

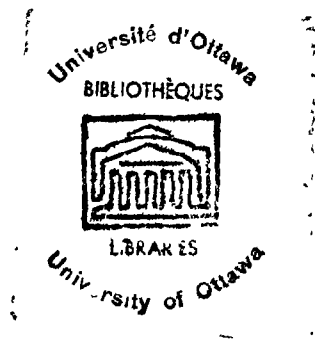
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RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS OF THE BASOTHO

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Arts of the University of Ottawa
through the Department of Theology
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INTRODUCTION

It is a well known fact that continuous reference is made to pastoral needs of our times; new elements are harmoniously incorporated to meet present needs, dead liturgical formulae are given new life. In preparation for similar reforms, preliminary studies have been made in various international congresses of liturgy. To mention but a few, let us remember international congresses held at Maria-Laach in 1951, at St. Odilienberg in 1952, at Lugano in 1953, at Löwen in 1954, at Assisi in 1956, and the Nimègues-Uden international week of studies in 1959.

Without prejudice or miscalculation to preceding congresses, we may say that the Nimègues-Uden congress is one of the memorable congresses of great importance in the history of the liturgical movement. Dedicated almost entirely to catholic missions, the theme of this international week of studies organized by the Liturgical Institute of Trèves was "Missions and Liturgy".

At this congress adaptation of the liturgy was discussed at length and given special consideration. The indirect cause of the emphasis on liturgical problems was the common desire of finding and discovering means of obtaining true, profound and permanent fruits of evangelization in the missions. In general, participants thought that a certain renewal of liturgy was the solution. Some of the delegates

thought that a certain adaptation of religious rites, ceremonies and customs of the people in the missions would strengthen Christianity among neo-Christians. Among lecturers who supported adaptation of local customs we may mention Fr. Luykx.¹ Fr. Buhlmann seconded him.² Both paid special attention to needs and possibilities of such an adaptation in African missions. Mgr. J. Van Cauwelaert did not only support adaptations, but also suggested a few examples from local customs of his vicariate of Inongo, Africa.³

Their intention, as Fr. Divarkar said, "n'était évidemment pas de s'aventurer dans des nouveautés ou de lâcher les rênes à un zèle réformiste effréné. Ils ne songeaient pas à assiéger Rome de demandes, ni même à voter des résolutions";⁴ On the contrary, their aim was to discover practical means of having understood and practiced liturgical services. Their studies led them to conclude that adaptation of local religious values, such as arts, observances of

1 B. Luykx, O.Praem., "L'adaptation de la liturgie en pays de missions", in Missions et Liturgie, Bruges, Abbaye de Saint-André, 1960, p. 66-77.

2 W. Buhlmann, O.F.M.Cap., "Urgences Africaines", ibid., p. 90-95.

3 Mgr. J. Van Cauwelaert, "Costumes locales et liturgie", ibid., p. 171.

4 P. Divarkar, S.J., "La première semaine internationale d'études de liturgie missionnaire", ibid., p. 9-10.

cult, rites and ceremonies were essential elements of strengthening Christianity in their respective missions.

This spirit of adapting local values is found not only in international congresses held in Europe but in mission countries as well. Catholic missionaries in Basutoland also have begun speaking about adaptation of local African religious arts such as music, painting and architecture. Later on, perhaps, this problem will extend to liturgical subjects:

Adaptation, however, calls for good intention, much attention, prudence, choice and, above all, for knowledge of adaptable rites and customs. Religious values as well as their deficiencies and disadvantages must be well known, otherwise lack of information might make adaptation an easy way back to pagan and non-Christian practices. Useful elements should be well discerned and kept, while superstitious ones are left aside or corrected. This is what Mgr. Van Cauwelaert meant when he said that adaptation needs "une connaissance bien éclairée non seulement des coutumes et des rites extérieurs, mais des conceptions profondes dans lesquelles elles s'enracinent".⁵

To realize a worthwhile, permanent and useful adaptation of local customs of Africans, therefore, their

⁵J. Van Cauwelaert, "Coutumes locales et liturgie", in Missions et Liturgie, 1960, p. 171.

authentic religious values in themselves and in relation to their daily context, that is, in relation to their African civilization, have to be studied. In other words, enlightened knowledge and information are necessary. Urged by these reasons, I thought that it would be useful to make a study of religious values, practices, traditions and rites of the ancient Basotho.

Since in the present economy of salvation our sanctification is realized fully in a conscious and human co-operation of man with God's grace by which he saves us through Jesus Christ, the Church and the sacraments: since this co-operation is also manifested by liturgical celebrations and the reception of sacraments which may not produce their full psychological resonance in man unless cultural "archetypes", conceptions, local language, customs and institutions are assumed and Christianized, I intend to limit this study to religious symbols of Basotho. Indeed, symbols play an important role in liturgical services and in the psychological functions of man.

