritual power. It is said that this bad spirit is like a bird. The bad spiritual lightening power is deadly to the people. Dangers of ukududuma or izulu can be prevented by the medical practitioners specialist powers. "The main task of the diviners is to find out where sorcerers have hidden their destructive and deadly poisons. In a society where a sorcerer is supposed to be able to direct the very lightening against the enemy by magical means the heaven-doctor is kept busy placing magically prepared pegs (izikhonkwane) which will attract the powerful impulse of the sky-god and thereby save the lives of men" (Sundkler, 1948, 24).

Other types of bad spirits are those which are man-made such as Amafufunyana or izizwe. Amongst Mpondo religion the use of izizwe is common during ukuphosa practice. The ukuphosa practice is when the spirits of izizwe are applied to a person. Somebody who is possessed or made to be possessed by izizwe usually cries without tears and goes to where the spirits order him or her to go. He or she becomes more energetic and hysterical. When such bad spirits are in possession of a human being neither he or she is normal nor does he or she know what he or she is doing

or talking about. When he or she is talking he or she does not talk but the izizwe does the talking.

Many cases of hysteria which the inyanga is required to heal nowadays are being treated with such medicine (umthi - pl. imithi) are supposed to replace or supersede the hysteria with some form of possession called "indiki, indawe or izizwe" (Sundkler, 1948 : 24). The amandiki and amandawe are zulu terms for izizwe.

Amongst the man-made bad spirits are those who are called familiars. Most of them are a product of evil medicine men. The belief in the evil power of familiars is very strong amongst Mpondo people. Well known familiars are iMpundulu, utikolotshe, iChanti and uMamlambo.

Impundulu familiars are used by people to kill or to cause illness. They usually appear as dreams when one is asleep. They normally change their appearance as situation demands. At times they appear as human beings who are causing fear or as just a fearful monster or a bird. It is believed that, when it has caused death one may appear dead while actually it is not so. In such a case, a dead person may have been magically taken away and placed in a safe place whilst his or her place in the grave is taken by iMpundulu. This method of causing death through use of iMpundulu

is called ukuthwebula.

UTikolotshe is another familiar well known amongst Mpondo people. Like impundulu the Tikolotshe familiar is man-made and it usually appears like a human being. It is usually used or sent to destroy life of human beings. The name of dwarf in Mpondo is Tikolotshe. The name uHili is used by Xhosas only.

Ichanti or Mamlambo is a name given to a snake-like familiar. The snake-like familiar called Ichanti is used by males and the familiar used by females is called uMamlambo. The use of familiars is to gain wealth. The life of human beings is always at stake as the Ichanti and Mamlambo can kill people.

Besides man-made bad spirits used by man as familiars, there are also those animals who are employed as means to kill or disturb the normal course of life of the people. Animals which are employed in the evil deeds or spread of evil spirits are impaka, imfene, that is, baboon and a type of a frog called ilidwi. These are ordinary animals which are used as familiars, to destroy or disturb life of the people or of all the living organisms.

The possession of a deadly power is seen or noticed in these animals although naturally they are not evil. It stands to reason therefore that evil or bad spirits

are transferred to other animals or act on command of their employers or owners. The presence of an evil spirit is not doubted as it can be detected in the daily activities of the people. As the life of any people is always an interaction between good and bad, bad always seek to destroy the good.

3.4 The Nature of Prayer

The focal point and core of any religion is worship and the liturgy. Both worship and the liturgy refer to a special service rendered by people to a Supernatural Being. Emphasising this reality Holm (1977 : 12) wrote thus: "It is not only the words that are used which express the beliefs or even the way in which the pattern of worship is contracted, the sequence of different kinds of prayers, such as praise, confession, thanksgiving or the use of scriptures or sacred stories it is what is done as well as what is used." From the above-mentioned statement one gathers the information that the main elements constituting worship are the people, sacred stories, holy places, holy objects, prayers, prophets, priests, sacrifices, rituals etc. All these elements are the means of linking men with a Supernatural Being. In this chapter an attempt will be made to assess the interpretation of worship and liturgy in African Traditional Religion amongst Mpondo people.

Communicating with a Supernatural Being is something common and practised by many famous religions of the world of which African Traditional religion is one. Prayer is the commonest method of approaching God. People may pray privately as individuals or as heads of their families. Other prayers are held communally at public meetings and for public needs. Anybody can pray to God at any time and at any place. But there are people who pray on behalf of others. African Traditional prayers generally include praise, thanksgiving, a declaration of the state of affairs in which prayers are offered and requests. Whenever an African is conducting a prayer he or she is communicating directly with God. Prayer is direct talk with God (Mbiti, 1975 : 55).

In praying people are addressing themselves to God who dwells in the invisible world and who is invisible. They believe that He is present with them. Prayer is an act of pouring out the soul of the individual or community. Through prayer people get closer to God as if they can see Him. They speak to Him directly, although they cannot see Him with naked eyes except through spiritual eyes.

Approaching God one cannot employ a single direction hence God is not limited by space and time. The nature of prayer is the use of words as well as symbols accompanying the words. The symbols usually

appear in the performance of offerings and sacrifices. To paraphrase the words of Mbiti, 1975 : 60, "People make offerings and sacrifice in order to draw attention of God to their needs but these things are not always given to him directly. The sacrifice and offerings are then made to lesser spiritual beings such as divinities, spirits and the departed. These act as go-betweens between men and God. They are expected to receive the offerings and sacrifices and then relay people's requests to God."

Therefore the understanding and practice of African Traditional prayer cannot be underestimated. In the following pages special attention will be given to prayer, mediation, symbolism, sacrifice, offerings common among Mpondo people. Also in the following pages special attention will be rendered to liturgy and procedure of conducting prayers.

3.5 The Places of Worship

Coming to the places of worship in the African religion particularly in the context of Inkolo yesiNtu, that is, South African religion, one would be bound to make the following remarks. This religion observes various places as holy and sacred for worship. Such places are rivers, forests, mountains, cattle, goat or sheep kraals, court-yard, grave-yard and alters, shrines. The sacredness of these places

is shown by the respect given to them by the people. Holy places are not just visited by any man. Some people are not allowed to visit holy places of worship.

A contribution towards this concept has been made by Mbiti, 1975 : 45 when asserting that "Every African person has its own religious place. They are not for common or careless use, because they are considered to be sacred or holy. Some of them are man-made and others are taken over in their natural form."

The man-made places are the temples, shrines, alters and graves. In the African sense a temple can just be an ordinary hut. For instance a special hut for worship used by diviners, that is, izangoma is named Isiqodlo by Mpondo people. Amongst Mpondo, the courtyard that is, Inkundla and great hut, that is Indlu enkulu are also regarded as holy. Certain religious occasions are conducted inside the courtyard and the great hut which are regarded as sacred places.

The Traditional Mpondo temple called Isiqodlo is usually a mud-built hut with a thatched roof. Inside the hut a special room is built with wooden material. However today this special room is built with planks covered with red or white cloths. Inside this room or the enclosure sacred garments, called isidlokolo, spear, sticks and all other holy material and medicine

are stored. This temple called isigodlo is regarded as a sacred place. Only the qualified diviner or the one in training called ithwasa is allowed to enter into the enclosure which is the most holy place of isigodlo. When people enter into isigodlo they have to take off their shoes, they must not be drunk, they must be clean, that is sexual cleanliness, not to be in menstruation period, not to have committed murder, not have had a deceased relative. This shows that in the temple of the medical practitioner and diviner sacredness is upheld. In African religion worship and medication is intertwined. A medical practitioner is also a full-time priest. The priest observes certain rules and orders from the ancestors who are the mediators between God and the living.

The shrines are common in African religion. In South Africa, shrines are the cattle kraal, graveyard, certain forests, rivers and mountains. The significance of a shrine is explained by Mbiti (1975 : 146) when saying that, "Graveyard of the departed are also used as shrines. Family and personal shrines are used for pouring libation, placing bits of food, performing family rituals, sacrificing and making offerings and saying prayers. They are a centre of family religious life. They symbolize the meeting point between the visible and invisible world." The idea of popularising religious centres of worship is part and parcel of African life, history and worship.

Certain hills, mountains, rivers, cattle kraal or goat and sheep kraals acting as alters, that is, Isibingelelo and mounds called Isivivane are well-known phenomena in Mpondo religious life. Amongst Mpondo people certain mountains are regarded as holy and thus are shrines where special prayers are conducted. For instance prayer for rain is usually conducted on top of a holy mountain. Some rivers have deep pools where it is believed that there are people living in them. Such rivers are regarded as holy. Certain people especially those who are on call for divination are usually called by the Spirits living in such rivers where they get a special training before they undergo practical training by a qualified diviner. These pools are said to be calling, that is, in Mpondo language ziyabiza. They are respected and feared rivers in the community. These rivers are holy and clean. If people crossing such rivers are unclean, in terms of committing sinful acts, the tendency is that they are washed away by the strong current. It is even necessary and common for people crossing such rivers to confess their sins in order to avoid disaster. At times special prayers are said particularly by the diviners in training and by those who are qualified. These rivers can thus be regarded by the people concerned as their shrines (Interviewee, Duma S, a Diviner 12:10:1989).

Some forests are used as shrines by Mpondo. The sacredness of such forests is confirmed by the fact that special schools for initiation of boys, that is, Ithonto are often situated in such forests. The belief is that even evil spirits will not easily reach such forests which are regarded as clean and holy. Cattle kraals or goat and sheep kraals are regarded as special places marked for prayer or worship. They can be referred to as alters or as shrines with alters. In Mpondo community most of the religious ceremonies are conducted inside or near the kraal. An animal to be slaughtered as a sacrifice to the ancestors is killed in the kraal. It is this fire place that can be regarded as a kind of an alter. Sometimes a special beer brewed for the religious ceremony is partaken of in the kraal or near the kraal. The beer is even poured on the fire place as an offering to the ancestors.

The mounds known as Isivivane by Mpondo people are also regarded as centres of prayer or worship. The people on journeys used to put stones on certain points or spots of their way as a symbol of prayer or thanksgiving or a plea to God to be with them on their journey. Some words of prayer are said when the symbolic prayer stones are placed. The collection of symbolic prayer stones called Isivivane become holy centres of worship or shrines (Soga, 1930 : 125).

Generally speaking the worship of God is not time bound, for God is to be worshipped at all times by His people. However people do mark certain periods or seasons as special periods of worship. This is common practice amongst all religions of the world. Something common in many religions are the specific days, dates and weeks of the year set aside for special worship.

In African religion, especially as observed by Mpondo people, special days or periods are set aside for worship something indicating that African religion is an interwoven phenomenon. The people's daily lives cannot be totally separated from their religion. This is what Mbiti, J S (1975 : 27) emphasized when he declared that, "African religion is seen in all aspects of life, therefore, it influences all areas of life. African religion has been largely responsible for shaping the character and culture of African peoples through the centuries. Even if it has no sacred books it is written everywhere in the life of people. To be an African in traditional setting is to be truly religious. It has been rightly said that Africans are notoriously religious." This shows that the whole life of an African is full of stages of development during which special prayers are conducted. From birth to death times of worship are

marked by certain ceremonies performed especially for certain individuals attaining certain stages of development that is the rites of passage, called by van Gennep, "rites de passage" (Seligman, 1930 : 21).

3.6.1 During Certain Rites of Passage

The initiation rites I observed amongst Mpondos are imbeleko, that is, the rite performed just a few months after the birth of a child, ukuchaza, that is, making some small cuts on the face, arms, back and legs, ukungqitha, that is amputating the last joint of the small finger on the right hand, ukuya ethontweni, that is, circumcision for males and umngquzo, that is an initiation rite performed for girls after they have reached adulthood. All these initiation rites are accompanied by a religious ceremony to mark their solemnity. However the detail of the performance of such ceremonial rites will be analyzed in the following chapter.

Another period of worship for Mpondo people which is observable in my community is the chain of rituals performed during and after the death of a human being. To mention a few such examples are the funeral service usually marked by traditional celebration called in Mpondo umngcwabo, ukuxukuxa, that is a cleansing ceremony after the funeral, ukulanda or ukubuyisa abangasekhayo, that is bringing back the deceased, now

associated with the Christian orientated ceremony known as ukutyhila ilitye, that is, unveiling of the tomb-stone.

Another special period of worship observed by Mpondo people is the cleansing ceremonies such as ukungxenqxeza and ukunkcola, that is, to appease God or to cleanse somebody when something bad has befallen him or her. If something bad has occurred to the whole community or nation, then the ceremony would be national or communal. The manner in which those rituals are performed indicates that the grave becomes the centre of worship and as such the community or the family prescribes certain periods of worship. Suffice to mention these examples of periods of worship, the detailed procedure of conducting different methods of worship will be analyzed in the following chapters.

3.6.2 During Time of War

In Mpondo community the period of war is usually marked by several special religio-medical ceremonial rites. When men are going to war, first of all, a special prayer is conducted by a religio-medical specialist who gives guidance and strict regulations to be observed in order to help men to be successful on the battle field. This religio-medical prayer is called by Mpondo people ukwelapha (Observed : 1989).

3.6.3

During Agricultural Festivals

When a child becomes an adult he or she continues to celebrate life. This means engagement in a religious celebration of certain agricultural events such as Ulibo or ukwetshwama, that is an African ritual celebrated in Autumn before the nation or community partakes of green produce in the field. This is a common practice amongst Mpondo people.

The purpose is to strengthen the family before taking full eating of the new crops such as green mealies, fresh pumpkins etc. The belief centred around this incident is that new crops have weakening substance if they are just taken in without this religious ceremony. It is also a kind of a prayer of thanksgiving, for the newly ripened crop as an additional food supply for the nation or community. To show that this is a kind of a prayer, the rite is conducted in the presence of a religio-medical doctor, traditional priests, senior community and family members. This rite is solemnized by the spilling of the blood of a sacrificial animal and by the traditional beer which is usually brewed for all religious occasions and rituals.

Another Mpondo traditional ceremony conducted to mark the harvest season is known as Amanqina enkabi that is "the feet of an ox" or Utyalwa besabhokhwe that is a

"beer for the sjambok". It is a thanksgiving occasion to the ancestors, for the protection they rendered to the community crops before the harvest. The ceremony may take several days of beer drinking if several homesteads in the community have contributed in the process of preparing the beer. Such an occasion is commonly known as Umthayi. As the festival is purely agrico-religious it is marked by the slaughter of an animal and the home-made beer is shared by the community members. (Interviewee : Nakasa, 1988).

To sum up, this chapter has been designed to highlight those parts of African Traditional Religion which can be interpreted as representing the liturgy, time and place of worship particularly amongst Mpondo people. A deep insight into the liturgy, time and period of worship of African Traditional Religion needs a sound hermeneutical approach of the data mainly based on oral tradition. This means amongst other things that any given situation should be interpreted in such a way that it shows clearly the religious connotation it has. The given example or situation must be able to explicitly speak for itself.

A religious example showing how God is worshipped by the people in their own religion, must be able to carry home hermeneutical meaning. The idea of looking into the data hermeneutically is to prove that God speaks and reveals Himself in various ways to

different people at different times and different places. God's wisdom and power is shown through His great works. Through worship his people apply their understanding and interpretation of God's great works. The worship of Mpondo people has illustrated that these people grasped God's revelation through nature and they acknowledge his existence hence they worship Him in spirit and in truth.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 The Rites of Passage in Mpondo Religion

In African religion law is the basic binding factor for the people practising that particular religion. Law seems to be penetrating all spheres of life. It is for this reason that in African Traditional Religion there are social laws, ceremonial laws and agricultural laws. These laws are so intermingled and overlapping that it is difficult to separate one from the other. For instance ceremonial agricultural laws are to a certain extent social, for they occur in the society. They are also religious, for the people in a society are religious.

The problems of a society are dialectical in sociological terms, that is, man is a product of a society and society is a product of man. Therefore social laws deal with a man as a member of a society. It is a law which seeks to initiate and govern man in his society. Thus it stands to reason that such social laws are man-made. In any society law is initiated to the new born members of a society immediately after their birth. This is exactly what Goodman and Gary (1971 : 30) sought to clarify when they declared that "the internalized rituals are, what G H Mead called the generalized other a depersonalized set of social norms and values within whose context,

the child evaluates himself or herself and goes on in the environment."

There are several laws between man and his or her society which act as guidelines in a society. Some of the laws are properly interpreted in terms of social institution initiation rites or rites of passage, taboos, folk-laws, customary laws. Initiation rites such as imbeleko, ukunqgitha, ukuchaza, ukuya ethontweni, ukunqquza etc. among Mpondo can be regarded as good examples of social laws.

4.2 Rites during Pregnancy and at Childbirth

4.2.1 Isihlambezo

In African Traditional Religion worship involves the whole life of a human being. From pregnancy, that is where life begins, to death, where life ends, stages of development are observed. At about five months it is expected of a pregnant wife to undergo a religio-medical treatment. This mixture is prepared by the people of her husband's place. In connection with this Krige (1936 : 63) has this to say, "While she is pregnant a woman must be very careful indeed, for there are all kinds of danger around her that can harm her unborn child unless proper precautions are taken. To safeguard her child from evil influences the woman must be treated by a doctor, who will give her special medicine."