Our intention, therefore, is not to suggest adaptation. It is to look for religious symbols of pagan Basotho. We would like to know whether such symbols existed. We would like to know their nature and values.

Accordingly, this research has three points to deal with. These points are the existence, nature and values of

religious symbols of Basotho. In the first chapter we shall attempt to define symbols. We shall study them in relation to signs and images. In the second chapter we shall study myths on account of their importance in primitive religions. Before studying religious symbols of pagan Basotho it is necessary to know the kind of religion they had. As a result, in the third chapter we shall study their notion of the divinity which will determine their religion. In the fourth and fifth chapters we shall study common and special rites of pagan Basotho. It is in these rites and ceremonies that we shall find religious symbols.

Having discovered religious symbols in their religious functions and context, we shall attempt to explain their symbolism and value. We shall study religious symbolism and the religious reactions which pagan Basotho had towards those symbols, that is to say, their consciousness of the sacred and holy. Finally, we shall attempt to find out their authentic religious values which can be of any use in Catholic rites. In this part, we shall use notions and discoveries of ethnologists and masters in history of religions. Although sociology, psychology, history and comparative study of religious forms have at one time modified or complicated the problem of religious inquiry, these disciplines have also definitely increased the range of observation likely to throw light upon religious problems today. That is why we

shall use them as auxiliary sciences, without forgetting the formal aspect of our research — the religious character of the symbols of the pagan *Dasotho*.

In this dissertation the term "primitive" does not mean "savage" nor "barbarism" because these terms, at least in English, connote moral characteristics which are not found among all the so-called primitives. We shall use these terms "primitive", "archaic" and "ancient" synonymously. They mean pre-literate, non-literate, the earliest state of human history, the first period of the growth of a given people, culture or civilization.

The word "pagan" is not used to mean "areligious" or absence of any form of religion. In this paper it is used to mean non-Christian and natural religion.

The term "religion" needs some explanation because of a possible confusion which may be found when dealing with primitive religions in which most of the time religion and magic are overlapping. In general, religion is an attitude of man towards a certain power or towards an object thought to have some force. Man, however, may have two major attitudes towards the super-human world: the attitude of persuasion, petition or propitiation, and the attitude of coercion, constraint or compulsion. According to Mr. Cooper, the term "religion" denotes "those activities that are characterized by a persuasive or propitiatory attitude towards the

supernatural world", and the term "magic" denotes "those activities that are characterized by a coercive or compulsive attitude towards the supernatural world."⁶ These distinctions are important because among primitives, magic and religion are sometimes mixed. Both of them have intellectual, emotional and volitional elements. Their difference is in their volitional elements. In magic, things are believed to happen automatically. People believe that some actions or gestures are followed necessarily by some effects. Religion is also distinguished from magic by the powers to which people direct their attitude of persuasion. As Fr. Cooper said, "If forces are impersonal and our attitude is more coercive than persuasive then we are in the province of magic. If, however, these forces are personal beings and the attitude towards them is more persuasive than coercive then we are in the province of religion."⁷ In this dissertation, therefore, the term "religion" is used to mean an attitude of persuasion, propitiation, petition and prayer towards supernatural powers. It is important to remember that the feeling of dependance on some power or object is sufficient to have the minimum of religious attitude. This dependance

⁶ Mgr J.M. Cooper, "Primitive Religion", in The Missionary Academic, vol. II, no. 5, June 1944, p. 9.

⁷ Idea, "Magic and Science", in Thought, vol. X, no. 3, December 1935, p. [357]-358.

is the basis of the attitude of persuasion. As a result, the element of persuasion suffices to have religion and religious attitudes.

Briefly, our dissertation is on the religious symbols of the pagan Basotho. We shall study their existence, nature and values, and especially their possibility of being adapted in Catholic liturgy.

CHAPTER I

SYMBOL

Signs are among the most useful wonders of creation. Our daily life, indeed, is full of them. Our languages are but sums of signs. A flag, a smile, a red light at the corner of a street, numerous liturgical gestures and our sacraments are signs. Without them our life, profane or religious, individual or social, would be dull, empty, meaningless and, perhaps, impossible. Without them communication between one person and another, between us and God, would be impossible: above all man would be condemned to total solitude — which would be absurd.

In current language, as a matter of fact, signs are used for symbols. We might ask ourselves whether this indiscriminate use is correct. If there is any difference between the two, in what does it consist?

Our aim in this first chapter is to try to explain the nature of symbols. In order to do this, four points will be examined: characteristics common to signs and symbols, origin and relations of symbols with the archetype, polyvalence of symbols which seems to be their formal constituent, the global reaction which symbols stimulate in the knowing subject; finally properties and advantages of symbols in comparison to concept.