A woman during the pregnancy stage needs to protect the weak unborn child against bad spirits used by wizards. There are also dangers to the unborn child caused by umkhondo, that is the suffering caused by the bad spirits if a pregnant woman walks on the track where a bad spirit animal has passed. To protect the child, the heads of the family prepare a special medicine called Isihlambezo. The homestead is the centre of the ancestors. The ancestors take care of the child at pregnancy stage and after birth. The ancestors make the Isihlambezo to be more effective. The Isihlambezo is a mixture of various herbs.

A pregnant woman would keep on drinking Isihlambezo until there are about three or two months left before the birth of the child. The Isihlambezo mixture protects and facilitate the birth of a child (Ndamase 1925 : 151).

4.2.2 Taboos during Pregnancy and Birth

In order to make sure that the life of the child is safe in his mother's womb, the mother has to observe certain taboos. The taboos are community or family laws to be obeyed by the pregnant mother in the interests of the child. The laws are always attached to the ancestors who are the custodians of the family or community life. Therefore the guardians of the taboos are the ancestors. If certain taboos are

broken, a great deal of disaster may occur. It is therefore always worthwhile to observe them.

The pregnant mother is not allowed to stand up when eating, lest the child stands in the womb. The belief is that the birth may be a problem as the child may come in a wrong position perhaps with feet instead of coming with the head. Peeping through the window and door is taboo for a pregnant woman. Such an act may lead to a problematic birth as the child would peep and withdraw at birth. (Krige, 1936 : 63).

The pregnant mother is not allowed to come very close to a corpse. She cannot pour soil into the grave during a funeral service. She cannot put on mourning clothes. It is a taboo for a pregnant woman to put on a knotted cloth on the head or around the waist or stomach. The hairstyle of the woman should not have knots. The death, grave and burial taboos for pregnant women are protective measures against any weakening forces emanating from the death situation. The religious beliefs pertaining to pregnancy taboos are made to ensure the safe birth of the child. It is a taboo for a pregnant woman to put on an attire with some knots, for it is believed that such knots may render the process of delivering a child difficult. These taboos are observed until the birth of the child has been achieved.

There are also some food taboos for pregnant women. It is believed that certain food stuffs have a special influence on the baby before birth. For example, a bald head of a newly born child is believed to be caused by the kidney meat eaten by the mother or father. The marrow of the bone is a taboo for pregnant women because it makes babies to be born with wet noses.

At birth a child is further protected by some other taboos to be observed by the mother. For instance, only elderly women can act as midwives. They should only be members of the family. "The midwives are always the women of the kraal who are past child bearing age themselves, and will thus both be free from being harmed by contact with the patient and have the necessary experience in dealing the cases" (Krige, 1936 : 64). The hut should be kept warm with wood fire and smeared with cow-dung.

When the process of giving birth is over the placenta is buried in a hole in the great hut where the parents of the husband stays. The baby is protected by a specially prepared mixture of sooth (umle) and the left over of the home-brewed beer (intsipho). She or he takes this mixture with the milk of the mother whilst the mother is in confinement (efukwini) for one week or more.

4.2.3 Ukuchaza

According to Mpondo custom a child needs to undergo a traditional ritual called ukuchaza. In most cases Mpondo rituals involve spilling of the blood as symbol of prayer. In this manner a child is introduced to the ancestors, that they must know him or her, that he or she has arrived and that they must take care of him or her. A child undergoes this initiation rite at the age of six months and above.

Ukuchaza means making shallow and thin lines or cuts on the face, on the arms, legs and body. The idea is not to make big wounds but to let out some drops of blood.

The practice can be done repeatedly as the child grows. The officiator is usually an elderly lady who has passed the child bearing stage. She uses a sharp blade specially designed for this function. This blade is referred to as Inkcakuba. This rite is usually accompanied by a celebration which is marked by home-made traditional beer and slaughter of a fowl, a goat or a sheep. The whole ceremony is religious.

4.2.4 Ukungqitha

Another initiation rite for Mpondo children is Ukungqitha. The Ukungqitha is the cutting or removal

of the first joint of the child's finger. This ritual is usually done only to the first-born child of the family at an early infant stage. The small finger's last joint is cut off on the right hand.

The first born child of the family undergoes this custom but if the first born passes away at an early infant stage the following child will still be subject to Ukunnqitha initiation rite. The purpose of the ritual is to introduce the child to the ancestors. It is a kind of prayer. It is a way of placating the ancestors to protect the child against all evil spirits and dangers of life.

An elderly woman is normally appointed as an officiator. Such a woman must be clean. This means that she must have passed the child bearing stage. The instrument used for cutting a finger is a sharp blade called Inkcakuba. When the last joint of the finger has been removed it is carefully covered with some medicine and is stored underground inside the great hut or at the top of the roof or thatched roof. This is done in strict privacy so that people other than the family members may not know where the finger joint is stored. The fear is that witches can abuse the cut-off part of the finger and thus the life of the child may be at stake (Interviewee Mancayiyana Ntsangu 13:04:1978).

Like all other Mpondo initiation rites Ukungqitha is accompanied by home brewed beer which solemnizes the occasion. Sometimes a goat, sheep or a fowl is slaughtered. The people are invited to share in a communal way, the ritual meal. This indicates that the ukungqitha is really a religious ceremony. It is a way of approaching God through traditional ritual prayer via ancestors.

4.2.5. Imbeleko

At an early stage a child is introduced to the ancestors of the family. This occasion is normally marked by the offer of a sacrificial animal. When an offered animal (a goat or a sheep) is pierced on the side of the chest bone to strike the heart, a goat or sheep bleats as the spear is pierced on the chest to the direction of the heart. This cry is regarded as the transmission of a message from the officiator to the ancestors. When an offered animal is crying the chief officiator says a short traditional prayer in the form of a praise song, that is izibongo or izinqulo.

In the case of imbeleko the child concerned must put his or her hands on the back of the sacrificial animal before the sacrificial animal is killed. When the animal has been killed a certain portion of its meat is given to the child. A certain part of the skin is

neatly cut and tied around the neck and the arms of the child. If the child is still at an infant stage a leather blanket is made out of the sacrificial goat or sheep skin. Such a blanket is used to tie the child at the back i.e. ukubeleka. Hence the ritual is termed Imbeleko. The skin may also be used as a sleeping mat for the child concerned.

4.3 Initiation

4.3.1 Umnqquza

The initiation rite for girls is called Umnqquzo. When a girl reaches twelve years of age and above a ceremonial rite is performed as the girl has begun the menstrual periods. It can still be done when she is already married. The religious connotation of this ceremony is to initiate girls to the ancestors. It is also a thanksgiving to the ancestors for the care and protection service rendered to adulthood and child bearing stage. It is also a prayer for protection in future.

The Umnqquzo initiation rite has various steps to be followed when it is conducted. First of all, there is the entrance ceremony. This occasion commences by taking the girl into the hut. When the girl is taken into the hut she is usually accompanied by other girls of the same age, that is abakhaphi. The mother of the girl is allowed to come into the hut. Young males of

the same age with the girl are allowed to enter the hut. She remains in confinement for about two or three days under a special supervision of an elderly woman who gives them educational instructions. Inside the confinement room a special hut called umalugoco is constructed for the intonjana, that is the girl to be initiated. It is a taboo for males to enter into umalugoco. When she goes out she should make sure that her face is covered with a blanket. She must not speak loudly. Her face must be smeared with red soil called imbola. She cannot participate in any house or community activities until she is out of confinement. Intonjana does not eat meat or drink home brewed beer, milk or amasi while she is still in confinement.

The entrance ceremony is marked by a special ceremony performed for the girl entering adulthood stage. The girl is first of all secluded from the community in order to be given special attention by the elders as she is in an initiation school. Such an initiation ceremony follows the pattern of other Mpondo traditional ceremonies where a goat is slaughtered and traditional beer is brewed.

On the third day women start singing and playing with sticks. At this stage a goat or other beast of sacrifice is slaughtered and is enjoyed with home brewed beer. But the girl in question is not allowed to partake of the meat, liquor or sour-milk. She is

normally served with cooked maize grains, sour maize drink and other meals. From the slaughtered cow or goat, the gall-bladder is taken and its contents poured on the head or hands of the girl or woman whose adulthood is celebrated. Then a necklace made of the skin from the front right legs of the slaughtered animal are made and some skins are put on the arms of the girl like bangles. These amulets of the skin placed around the neck are called Inqgwambu.