1. Signs and Symbols

A. Complexity of Symbols

Symbols are sometimes opposed to signs and to allegory. Signs are simple expressions whereas symbols are complex.¹ Symbols manifest complicated realities which are beyond verbal expression and impossible to express all at once. Symbols are the best formulae of relatively unknown realities which cannot be expressed in a clearer nor in a more characteristic and significative manner.² Hostie, commenting on Jung's position about relations of symbols to signs, says that signs were similar to allegory which were different from symbols. The main difference lies in this: that symbolic representations were complex reality itself rendered sensible and incarnated, while signs are not the reality they represent. Another difference is that allegory is notional while symbols are concrete.³

B. Image in Symbols

Symbols are also distinguished from signs by the image of the thing they manifest. Garnot has explained this

1 R. Hostie, Du mythe à la religion. La psychologie analytique de C.G. Jung, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, [c1955], p. 40.

2 Idem, op. cit., p. 171.

3 Idem, ibid.

image in his article on the symbolism of hieroglyphic signs.⁴ There he explains that such signs can provoke natural or artificial products without being read. They evoke things by their natural properties. One grasps their symbolism by the mere fact of looking at them. This is rendered possible because some signs have in their very nature images of the thing they represent. On account of this image, signs are distinguished into two kinds in accordance with the images which enable them to be more symbols than signs. Images are either visual or auditory. Visual images are also called sign-object or action-sign; for example, a dance, any kind of gesture whether theatrical or oratorical. Auditory images are otherwise called talking images or oral images, word-signs, phonetic signs or phonograms. They are nothing but a combination of sign and sound-images. They are relatively simple, stable, and easily interpreted and understood. The advantage of such images and their effect on the nature of signs are summarized by Garnot in the following words: "C'est en cela précisément qu'ils cessent d'être des signes pour devenir des symboles."⁵ In other words, Garnot differentiates signs from symbols by images. Symbols have an

⁴ J. Sainte Fare Garnot, "Signes et symbole dans l'écriture hiéroglyphique", in Études Carmélitaines, no. spécial 1960, p. [103]-104.

⁵ Idem, ibid., p. 106.

additional meaning on account of those images. The author, however, does not admit a radical opposition between signs and symbols even if he uses the word "ceases" in order to explain the difference between them. The context shows that he meant that symbols had an additional function or characteristic. He meant that symbols are not only signs but that they have something which signs do not have. Therefore, Carnot's position is that symbols are more than signs on account of the image of the thing they represent, which enables them to have an additional function.

Maritain also distinguished symbols from signs by images.⁶ By the image he meant what is similar to its principle, for example, a child is an image of its parents. Signs are not images. More than that, it is not necessary that they be similar to what they represent. This is what is meant when the Scholastics say that signs proceed not from others according to a similitude, but inasmuch as they are means leading to the knowledge of the object whose representation they are. Since images distinguish signs from symbols, and since not all signs are images of what they represent, we have to conclude that not all signs are symbols.

⁶ J. Maritain, Quatre essais sur l'esprit dans sa condition charnelle, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, [1939], ch. II, p. 70.

On account of that image Maritain concludes that: "Nous pourrions définir le symbole comme un signe-image."⁷

C. Symbols and Supernatural

Another difference between signs and symbols is given by Jacobi in his commentary on the archetype and symbol according to Jung.⁸ For him symbols are properly sensible signs which lead to the knowledge of supernatural reality. This aspect, however, is not exclusive because there are signs which signify supernatural reality. This insinuation has its importance in that it allows the possibility of having symbols in religious affairs.

In conclusion we may state that one thing is sure about relations between signs and symbols. It is an undoubted point that symbols are more than signs. As Fumet says: "Le symbole est donc signe et plus qu'un signe parce qu'il est actif, il est signal, et l'analyse en profite."⁹ Symbols are signs. Moreover, they have something more than signs which is the image of the object they manifest. It is by means of that image that our carnal spirit can touch

⁷ J. Maritain, Quatre essais sur l'esprit dans sa condition charnelle, p. 71.

⁸ J. Jacobi, "Archétype et symbole dans la psychologie de Jung", in Etudes Carmélitaines, no. spécial 1960, p. 174.

⁹ S. Fumet, "Symbolisme contemporain", ibid., p. 42.

something spiritual. It is by the sensible image of the symbol that we know more invisible realities. Those images render the spiritual sensible; they render possible the contemplation of the unknown realities. By symbols we know the thing manifested and by means of its image we are enabled to contemplate the manifested object. This image seems to be the foundation of the main difference between signs and symbols, i.e., the complexity, concreteness and polyvalence of symbols. In spite of these notions our knowledge about symbols is far from being exhaustive. Their nature is not yet fully explained. Let us now study them in themselves.

2. Symbols and the Archetype

One of the major contributions of Jung is that of the archetype, which, I think, has promoted the understanding of symbols. It goes without saying that Jung's theory remains a hypothesis, and as such it has to be studied and examined with a critical eye. Jung puts an essential difference between archetype and symbols, just as he puts one between the archetype and images which he identified with symbols.¹⁰ According to him, archetypal image and symbol mean the same thing. His reason for identifying them is that symbols are only a manifestation of archetypal image.

¹⁰ C.G. Jung, Psychologie de l'inconscient, Genève, Librairie de l'Université de Genève, 1952, p. 131.

They are the image in the zone of the conscious, where they are rendered visible by the conscious itself. Archetype and image cannot be separated although they are distinct one from the other.¹¹ What makes archetypes differ from images are the following characteristics.

A. Archetypes: Unconscious Energies

Jung's archetypes may be considered in two ways, that is to say, in themselves and in relation to external phenomenon. In themselves, they are concentrated psychic energies, or numerous structures of the psyché, or a sum of powers and an organized system of virtualities or of invisible forces. Essentially, archetypes are specific energies. In other words, archetypes are capacities to recall, to bring to mind, to raise up and evoke elements of representative heritage.¹² They are autonomous energetic centers endowed with such fascinating influence that they can seize the conscious of an individual and change him profoundly. Their activity is within the domain of the conscious. Consequently, their influence is felt in dreams, in imaginations and in life too. In this way, archetypes are by no means inactive; on the contrary, they are "centres

11 C.G. Jung, Psychologie de l'inconscient, p. 138.

12 S. Fumet, "Symbolisme contemporain", in Etudes Carmélitaines, no. spécial 1960, p. 167-168.

énergiques, comme des forces ou des tendances qui poussent le sujet à renouveler ces mêmes expériences".¹³

In relation to symbols, archetypes may be considered as non-perceptible symbols. They are dynamic nuclei ready to be put in the domain of the conscious at any time. Because of this imperceptible nature archetypes cannot be reached directly. In that unconscious state they do not manifest anything, unless they manifest their values in an archetypal image, symbol, in dreams, imaginations and in other symptoms of this kind.

Briefly, archetypes are unconscious in themselves. This characteristic, undoubtedly, implies a relation either with a knowing subject or at least with the contents of the archetypes. Without relations with external phenomena, past or present, archetypes are empty; they have no meaning and are therefore without representation. Their meaning and signification is undetermined. Their contents represent raw matter, as it were, for the final formation of symbol or archetypal images. This occurs when the archetypes are put in favorable circumstances of space and time, when they are in relation with the conscious from which they receive their meaning. In other words archetypes faced with an objective phenomenon existing in space and time receive a "body", a

¹³ S. Furet, "Symbolisme contemporain", in Etudes Carmélitaines, no. spécial 1960, p. 58.

"matter", a plastic form, and become perceptible. At that time the conscious makes them symbolic because of the relation it makes between the archetype and the phenomenal matter. Briefly, archetypes are unconscious energies or potencies.

B. Archetypes: Collective Forms

Jung distinguished the unconscious into personal and individual, impersonal and collective unconscious.¹⁴ Personal unconscious is formed out of personal experience. It is a sum of lived infant reminiscences. Their existence and value is limited to individual perceptions and sensations that each person had in the early days of his life. That is why personal unconscious contains forgotten events, even those which are forgotten intentionally. It contains also past painful sensations and perceptions which had not sufficiently penetrated the planes of conscious and memory. Sometimes its contents are repressed or past checked sensations or unaccomplished sensations.¹⁵

Collective unconscious on the other hand is described in the following manner by Jung: "un inconscient impersonnel ou supra-individuel [... est] précisément parce qu'il est

¹⁴ G.G. Jung, Psychologie de l'inconscient, p. 130-132.

¹⁵ Idem, op. cit., p. 132.

détaché des sphères personnelles, existant en marge de celles-ci, qu'il possède un caractère tout à fait général et que ses contenus peuvent se rencontrer chez tous les êtres, ce qui n'est pas le cas pour tous les matériaux individuels".¹⁶ The main difference between individual and collective unconscious is that the latter have neither been experienced nor lived by each individual. Collective unconscious are ancestral figurations made up of capacities of representative heritage. They exist in the human spirit and are therefore transmitted by heredity. Hostie, commenting on their origin, said that they are acquired by humanity.¹⁷ Baudouin, commenting on Jung's archetypes, calls them collective images on account of their identity in many subjects.¹⁸ In this way they are common to all people, relatively speaking.¹⁹ They are capacities enabling many subjects to form similar images and correlations. They are collective and common because people have the same understanding and interpretation of them. They are a center of association of ideas which are particularly stable in many

16 C.G. Jung, Psychologie de l'inconscient, p. 132.

17 R. Hostie, Du mythe à la religion. La psychologie analytique de C.G. Jung, p. 61.

18 C. Baudouin, Psychanalyse du symbole religieux, Paris, Fayard, 1957, p. 110-112.

19 J. Henninger, S.V.D., "Mythe en ethnologie", in Dictionnaire de la Bible, suppl., fasc. xxx, p. 235.

subjects, which enable that subject to announce analogous images to many.²⁰ According to Hostie's explanation, they are unconscious collective dispositions of the soul, without any representative content. They are, therefore, identical structures of the psyché, whose tendency is to realize their signification, to produce similar representations.