In preparation for the passing out of girls in confinement a home brewed beer is made specially for this ceremony. When the beer is ready the passing out ceremony begins. This is when the duration for confinement of the girl is over. This ceremony begins early in the morning. At dawn the vagina cover called umbhonyo as well as the grass used as a mat is burnt. The girl or woman goes out. She moves towards the gate of the live stock kraal, her body and head covered with a blanket. At the gate the initiated naked person jumps over the fire of the burning mat and vagina cover. Then she runs straight to the river, naked and washes her body. Thereafter she runs back home to enter the live stock kraal where she is slightly beaten by the father with a sjambok. The significance of this practice is to show the girl that they should behave properly in order to get married, thus bringing more cattle into the kraal. After this occasion girls are now taken to the hut together with

their mothers. Then follows the presentation and feasting.

4.3.2 Ukuya Ethontwemi (Circumcision)

At puberty stage and above boys are eligible for the circumcision rite. The actual entrance into the circumcision operation is a decision reached by the parents of the boys concerned and their principal teachers (amakhankatha).

On the appointed day the boys ready for circumcision are called upon their teacher, that is ikhankatha to attend the training centre called ithonto. On an isolated spot usually near the forest or mountain a shelter is prepared for the boys (i.e. ithonto). Here boys remain secluded from the rest of the community waiting for the traditional surgeon called ingcibi to conduct the circumcision operation. The fore-skin of the penis is removed by a sharp edged spear called Umdlanga. The fore-skin is buried in an ant-heap or is secretly buried in the ground in the ithonto. The wounds are bandaged with a traditional herbal bandage in order to get them healed in confinement. For about two or three weeks the circumcised boys remain in isolation.

At this stage only boys and some circumcised men can visit the ithonto. Females are strictly tabooed to

visit ithonto. Food is usually brought in by young girls who stand at a distance for a man to come and take the food which is salt free. They are not allowed to put on clothes such as under pants, vests, trousers and shirts except blankets. They usually remain in confinement until their wounds have healed. Their heads are kept shaven and their hair is buried in the cattle kraal. The boys in isolation always keep their bodies smeared with white clay. It is a taboo for initiates to drink water, to eat green vegetables and to drink beer. They are always well armed with sticks, spears and knob-kerries. During isolation period the boys are free to hunt for wild animals and birds. They can also raid for fowls, pigs, ducks etc. at the surrounding homestead. They also obtain some educational instructions or lessons from the ikhankatha about adulthood and general behaviour as adults.

After this, there comes the stage of umphumo, that is the passing out ceremony. This ceremony is marked by the slaughter of a goat or sheep which is usually roasted and mixed with herbs and is eaten by boys. It becomes a great occasion for the parents and the relatives of the boys. This occasion is usually blessed by the preparation of home brewed beer and the slaughter of a goat or a cow.

On the actual day of passing out, that is umphumo the boys wake up early at dawn and run to the river to wash their bodies and run back to the ithonto without looking back at the river. Then the ithonto is burnt down. They go back home singing and moving without looking back at the ithonto. They are taken by their principal teacher to a hut specially prepared for them in the homestead. Here they put on new clothes.

They are taken into the livestock kraal where they sit on the traditional mats with a spear or a stick next to each boy. The spear or stick is used to beat a boy on the head, whenever a man is interested in passing some words of warning. Each and every grown up and experienced man stands up and warns the boy about the problems of life, how to behave in life as a man etc. At this stage boys are also given presents in the form of livestock, weapons, ornaments, clothes, etc. After this stage the boys are passed over to their mothers to receive warning and presents from them (Interviewee Nomacala Nodunyelwa : 1989).

4.4 Ukuzeka or Ukwenda (Marriage)

The concept of a marriage contract is a very complex institution amongst Mpondo communities. There is ukucela marriage method, that is, requesting of the girl by the parents of the boy. There is also ukugcagca method of marriage contract. In this case

a woman to be married is not asked for from her parents. She simply elopes. The ukuthwala method of marriage contract is a forced marriage. This is when a girl is forcefully taken to a man's place where she is to be married. Common amongst these methods of marriage contracts are the taboos and the rituals centred around each marriage method.

Ukucela method of marriage involves senior members of the two concerned families. The male's parents send some members of the family, usually males, to go and ask for the desired girl. This process of ukucela is a lengthy process which involves negotiations between the girl's people and the man's people. There is a special beast for ukucela which must come from the man's people. It is after this beast has been handed over to the girl's people that a request can be made to be accepted. The people of the young woman's side would tell how many cattle they want. If the necessary dowry lobolo has been paid then the girl in question can be allowed to go to the husband's place. The father of the requested girl welcomes the people who have come to ask for the girl as well the beasts they have brought to his homestead. The nature of the welcome is usually a ritual following the ordinary Mpondo traditional pattern of any ceremony.

4.4.1

Ukuhota

For every Mpondo bride ukuhota is an unavoidable step irrespective of the type of marriage contract. This stage follows the ukuzeka or ukwenda. This begins when the girl has been taken to the home of the bridegroom or to the home of his relative.

When the bridegroom is contracting marriage he takes the girl to the hut of a relative or of his homestead accompanied by two or more girls as abakhaphi. This group of girls remain in confinement for about a week or more. They are normally called umthimba. They remain in isolation until the preparations for re-integration ceremony have been completed. This period of isolation is called ukuhota.

The umthimba group stays in the hut on the side of the women behind the door. They are not allowed to work in the yard or do the cooking in the kitchen. They can only walk on private roads to the river or to the toilet, that is ukuceza. They cannot walk near the kraal. They cannot walk through the courtyard. They cannot enter any livestock kraal. It is a taboo for them to speak aloud and to eat sour milk. The bridegroom sleeps with the bride. Whilst the other members of umthimba are free to be visited by males with the aim of proposing love.

The ukuhota continues until such time that a report to the bride's house has been made and approved, that is ukubika. If the report ukubika has been accepted it means that the marriage contract can continue. The report ukubika beast which is usually described by its colour by the reporter is accepted. If it is money it is taken immediately. If it is a beast it is sent immediately as it is counted as part of ilobolo. It is usually accompanied by two other beasts which are the first ones to be paid. This is a beast which settles the shock of the parents umothuko and the beast paid before the actual number of the ilobolo is announced, that is imvulamlomo. However if the marriage report is not acceptable to the bride's parents, they do not take any report, beast or money. Instead they announce that they are not contracting any marriage, and that their daughter be sent back home accompanied by a beast called inkomo yukobopha. The ukubopha is a sign that a marriage is not contracted and that the ukuhota period has come to an end.

4.4.2 Ukwendlaliswa

When the report has been made to the bridegroom's people the groom's people start preparing for ukwendlaliswa ceremony. This is an initiation or incorporation ceremony of the newly-married young women to her new home. This occasion is marked by

the spilling of the blood of a goat or a sheep sometimes a cow and home-brewed beer.

The gall or bile juice of the slaughtered animal is taken from the liver and poured on the head and hands of the newly-married woman. Her marriage is therefore solemnized and is thus accepted and introduced to the ancestors of her new home. She becomes part and parcel of her new family, not just a wife only to her husband. In this way both families are bound together.

A newly-wed woman is also expected to observe certain taboos under the principle of ukuhlonipha. For instance things with names related to the names of the elderly members of the family must be replaced with other names of respect, that is ukuhlonipha. Let us say, for example, the name of the bridegroom's father-in-law is Manzolwandle, she is not expected to call amanzi, that is water. Instead she must say amathinzi. She is also not to touch her father-in-law, not to shake hands and not to walk, sit or sweep, sleep on the male side of the hut.

Closely related taboos in marriage are those taboos centering around a concept of ukuceza, that is avoidance of walking near or on sacred places or touching certain holy objects. For instance it is a taboo for a newly-wed Mpondo woman to enter the

livestock kraal of her new home. She cannot drink or eat sour-milk of her new home. She cannot walk near or in the courtyard, enter the livestock kraal. She must also avoid calling the people senior to her by their names.

4.4.3 Ukudlisa Amasi

This is another initiation rite for the newly-married woman. To make her part and parcel of her new family, she is incorporated to the community and family of her husband through a ceremony known as ukudliswa amasi. During this ceremony she is made to partake of the fresh milk or sour milk amasi meals of the community or family.

The ukudlisa amasi ritual is one of the most honourable and great incidents whereby a goat is slaughtered and the home beer is brewed. The members of brides and bridegroom's family attend this ceremony. The chief officiating persons in this ceremony are usually the senior female members such as the mothers-in-law of the bride.

The bride who is now introduced completely into the family and community structure has been under ukuhlonipha stage which is shown amongst other things by avoiding drinking milk and sour milk of the bridegroom's house. The ukudlisa amasi ceremony is a

signal for the acceptance of the new member of the family even by the ancestors. Amasi is one of the sacred foods of the family amongst Mpondo. Not everybody can partake of sour milk except the blood relatives of the family.