The existence of contents of collective unconscious is explained by three joint factors. The most fundamental factor of these contents is heredity itself. Heredity is the basis which determines the nature of contents of the archetypes. It is through it that we can explain the existence of identical legends, folklore and myths in the many various parts of the world; for instance, myths of fertility, lunar rhythmic life and death, myth of natalis solis invicti and myths of initiation. Other subjective factors which explain the expression of the archetypes are the imaginative reactions stimulated by physical phenomena. In this way imaginative representations are the echo of the objective phenomenon.²¹ Therefore, representations of archetypes are not innate. Jung's opinion on this point is very clear.²²

20 G. Baudouin, Psychanalyse du symbole religieux, p. 119.

21 C.G. Jung, Psychologie de l'inconscient, p. 138.

22 "Ce faisant, je n'affirme nullement la transmission héréditaire de représentations, mais uniquement la transmission héréditaire de la capacité d'évoquer tel ou tel élément du patrimoine représentatif. Il y a là une différence considérable." C.G. Jung, op. cit., p. 131.

Considered in relation to their representations or contents, archetypes are called pure formal elements, facultates formandi. Compared with symbols, archetypes are pre-figurations of symbols.²³ Their role is to allow objective phenomena to find their corresponding prefigurations among psychic qualities. According to Jacobi's commentary archetypes are conditions for the creation of symbols.²⁴ Their psychological reaction consists in a projection of the psychic forms which are represented. The predominant role given to the psyché in this theory is to create and communicate symbols.²⁵ The psyché and the archetypes are a condition sine qua non of the symbol. Man accordingly may be called animal symbolicum.²⁶

According to Jung, therefore, we can speak of symbols whenever the archetype is manifested hic et nunc in space and time. Symbols are the archetypes appearing in such situations and are given signification and perceived by the conscious.²⁷ In other words symbols are expressions of

23 R. Hostie, Du mythe à la religion. La psychologie analytique de C.G. Jung, p. 59, 67.

24 J. Jacobi, "Archétype et symbole dans la psychologie de Jung", in Études Carmélitaines, no. spécial 1960, p. 180.

25 Idem, ibid., p. 168.

26 Lucien-Marie de Saint-Joseph, "Expérience mystique et expression symbolique chez S. Jean de la Croix", in Études Carmélitaines, no. spécial 1960, p. 172.

27 J. Jacobi, loc. cit., p. 168.

the archetypes in a concrete collective or individual situation. To express this, Jung said that: "Tout symbole est l'expression d'un archétype dans une situation concrète collective ou individuelle."²⁸ Without archetypes symbols cannot be explained, cannot be what they are, since the latter are pictures and expressions of the psychic energies or dispositions.²⁹

Jung's theory about the archetypes can be summarized in these words. Symbols depend on archetypes for their nature and existence. Archetypes are dispositions of the psyché. They are a sum of energies and capacities. They are unconscious, collective, innate dispositions without definite content in themselves. It is on account of them that some phenomena in their proper circumstances of space and time are interpreted in the same way and, therefore, represent similar images to all people.

It is stated also that religious symbols are based on their own archetypes.³⁰ Although we should not consider Jung as a theologian, his theory can be applied to symbols of supernatural realities. He was concerned rather with

²⁸ R. Hostie, Du mythe à la religion. La psychologie analytique de C.G. Jung, p. 67.

²⁹ J. Jacobi, "Archétype et symbole dans la psychologie de Jung", in Etudes Carmélitaines, no. spécial 1960, p. 168, 186.

³⁰ Idem, ibid., p. 193.

natural phenomena and natural religion, but his theory seems admissible outside those limits.

3. Polyvalence of Symbols

The most characteristic quality of symbols has been given many names. It has been called polyvalence, duality, polarity and ambivalence. This polyvalence seems to be one of the most differentiating qualities of symbols. It seems to be an essential property of symbols. Since this polyvalence is explained in many expressions we shall examine some of them in the following paragraphs.