4.4.4 Ukunxula

The newly-wed woman is expected to give birth to her first baby at her own home. This usually happens when the mother of the bride is still alive. The mother-in-law of the bride would go and welcome the newly born baby just immediately after birth. This incident is known as ukunxula.

The mother-in-law is normally accompanied by some family member of the women folk. The ceremony is usually marked by the spilling of blood and the traditional home brewed beer. The newly born child is introduced to her or his mother's ancestors. The mother-in-law coming to welcome the newly born baby brings along with her some presents like a traditional sleeping mat, washing basins, towels, blankets etc. After this occasion the bride and her child go to the bridegroom's home accompanied by the members of the family and mother-in-law. This is what is actually understood by ukunxula.

This occasion occurs after the wife has given birth to two or three children. The people of her home and relatives would make and collect many goods such as mats, that is izicamba, izithebe, ingobozi (baskets) etc. These goods are taken to the home of the newly-married woman.

The purpose of this ritual is to initiate the newly-married woman and to make her realize that she belongs to the people of her husband. It is for this reason that this occasion is also called ukwendisa. It makes her understand that she is married and is regarded as one of the members of the family.

When all the necessary arrangements have been made by the bride's people they ask for her to come home. They also ask from her the number of the people to be given presents. They also notify the bridegroom's people about the day of their arrival with the bride (umakoti). On the said day the mother and the father together with some relatives of the bride and friends take the goods or presents to the bridegroom's place. It is this occasion that is called ukuthwala impahla or ukuphinda inqca. This is the second coming of the bride which gives her a status of a full fledged woman. This is shown by the fact that when she comes for the second time she comes carrying goods of the

house, that is indlu.

The goods carried by the people of the bride are not for her own use only but must be shared and are divided amongst the people of umzi, that is the homestead. On the day of their arrival the bride's people are welcomed by a gift of a goat, sheep or a beast slaughtered for a meal specially prepared for the bride's people. On the following day, as they usually come late in the afternoon or evening of the previous day, the distribution of the goods amongst the members of the family takes place. This distribution is referred to as ukubeka. The items or goods such as mats, pots, brooms, blankets, bed spreads, sheets, beds or furniture are used in modern times. This depends, of course, on the financial stability of the people. The people who are to receive presents are often picked secretly by the bride with the advice of the elder sister-in-law or aunts. Top in the list of those who are chosen or earmarked for presentation of gifts are the mothers and fathers-in-law according to their close relationship, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law etc.

4.5 Purification Rites (Ukunkcola)

According to Mpondo belief certain unfamiliar incidents befalling the community or one family member is regarded as the sign of the wrath of the ancestors.

The whole community or a few individuals may be held responsible for the provocation of the ancestors. In such a case the angry ancestors need to be approached in a religious manner in order to appease them. The member who happens to be a victim of the wrath of the ancestors has to undergo a cleansing or purification ceremony called ukunkcola.

The procedure of the cleansing ceremony is similar to other African Traditional worship. If the community needs cleansing, the ceremony will be arranged on a communal basis whereas if the cleansing is individualistic, preparations will only be done on a family basis. Preparations for the cleansing or purification ceremony involve traditional home brewed beer and a sacrificial animal slaughtered specially for appeasing the angered ancestors.

The wrath of the ancestors is normally shown by the illness of a person or persons belonging to the community. In the event of such illness or omen befalling one member of the family, he or she has to partake first of the offered beer and sacrificial animal which is preferably a goat. Sometimes the cleansing ceremony involves ukwenziwa kwe ntambo, that is a rope made out of the hair from the tail of an old family cow or ox. The sick person or the one who needs purification must wear around his or her neck, waist and ankles, the ropes made of the tail of the

family cow. This is the traditional religious healing or cleansing of the suffering member of the community or the community at large. The hair rope (intambo) and the skin rope called ingqwambu are placed around the neck, wrist and ankles. The skin rope is usually made of the skin taken from the left hand side of the sacrificial animal (Interview N Mbangatha 8:07:90).

4.6 Rites at Death

From birth to death rites of passage are marked and observed in African Traditional Religion. Rituals pertaining to death or funeral services, that is umnqcwabo, the cleansing rite, that is ukuxukuxa, ukuzila, that is mourning, ukubuyisa, that is to bring back. These rituals of death are an indication that death is not accepted by African communities. Death is regarded basically as a transitional stage between this life and life after death. It is for this reason that there are death rites.

This notion is contained in African religious terminology concerning death. Take for instance the term ukufa means death in general speaking according to Mpondo language, but it is not applied to the death of human beings. Special terms are applied to the death of a human being. Such terms are ukusweleka meaning that which is scarce, utshonile meaning disappeared, akasekho meaning not present, usitshiyile

meaning has left us, uhambile meaning has gone.

Taking the term uswelekile which means scarcity of the deceased person the connotation contained in this term is the fact that the person has not stopped totally to exist, but his or her disappearance is momentous. He or she is made to be scarce to be seen commonly again amongst his or her own people. This term suggests that the deceased man is only scarce, yet is present. This clearly indicates that life after death is very possible.

4.6.1 Ceremonies and Taboos before the Burial

After death the corpse of the deceased is covered neatly and the eyes are closed, the legs and arms are properly arranged. It is placed in a sleeping position next to the wall of the room under a shelter of the traditional mats ukhukho. The elderly people remain in the room where the corpse is kept day and night. The corpse is never left alone.

The wife of the deceased starts mourning immediately after death. She stays in the room where the corpse is kept with her face and head covered with a cloth or a blanket. She does not speak loud. She cannot do any household activities. These taboos for the female mourners are also applicable to the males but with less strictness.

This is caused amongst other things by the fact that males are always committed to outdoor activities and they are always decision-makers in their homes.

A corpse cannot be touched or handled by the young ones of the community. It is a taboo for females to come close or handle the deceased. No fire or smoking is allowed in a hut or house where the corpse is kept. No food or cooking is allowed inside the house or hut with a corpse. A child or baby entering a hut or house with the corpse is first placed on the door step and the mother jumps over him or her. The people continue to sleep in the hut or house where the corpse is kept until the funeral day comes.

4.6.2 Funeral Service (Umngcwabo)

In African religion the notion of a grave is a home. It is just another place of dwelling for the people who have undergone a kind of change. The deceased people for Africans have joined another realm of the spiritual world. This is the world of izinyanya or amathongo, that is ancestors.

Ancestors are so called izinyanya, for they are loathesome and anti-evil and are thus holy. They are also referred to as amathongo, for they appear or can be seen during sleeping time, when one is asleep that is osebuthongweni. This means that they are spiritual

in nature and can only communicate spiritually. So to say they are spiritual and godly.

The belief held by Africans, is that the grave is just a holy place, a sacred and private place. It is even called ifihlo, that is a concealing place. The funeral is sometimes called umfihlo, that is a ceremony for concealing. This stems from the fact that the funeral service of the king amongst Africans was often conducted privately during the presence of the royal family and councillors. Such a grave was strictly private usually situated in an isolated place.

It is taboo for a man to go to the grave without prior preparation such as traditional home brewed beer and a slaughtered animal or fowl. It is for this reason that a deceased man is usually accompanied by the slaughtered beast, goat or sheep and traditional beer is also brewed. However, this is not done if death is not natural, that is, if it is accidental. All accidental deaths are a taboo in many traditional Mpondo communities. It is for this reason that there is no accompaniment, that is ukukhatshwa by a slaughtered sacrificial beast and beer.

The deceased is buried together with his important belongings such as weapons, spears, axe, tobacco bag, some maize and corn seeds. He is buried facing his

home. The owner of the homestead is usually buried near the gate of the cattle kraal. According to J H Soga, (1931 : 11) the significance of this burial form is a clear indication of the African understanding of life after death the so called resurrection in a Christian sense.

The Mpondo people's understanding of the concept of resurrection is not totally different from the Christian belief. In African religion the deceased, through death, joins the spiritual world. They have changed bodies. They can communicate spiritually with the living and give some instruction. They demand edible food like drinks and meat. This does not mean that they physically partake in it but they only partake in it spiritually.

4.6.3 Death Cleansing Ceremony (Ukuxukuxa)

Ukuxukuxa is a cleansing ceremony which immediately follows a funeral service, that is umngcwabo or umfihlo. This ceremony usually takes place three days after the funeral if death is accidental. In the case of a natural death ukuxukuxa takes place a week after the funeral. But nowadays, due to external forces the Mpondo culture has changed, the umxukuxo takes place a day after the funeral service. The reason may be that most of the people are under employment.