A. Abstract and Concrete

In the commentary of Jacobi Jungian symbols are both abstract and concrete.³¹ This terminology should not lead us to confusion. It should not be understood according to scholastic vocabulary. Here abstract means the dispositions of the knowing subject whereas concrete means the objective phenomena or the symbol itself in its extramental existence. Symbols are built up of an association of these subjective and objective elements. They are constituted by the archetypes and the sensible phenomenon. Furthermore, symbols are not perceived by rational or logical stages but by intuition

³¹ J. Jacobi, "Archétype et symbole dans la psychologie de Jung", in Études Carmélitaines, no. spécial 1960, p. 169.

or in an irrational manner. This is what is meant by Jacobi's words: "Il n'est ni abstrait ni concret, ni rationnel ni irratiionnel, ni réel ni irréel, il est toujours l'un et l'autre [...]."³²

B. Polyvalence Itself

Symbols are called polyvalent in order to emphasize their multiplicity of signification. This means that they are "conscious" and "unconscious". In other words they are full of meaning and void of meaning at the same time.³³ This seems to be contradictory at first sight, whereas in fact there is no contradiction. Duality is a quality by which the intimate union of opposites is expressed. This coincidence is based on the nature of the archetypal image itself. Symbols by their duality touch and manifest not only what is before us but also what is behind us. This function makes them mediators between the hidden and the manifest.

Eliade explains this bipolarity in another way.³⁴ He simply explains the double signification of symbols by

³² J. Jacobi, "Archétype et symbole dans la psychologie de Jung", in Etudes Carmélitaines, no. spécial 1960, p. 185.

³³ Idem, ibid., p. 172, 182.

³⁴ M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, London-New York, Sheed and Ward, 1958, p. 8-11.

mentioning their most important meaning in religious phenomena. For him symbols manifest powers, the sacred. On that account he calls them kratophanies and hierophanies. In order to show that symbols are concrete and real objective things, Eliade explained that hierophanies may belong to psychological, economic and social orders as well as to the spiritual order. They may be objects, movements, games or psychological functions. This accounts for their polyvalence because they attract and repel, because they are considered as clean and defiled, as sacred and profane.³⁵ Polarity of symbols permits them to produce a series of reactions in the knowing subject. This led Eliade to bring a valuable distinction on the nature of symbols. Following that precision we may say that symbols are not objects which hic et nunc have a relation with the mind, nor what actually unites many zones of reality, but they are what is capable of revealing the fundamental unity of many planes of the real to many senses on whatever context they may be. In this way symbols are rightly called realizers of concordance and coincidence of many in one form.³⁶ Their message extends to many fields. Polyvalence is, therefore, the quality and

³⁵ M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 14-15.

³⁶ G. Baudouin, Psychanalyse du symbole religieux, p. 62.

property of symbols of being able to express simultaneously many significations at once.³⁷

Van der Leeuw gives a nuance about this property.³⁸ According to him polyvalence is what makes symbols identified with the things they manifest. In that case symbols are a meeting of two perfections or realities. But this identity is total or complete, because the object manifested remains a thing different from its symbol. The quasi-identity is based on the image by which symbols are not simple representatives and replacements like signs but in a way the thing revealed. They take the place of something distinct from them and at the same time they express their own perfection and qualities.

According to Lucien-Marie de Saint-Joseph polyvalence again means the capacity to express opposed qualities such as life and death, joy and suffering, attraction and repulsion.³⁹ These effects are expressed in different faculties. In the symbols of baptism, for example, water symbolizes death to sin and the spiritual life of grace,

37 M. Eliade, "Le symbolisme des ténèbres dans les religions archaïques", in Etudes Carmélitaines, no. spécial 1960, p. 18.

38 G. van der Leeuw, L'homme primitif et la religion, Paris, Arcan, 1940, p. 45, 62.

39 L.-M. de St-Joseph, "Expérience mystique et expression symbolique chez S. Jean de la Croix", in Etudes Carmélitaines, no. spécial 1960, p. 47.

disappearance of sin and the quasi-creation or appearance of grace. This symbolism of water is found in analogical fashion in the polyvalence of water itself, because water is capable of producing physical purity by the removal of physical impurities, because one can get life in water just as one can get death in it. This is an example of the objective foundation of the character of polyvalence of symbols.

This function of manifesting different things is, in fact, an advantage because distinction and independence of objects revealed are manifested without forgetting their unity. For this reason also new values or manifestations can be added to a symbol without danger of confusion. This polyvalence allows the survival of the symbol even if other manifestations are added to it. It allows the existence of religious symbols which can unveil inaccessible realities to empiric experience.⁴⁰ It is by means of symbols that such realities are manifested without deforming either the symbol or the inaccessibility of those realities.

Polyvalence of symbols is an important quality of symbols because it allows the manifestation of various aspects of reality without the danger of hiding or diminishing the value of the symbol itself. It means that symbols are

⁴⁰ M. Eliade, "Le symbolisme des ténèbres dans les religions archaïques", in Etudes Carmélitaines, no. spécial 1960, p. 11.