The actual connotation of this rite is to wash away the bad influence of death. Traditional Mpondo communities used to practise this ceremony. The procedure is that people of the deceased person provide a goat or sheep and traditional home brewed beer for the occasion. Then the senior members of the family pronounce a kind of traditional prayer, the words of the prayers are usually referred to the ancestors who in this manner are approached on behalf of God. The whole process is addressed to the Supernatural Being who is the guardian of the whole community. After the words of prayer have been said the traditional beer and the sacrificial beast's meat is consumed and shared by the community members present.

4.6.4 Mourning or Fasting

Mourning or fasting is basically an outward expression of the sorrow caused by the unacceptability of that particular awkward occurrence. It is an outward or practical saying that such an occurrence must not take place any more.

In African Traditional Religion fasting and mourning that is ukuzila is a common practice. It is a religious resistance or rejection of a certain unwelcomed incident such as illness or death. It is a practical sign for the Supernatural Being to see that the unpleasant event which has occurred is not

welcomed by the people concerned. The unacceptability of an occurrence is brought to the attention of the Supernatural Being by denying the body, most of the enjoyment such as eating delicious dishes, food, meat, sour-milk, bodily comfort, bright coloured dresses, bright coloured paintings of houses, avoidance of sexual intercourse, avoiding shouting and quarrelling.

The denial of bodily needs intends to draw the attention of the Supernatural Being through the ancestors who are the mediators between God and man. Fasting or mourning can also be explained as a kind of invoking the ancestor's power of protection against the occurrence of bad omen or accident. As such fasting can be viewed as a kind of a prayer.

4.6.5 Ukubeka Ilitye

Also closely linked to fasting is the concept of ukubeka ilitye, that is putting a stone on the grave. This is a symbol of sorrow like fasting. Members of the family who were not present at the funeral service of the deceased are allowed later to go to the grave accompanied by a senior member of the family where they take a cloth or piece of stone from the surroundings of the grave and place it on the grave, that is ukubeka ilitye.

This becomes a practical symbol that a relative concerned has visited the deceased. The deceased would somehow appreciate the visit as long as the stone has been placed on the grave. This practice is a symbolic protective prayer. Failure to obey this practice may lead to a bad omen befalling the relatives of the deceased. Like all other African prayers, the ukubeka ilitye is solemnized by the home-made traditional beer and slaughter of a sacrificial animal.

4.6.6 Ukwambula (Unveiling)

After a set period of mourning has come to an end, a special occasion to mark this period is arranged. By this occasion known as ukukhulula izila, that is stop mourning or ukwambula, that is unveiling, life becomes normal.

Traditionally Mpondo people used to vacate their dwellings as a sign of mourning. They used to go and live in the forest or bush during the period of mourning. Today black cloths are placed on the arm or black clothing is used especially by females. Sometimes homes or huts are painted with dark coloured paints or soil. When the period of mourning is over ukwambula takes place. Thus the normal living conditions are resumed with houses and huts painted in bright colours. The wife usually puts on black

clothes during the mourning period but after the set period is over she puts on bright coloured attire.

The ukwambula takes place three months after mourning by the children and ordinary members of the family. However for the wife whose husband is deceased, or the husband whose wife has passed away, the duration of ukwambula is six months if the cause of death is natural. In accidental deaths this period is shortened to three months. The ukwambula ritual is solemnized by home brewed beer and slaughter of a sacrificial animal. In this manner people concerned are free to participate in the daily life.

4.6.7 Ukubuyisa or Ukulanda

In African Traditional Religion remembrance of the dead who are not regarded as distanced from active daily life is taken seriously, for it is attached to the life and well being of the living. It is more than just a remembrance, it is a prayer. The traditional name for this concept is ukubuyisa or ukulanda abangasekhoyo, that is bringing back the deceased.

The concept ukulanda is a prayer which takes place at the grave. It is an indication that the living dead are active in the lives of the living. The living dead are usually brought back to the newly built

homestead if the homestead has been built after their death. The purpose of ukubuyisa prayer is to request the power of the ancestor to protect the family and the whole homestead.

Like all African prayers ukubuyisa involves the spilling of blood and offering of home brewed beer which is taken to the grave where it is shared amongst the members of the family present. The remainder of beer and the blood is poured on the grave. A short prayer is also said by the chief officiating priest of the family. The soil from the grave just where the head of the deceased is placed is taken to the homestead where it is thrown in the yard. This is a symbol that the deceased has come to the homestead that is ubuyile because the ancestors have been remembered. This shows that in African Traditional Religion remembrance plays an important role just as Mogoba (1985 : 11) declared that "anything that can successfully link the present and the past brings forth rich association and meaning. Hence the part of Christian creed which refers to Christ descending to Hades which in western Theology is peripheral gets special stress in African theology. The implication of this for African Traditional Religion is that the deceased are still approachable. The deceased man goes straight to them." It is clear therefore that communication with the deceased is possible (Interviewee : N Hobo, 11:06:89).

When the Mpondo traditional rites of passage are perceived hermeneutically it becomes obvious that their religious connotation based on the worship of one God is unquestionable. To them rituals are nothing else but sacred prayers. The nature of most Mpondo rituals mentioned above are mediatory, for they are the means by which messages from the people to God via the ancestors are channelled. Any Mpondo ritual correctly interpreted should correspond to this theory. Rituals in the Mpondo religious setting are the people's talk to the ancestors and a communication with the Supernatural Being.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 Christian Influences on Selected Mpondo Practices

5.2 Introduction

Up to now traditional religion amongst Mpondo people is still noticeable although in most cases the religious life of these people is full of external influences. This can be seen through the terminology which appears at times to be Mpondo, yet it is used in a Christian connotation. The meaning attached to some Mpondo terms tends to remove or weaken their original meaning. The use of traditional terms in the Christian Bible or liturgy shows that the meaning contained in those terms is Mpondo although their new meaning is foreign. Such terms are ukuphehlelela, meaning baptism, umthendeleko, meaning holy communion, idini, meaning sacrifice etc. In this chapter the Mpondo religion will be looked at from the external influences point of view as well as its influences on other religions.

5.2.1 Ukuphehlelela (Baptism)

The term ukuphehlelela refers to a traditionally known practice amongst Mpondo people. This is a special ritual usually performed for a young child two or three days after birth. Three things are used during this ritual that is, amanzi, imicinga, amaqgabi

omfutha and a traditional prayer.

Clean water is fetched from a running spring with an earthen pot. Two equal grass sticks called imicinga are taken from the stems of grass called umqunqu. The two sticks of grass called umqunqu are placed in the earthen pot with water. Then the child is placed in a sitting position on the ground. The child is slightly beaten with the two wet grass sticks called imicinga. When he or she is still shocked by this the child's face and the whole body is washed. Then the leaves of a tree called Umfutha are taken and burnt on the fire. The child is now held just above the smoke of the burned leaves. When this is done the officiator, usually the mother or grandmother, says a traditional prayer in a praise song manner recorded in Ndamase (1925 : 152):

H-o-t-s-h-i! H-o-t-s-h-i!
Maliphuma, isela
Lingamjoli, isela
Isela liphume ngomnyango
Lingamjoli umutwana

This prayer is when the child is held above the smoke of the burning umfutha tree. The prayer is saying that the thief which may be around the child must not steal (i.e. ukujola) the child. Then it lastly says, the thief must go out through the door.

The proper meaning of the prayer is that the thief referred to here is death or the causality of death or evil spirits. He or she further says that the thief must go out of the child, that is, death's cause must be driven out through the door of the hut of the homestead. Death's cause must be driven out so as to avoid stealing the child, that is actually killing the child.

In religious terms this is baptism in the Judeo-Christian sense. The purpose is cleansing and confirming the child against evil spirit. This ukuphehlela in Mpondo religious belief is purifying the child and preventing future death causing incidents. The materials employed to solemnize this cleansing ceremony are water, fire and medicine.

In African Traditional Religion the notion attached to water as having a purifying power is a reality, just as it is with the Judeo-Christian religions. There is a clear parallel between these two religions as far as the ritual of baptism is concerned. Llyod (1976 : 85) defines baptisms as "an act of purification by which trespassers against hygienic, moral and social taboos are restored or initiated to full membership in the community and to the service of the Deity. It conveys, strengthens or saves life by mediating wondersome participation in the life of a Deity." Most probably, it was for this reason that early

missionaries translated the Judeo-Christian ritual called baptism ukuphehlelela. They saw some close relationship between the two. The traditional Mpondo practice was completely replaced by Judeo-Christian baptism while it remained in books of Christian liturgy translated as ukuphehlelela.

The translation remained a reminder to Mpondo people about their traditional practice, hence in modern African Independent Churches emphasis of baptism is the immersing of their followers in the river with clean running water. Amongst the mainline churches led by African leaders, this Judeo-Christian practice has been influenced by African Traditional beliefs. For example on the day of baptism the parents or people to be baptised are asked to bring each of them a fowl. The fowls are slaughtered to solemnize the occasion on that day. In some cases the members baptising their children are asked to prepare a ritual meal at their homes to mark the baptism day. The occasion is usually marked by slaughter of a goat or sheep. Then the church members are usually requested after the church service to go and partake of the meal prepared for them on baptism day. This is a proper example showing that Christianity has been somehow influenced by African Traditional Religion. In actual fact, this has been made easy by the fact that these two religions are on this point closely related. Just as Lloyd (1976 : 85) stated that in "ritual use of

blood, fire or water is widespread, these elements serve to consecrate things, animals and persons. Forms of rituals are sprinkling or pouring water on a person or object, washing, drinking and immersing or passing through water." The hermeneutical understanding of Christian baptism has influenced Mpondo understanding of the ukuphehlelela ritual. Thus their Christian interpretation of baptism was also simplified and enriched by their traditional understanding.

5.3 Umthendeleko (Holy Communion)

In the heart of any sacrificial prayer is always the sharing of the sacrificial meal, the feast, banquet or festival. A special meal is a vehicle of any ceremonial worship or prayer. The concept of umthendeleko in the African sense is a symbol of completeness of any ceremonial and sacrificial prayer. Amongst Mpondo people no sacrificial rite, customary prayer or worship can be meaningful if it does not involve a feast. Such a feast is always communal. This stems from the fact that any feast or sacrificial rite always involves a group of people such as family or families or the whole community. African societies are mostly communal in structure, therefore, feasting is always communal. Traditionally individualism is alien to African societies, so it is not known in Mpondo society too.

The bonds of community are maintained by the spirit of communalism which is deeply embedded in the community based worship of umdali through mediation of ancestors, that is, Amathongo. The whole concept of worship centres around symbolism and special occasion such as umthendeleko. During umthendeleko feasting is always central, marked by the spilling of blood and enjoyment of traditional home brewed beer.

The closeness of the umthendeleko practice to the Judeo-Christian sacrament known as holy communion made the early missionaries to see some similarities between the two practices. The missionaries and the Bible interpreters were influenced by the umthendeleko practice and thus interpreted it as the holy communion. They knew from the biblical perspective. The Eucharist is in many ways similar to Mpondo traditional meal or feast, which involves meal, fellowship and sacrificial animal, etc. This is illustrated by Barrette (1986 : 57) when stating that "the passover meal begins with the blessing, the breaking and the sharing of the unleavened bread (mazot). This is followed by the eating of the pascal lamb. After the meal the father of the family says a prayer over the cup of the wine thanking God for his many blessings. The whole celebration is a joyful one during which the Jews remember God's deliverance of their ancestors from slavery." The concept of holy communion is related to the Jewish practice of

passover which is one of the major elements of the Jewish covenant with Yhweh. This is what Mpondo people understand as eating together as a family or community. Both umthendeleko and holy communion are based on communalism.

The hermeneutical understanding of holy communion by mainline Christian churches has been influenced by African Traditional Religions interpretation, calling it umthendeleko that is a feast. Secondly mainline churches have been influenced by African umthendeleko or feasting. For instance most mainline churches celebrate the day of holy communion. The minister or priest in charge on the said day of holy communion conducts the sacramental service together with the congregation. The congregants on the other hand prepare a communal meal of meat and soft drinks and general food to be shared by the members and visitors on behalf of the priest in charge.

Amongst the independent churches the umthendeleko as indini, that is, sacrifice has a strong influence. These churches emphasize the African Traditional belief of offering sacrificial animal and brewing the African Traditional beer. They omit totally the holy communion in Judeo-Christian practice. To them celebration of life and certain stages of development are taken more seriously than celebrations of certain events.

5.4 Umthandazeli (Faith Healer)

The Judeo-Christian belief in faith healing is noticed in many parts of the Bible. As a result some Christian churches have emphasized faith healing rather than traditional African medicine. This became worse when the use of traditional medicine and divination was condemned as sinful in the eyes of God. In the mainline churches this became one of the main aspects of life by which an upright character of a believer was judged.

While some believers adhered to the anti-divination teachings, some believers lost interest in the mainline church teachings. The outcome of this was a split in the church and emergence of a group of independent churches with a deviated church doctrine which accommodated and tolerated use of African herbal medicine and divination. This led to the establishment of a new order of faith healing combined with African herbal medicine and divination and a kind of Isangoma a diviner with a new name called umthandazeli.

5.4.1. The Nature of Umthandezeli

The term umthandazeli is derived from a Mpondo-Xhosa noun umthandazo, meaning prayer. The word umthandazeli means one who prays for other people. In

most cases umthandazeli prays to God pleading for the sick, needy, suffering people to be relieved etc. He or she is therefore a spiritual as well as a physical healer. Some faith healers not only use spiritual healing but use medicine as well. Others condemn the use of African traditional Mpondo medicine but continue to use foreign healing substances or material. However the method of healing applied by the faith healers will be dealt with, in the following pages.

In the process of ukuthandazela the use of water and other medical material strengthened by special prayer is central. In the independent churches combination of African traditional medicine and Judeo-Christian practice is observed. Healing amongst many involves confession, visions, speaking in tongues and some kinds of purification rites (amongst many independent churches practising ukuthandazela). These are old practices with new meaning. Shorter (1975 : 38) puts it that "these cannot be understood simply as foreign imposition rather a new concept has been grafted onto and grown out of an old one thereby becoming attractive and acceptable."

The faith healers gather most of their information through visions or dreams just as it is with Christian belief. The information may come from the ancestors or God. Dreams and visions are important in legion

members spirituality for they are one of the media through which God communicates to them. There is cause for anxiety when people do not dream (Shorten 1975 : 39). Amongst faith healers lack of dreams can mean that the ancestors are not happy and thus cannot reveal certain information to the person concerned.

Confession is another important aspect of religious practice related to the healing skills employed by umthandazeli. Berglund (1971 : 55-56) stated that "confession may be made before a diviner who unlike a priest in Christian sacramental confession is the active party and who draws the confession out of the pertinent person. Ritual celebrations are also occasions for confession. Festivities often do not take place until priests have openly and publicly confessed their sins to one another." Faith healers work closely with ancestors who are regarded as mediators between God and the living man. Therefore confession is the way of purification and a method of pleading for ancestral support and God's power in the healing process.

Another healing method commonly practised by the umthandazeli is the power of speaking in tongues. When the spirits called amakhosi are in touch with the faith healer they express themselves through him or her. The amakhosi are the ancestral spiritual powers which express themselves in certain diviners. The

umthandazeli like a diviner can speak in tongues especially when engaged in a diagnosis and exorcism process. During this process they can even fall into trance. In support of this Sundkler (1948 : 39) makes this claim: "Various forms of speaking with tongues have been known since times immemorial among the Zulus."

5.4.2 The Healing Method

5.4.2.1 The Anti-Traditional Medicine Faith Healers

The method of healing ukwelapha employed by abathandazeli is not the same due to their differing beliefs and influences. Amongst Mpondo people two types of abathandazeli is noticeable. There are those who are anti-African traditional medicine and those who are pro use of the African traditional medicine.

Those who are anti-African traditional medicine believe in the use of river water or sea water, isiwatsho that is a mixture of fire wood ashes and water, woollen ropes and burning or ashes of an incense called impepho. Some of them amongst this group use some western medicines such as Jeyes Fluid, Dettol, methylated spirit, candle light, etc. They emphasize the power of prayer which is behind their mixtures for healing.

The objection of some abathandazeli to the African traditional medicine stems mainly from some external influences exerted by some mainline western christian orientated churches such as Baptist, Pentecostal churches, Full Gospel Church, Apostolic Faith Church etc. The doctrine of these churches is basically anti-use of medicine. The umthandazeli as a healer is also a full member of his or her denomination which prescribes the procedure to be followed when the healing operation is conducted. Hence where there are many Christian church denominations there are also quite a number of different abathandazeli with different methods of healing and diagnosis or examination skills.

Although the anti-African traditional medicine group of abathandazeli is regarded as Christians they still belong to African Independent Churches with strong African cultural ties. In their method of healing various African orientated skills or practices are observable. For instance, their diagnosis through the Holy Spirit is similar to African traditional diviners i.e. izangoma. Secondly healing with woollen ropes intambo is similar to African belief in the use of a sacrificial beast's tale hairs and goat or beast skin ropes called ingqwamba. In the isiwatsho mixture used by uthandazeli are elements of herbs (i.e. iveza). The wooden ashes is not just a particular type of wood but is a mixture of different trees used to make fire.

These faith healers also use African methods of healing. For example Isiwatsho is used to heal all African diseases like isichito, that is, which makes one to be hated by other people. Healing involves ukuqabha, that is drinking isiwatsho and vomiting, ukuchele sprinkling with isiwatsho, ukucima application of medicine through the anus, ukuqhuzisa smoked fire using impepho, ukufutha steaming a body with boiling isiwatsho and use of drums, horn and clapping of hands during singing.