"conscious" and "unconscious", "abstract" and "concrete", "real" and "unreal", "rational" and "irrational" at the same time in themselves. This only means that symbols are made up of both spiritual and sensible elements, that they are full of meaning according to circumstances of space and time. Polyvalence means that symbols are able to express different and sometimes opposed realities. It is on this point that their richness depends. For this reason also, symbols have two functions. They represent the object which they manifest and they are somehow the image of that object.

4. Global Reaction

In order to know exactly the nature of symbols we have to examine their role in the immanent act of knowledge. We have to know their influence on the knowing subject. Indeed, if knowledge is the vital identification of the knowing being with the known object, a clear notion of subjective reactions may help us know factors implied and included in the realization of such reactions.

A. Inseparability from Experience

Lucien-Marie de Saint-Joseph describes symbols as inseparable expressions of the experience of a knowing

41 L.-M. de St-Joseph, "Experience mystique et expression symbolique chez S. Jean de la Croix", in Etudes Carmélitaines, no. spécial 1960, p. 49.

being.⁴² By so saying he admits the existence of some reaction or influence caused by symbols in the mind of the knowing person. That experience had something special because the revealed thing is given neither before nor after the symbol itself. The act of that experience is not rational but intuitive. This does not mean that intuition produces symbols always. Certain conditions are required in order to have the experience of symbols. The object perceived should be polyvalent, otherwise reaction proper to symbols is not produced. Lucien-Marie de Saint-Joseph gives priority of nature to objective reality because extramental reality causes subjective experience.⁴³

B. Global Reaction Itself

This experience is not limited to one faculty. It is global, because it is the reaction of the whole person, of the whole being. It causes the reaction of different faculties of man.⁴⁴ This overall reaction is made possible by the image possessed by symbols. On account of it symbols cause the vibration of thought, sentiment, sensation as well

⁴² L.-M. de St-Joseph, "Expérience mystique et expression symbolique chez S. Jean de la Croix", in Etudes Carmélitaines, no. spécial 1960, p. 33-37.

⁴³ Idem, ibid., p. 38.

⁴⁴ J. Jacobi, "Archétype et symbole dans la psychologie de Jung", in Etudes Carmélitaines, no. spécial 1960, p. 177, 185.

as intuition. Symbols, therefore, realize an agreement and harmony between the sense and the spirit, between sensitive and intellectual faculties. The message transmitted is received by man not only by his rational powers but by his senses also. They help us to know different aspects of reality and their unity in one being. Through them we do not know reality partially but totally, not as a sum of distinctions but also as something really one.

This is nothing but a complete understanding of the etymological definition of symbol, which in greek is $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\nu\beta\omicron\lambda\epsilon\iota$ a substantive derived from the verb $\epsilon\upsilon\beta\omicron\lambda\lambda\omega$ which means "to take with", "to include", "to comprehend", "to totalize" and "to unify". In primitive greek culture $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\nu\beta\omicron\lambda\epsilon\upsilon$ meant "a sign of recognition". It was an object divided into two, whose portions were given partners as a sign of their contract and agreement. It is clear that those symbols were conventional. Nevertheless, the notion of totality was already understood because parts considered alone were not symbols.

Global reaction, briefly, means that symbols made the whole man know by all his faculties — sensitive and intellectual. It means that man knew not only by rational manner but also by intuition. In this way an overall and total reaction is produced in man by symbols. By that reaction we know distinctions as well as their unity in the existing thing.

C. Nobility of Symbols

After this short survey of the nature of symbols it is normal that we compare them with concepts, which are also means of knowledge. Our interest is to know whether symbols have any advantage over concepts. Hostie tells us that: "la définition jungienne du symbole prend tout le relief nécessaire. Le symbole est la meilleure formule possible pour indiquer une réalité relativement inconnue en soi, mais connue comme présente de par son dynamisme."⁴⁵ They are the best possible formulae because they indicate realities to many faculties and stimulate in them a global reaction. In them we see that object totally by our intellect and senses in a single act of intuition. Of course, this does not mean that symbols have no shortcomings. They do not give us comprehension or comprehensive knowledge nor evidence of absent beings. Their advantage is that more faculties know. Concepts, on the other hand, supply the intellect only with knowledge. In a word we may say that symbols are richer than concepts by extension.

Another advantage of symbols is expressed by Fr. Chenu in these words: "La richesse du symbole, et elle lui est propre, c'est sa puissance de suggestion du mystère des

⁴⁵ R. Hostie, Du mythe à la religion. La psychologie analytique de C.G. Jung, p. 43.

choses ou de Dieu."⁴⁶ In this way concepts enable us to have a better knowledge of transcendent realities by suggesting some similarity with what we see in the symbol. It is no other reason than this that Fumet speaks about: "son aptitude à faire toucher du spirituel par un esprit charnel plongé comme le nôtre dans le sens".⁴⁷ By symbols profound depths of the soul are reached.