5.4.2.2 The Traditional Medicine using Faith Healers

The traditional medicine using faith healers agree in many ways with the African doctors. Most of them resorted to faith healing because their church denominations rejected their traditional African medicine and their call to traditional African divination was refused. In many respects the ukuthandazela (Faith healing) is just a Christianized traditional method of healing. This group practically uses African herbs. The use of woollen ropes, sticks and isiwatsho is also practised by this group. The healing methods include ukuchela, sprinkling with intelezi, ukuqhuzisa, ukucima, ukuhlabela, cuts for putting medicine in the blood.

The abathandazeli attire is in many ways similar to that of African diviners. They carry sticks, spears

or the ox-tail fixed into a stick itshoba. These are used to drive away evil spirits during exorcism and diagnosis ukubhula. They sing, clap hands and play drums during diagnosis and exorcism service. They can be called abaprofethi (prophets) or seers found in the Bible. Likewise diviners or izangoma communicate with their Supernatural Being through prayers, visions, dreams, signs and spirits. Sometimes they claim to communicate directly with the ancestral spirits called amakhosi or amathongo. Amongst abathandazeli detection of the lost goods is done through spiritual power. This is also a common practise amongst the Jewish prophets which is called the **Urim** and **Thummin** by which the seers, mediums and prophets detect the lost goods and animals (Barrette 1986 : 20).

Confirming this Mbiti (1981 : 157) states that "seers are people who are said to have natural power by means of which they see certain things not easily known to the ordinary people. Sometimes, they foresee certain events before they take place. On the whole there is no special training for seers. They are often people with a sharp capacity for both foresight and insight into things. It is also possible that some of them receive revelations through visions and dreams in addition to being able to use intuitions."

It is noteworthy to articulate the areas of interaction between the faith healers abathandazeli

and diviners izangoma as mediums, seers, prophets, priests and medicinemen. The abathandazeli are the revitalizers of the African culture. They encourage the use African traditional medicine based on African principles and culture. This is clearly observable amongst Mpondo faith healers. They encourage the use of Mpondo customs of the sacrificial rituals like ukunkcola, that is, cleansing ceremony and ukungxenqxeza or ukubulela. The (AIC) African Independent Churches emergence was caused mainly by the frustration of the Africans worshipping in the western Christian orientated churches. As Sundkler (1948 : 81) declared "of all these factors, which strongly affect the emergence of an ever-increasing number of independent churches the colour bar and racial discrimination are felt by the Bantu as the most damaging." The frustration was caused by the South African government's racial laws based on apartheid. The church was seen as a state agent to perpetrate social, economic, religious and political discrimination. It was in this strain that one African congregational church minister of religion was quoted as saying: "This is a bad place to worship in" (Sundkler 1948 : 81). As a result the pro-use of African traditional medicine faith healers had common clear cause that of strengthening the African way of life. They emerged with their new doctrines, new songs, new methods of worship, new priesthood. They are non-sexist like izangoma (diviners) who are non-

sexist.

5.5 Ukutyhila Ilitye (The Unveiling of the Tombstone)

The unveiling of the tombstone is a Judeo-Christian practice by which the deceased are remembered. The grave is not an end to life, for, there is a hope for resurrection. According to the Christians the deceased are asleep or resting, for, they believe in life after death. It is for this reason that stones are used to mark the graves. The ceremony performed for the unveiling of erected stones on the grave indicates the belief that the deceased are asleep not dead.

The unveiling of a tombstone is called ukutyhila ilitye in Mpondo language. It is a Christian ceremony to which some African ceremonial experience has been added with some new meaning attached to the old practice. In the Christian church the unveiling of a tombstone is basically attached to the stone which is a symbol or a mark serving as a reminder to the living about the living-dead. The African addition to the church's sacrament of the unveiling of a tombstone, is the African ritual which accompanies any religious ceremony. It is totally un-African to finalize a ritual without home brewed beer and African christians have introduced their traditional ritual to the Christian sacrament, (unveiling of tombstone) making

unveiling of tombstone resemble the traditional Mpondo prayer called ukubuyisa (see 4.5.5 - 4.5.7).

The western Christian concept of stone unveiling i.e. ukutyhila ilitye is in actual fact foreign to Mpondo people. Traditionally no graves were decorated or properly marked by built-in stones or concrete. To Mpondos the graveyard is not a public place. It is very sacred and private. The grave of a King, for example, was always kept private and concealed from the knowledge of the public. No one can just visit a grave, according to Mpondo religious law, without prior preparation of home made beer and sacrificial animal or fowl. Most of the Mpondo people practising Christianity have changed their minds and attitude towards the graveyard because of their traditional ties. It is as Mogoba (1985 : 11) asserted that "although this service is Christian, it could very well serve to remember or have communion with the dead and in a way provides a well-desired bridge between African Traditional Religion and Christianity." Amongst Mpondo people the unveiling of a tombstone is accepted by the middle class, for, it is regarded as a prayer. It is the means by which the ancestors are approached and told about the problems of the family. Sometimes the ancestors do approach people through a dream reporting that they feel cold and thus ask for a cover. This request is usually interpreted as the request for the erection of a tombstone.

In this chapter, the analysis of various religious concepts and sacraments common to both Christianity and Mpondo traditional religion have exposed the existing similarities between the two religions. There is also a marked difference between them, caused mainly by the fact that both have a different understanding of certain religious sacraments or concepts. Secondly, one can easily deduce from the above analysis that both religions have influenced each other directly or indirectly. It is this influence which has made them to come closer in their understanding of certain religious sacraments and concepts they formerly disagreed about. Due to this understanding the Christian terminology has increased and developed. For instance, some Mpondo religious terms are now regarded as synonymous to Christian sacramental terms (eg. ukuphehlelela and ukubhaptiza or baptism). The terminology relationship of the two religions is also accompanied by relationship in the practice of the sacrament. All that is confirmed by this is the fact that both religions have greatly influenced each other.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, the concept, African Traditional Religion is analyzed and interpreted. The religiosity of the Mpondo people is also focused on, with the view to articulate the basic principles of a religion and to secure thoroughly the practice of a religion it becomes necessary to apply the hermeneutical key.

Proper interpretation of any religion depends mainly on the understanding of the geographic area, historical background, culture, language and social life of the people concerned. The urge to investigate African Traditional Religion became clear and more pronounced with the emergence of Black Theology and African Theology. The two disciplines sought to contextualize and look into any theological concept on the cultural, political, social or economic perspective of the people concerned. This approach to the study of theology paved the way for further investigation of African Traditional Religion. It was the realization amongst Africans that the study about God needs to be interpreted in an African or Black context in order to get a clear understanding of its religious content.

There is sound understanding of a religion if the cultural background of the people practising it is not known to the foreigner or the new comer to that particular religious situation. This means that their language, art, music, attire, food, values, customs, norms and folklore make an inseparable part of their religion.

African religious life commences at the stage of human realization of the existence of a Supernatural Being. To be religious means the ability to interpret the knowledge about God. The Supernatural power is understood to be the existing power although it is invisible. For Africans, the power of a Supernatural Being is found everywhere. Any material, living or non-living organisms, contains the power of God, be it a piece of wood, bark of a tree, leaves of a tree, pieces of rocks, piece of an ox hide, or goat hide or horns etc.

For an African to be religious is life. The life is celebrated and marked by various religious ceremonies. From birth to death as well as life after death, life is religiously celebrated. Certain stages of development in life are marked by sacred religious festivals. The seasonal festival and agricultural festivals form part of the religious life of the people. Sustenance of life is based on norms and values which can also be regarded as religious laws.

It is for this reason that certain Christian sacramental practices were seen as similar to African traditional rites hence, the early missionaries used some African terms for foreign western Christian sacraments eg. baptism is interpreted as ukuphehlela. Although there is a clear correlation between African Traditional religious sacraments and Christian sacraments, the African religious terminology borrowed by Christianity gained new meaning. However, the hermeneutical view of the African Traditional religion places more emphasis on the religious context of some African Traditional religious terms

found in the Christian liturgy and Holy Scripture.

The significance of the interpretation of African Traditional Religion is to expose certain obscure principles about this religion. Furthermore, African Traditional Religion has been shown as religious equivalent to other world book religions of the world. There still seems to be a vast field to be explored in order to bring this religion on equal footing with other religions of the world. This can be fruitful if the hermeneutical key as interpreters tool to make better understanding is skilfully employed. If this purpose is served by this approach better understanding of the African Traditional Religion can be achieved which can also bring about inter-religious compatibility.

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