Conclusion

Symbols are signs and more than signs because they are complex and have images of the reality they manifest. Symbols have subjective aspects or conditions which are called archetypes. These archetypes, in fact, are unconscious, collective energies and predispositions of symbols. Without them we cannot have symbols. They are innate and inherited together with brain structure. When they are in favourable conditions of space and time and contain in addition the corresponding phenomena, a symbol is formed.

Symbols in themselves are objective realities whose specific and formal constituent is their polyvalence, which is nothing else than their capacity to express many realities. It is a property by which symbols manifest different

⁴⁶ M.-D. Chenu, C.F., La théologie au XI^e siècle, Paris, Vrin, 1957, p. 190.

⁴⁷ S. Fumet, "Symbolisme contemporain", in Etudes Carmélitaines, no. spécial 1960, p. 142.

things and sometimes opposed objects without confusing them. It is by means of this quality that symbols reveal distinctions and unity of various aspects of being.

Polyvalence of symbols is the fundamental power by which symbols stimulate global reaction in man. It enables them to carry their revelations and manifestations to groups of knowing faculties of man, namely, sensitive and intellectual faculties alike. Symbols are known by intuition. They talk to the whole person. They address lower and higher faculties of man.

Their mobility consists in this overall manifesting power. They are the most proportionate objective means of knowledge to the human person, because they talk to man by his external faculties, because they talk to man as a being made of body and soul, because they do not talk to the intellect only as concepts do. They manifest reality to the whole person.

CHAPTER II

MYTH

We cannot study religious symbols without any consideration of myths, not only because myths are symbols of representation or of conduct but also because they play an important role in primitive religions. Different definitions and explanations have been given of myths. In general exegetes do not agree totally with the definition given by ethnologists. In the past, in fact, myths were looked at with a pessimistic eye. To-day the tide is changing. More studies are made about them. Just the same the solution is far from being clear and universally accepted. As a result, we do not intend to give a detailed study of the nature of myths. We will examine them in order to understand better their role in the various pagan religious rites and observances.

1. Myth as Expression of Understanding

One of the shortest and clearest phenomenological descriptions of myth is given by Childs, who states that "myth is an expression of man's understanding of reality".¹ Myth is equivalent to the conception that man has of the

¹ B. Childs, Myth and Reality in the Old Testament, London, SCM Press Ltd, 1960, p. 17.

universe; it is a manifestation of that understanding. In other words myth is a form by which existing structures of reality are understood. Mythology, therefore, is any knowledge and treatise about this conception of the world, a collection of myths. Nevertheless, as Pépin remarks, "la mythologie n'est plus seulement le catalogue et la description, mais la science et l'explication des mythes".² In this way mythology is a kind of reflection of myths.

This understanding of reality can be expressed and manifested in many ways; for instance, by means of recitations, literary forms, by vital activities, functions and actions. That is why myths are also called narratives and recitations. Idiart, in the same line, calls them literary achievement.³ There is some advantage in calling myths literary forms because of the distinction which is nuanced between myths and their doctrinal content.

Myths are not only recitations, they are also rites, actions or gestures. It is true that we can have myths without any rite but such myths would lose much of their power and the best part of their richness. As Caillois says, myths without rites and actions lose almost their

² J. Pépin, Mythe et allégorie. Les origines grecques et les contestations, Paris, Aubier, [c1958], p. [33].

³ P. Idiart, "Prêtre païen et prêtre chrétien", in Etudes sur le sacrement de l'ordre, Collection Lex Orandi, no. 22, Paris, Ed. du Cerf, 1957, p. 347, 355.

"raison d'être".⁴ They lose their influence and therefore cannot be practiced. They become mere literary productions as in the case of the majority of classical Greek myths. Apart from the primordial act, in which consist some of the myths, these myths may degenerate into an epic legend, a ballad, a romance or may survive in the attenuated form of suggestions, customs or souvenirs.⁵ The association of myths with certain ritual observances makes myths lively and influential. Separation from them makes them pure speculative and passive recitations. Even in their degenerated or dead form myths are still significant though in a lesser degree.

To consider myths as narrative forms is to consider them as a means of knowledge. On account of this characteristic Van der Leeuw even calls them symbols.⁶ Eliade calls them symbols of representation and conduct.⁷ Idiart describes them as explanations of mysterious problems of life.⁸

⁴ R. Caillois, Le mythe et l'homme, Paris, Gallimard, [c1938], p. 30.

⁵ M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, London-New York, Sheed and Ward, 1958, p. 431.

⁶ G. van der Leeuw, L'homme primitif et la religion, Paris, Arcan, 1940, p. 106, 216.

⁷ M. Eliade, Traité d'histoire des religions, Paris, Payot, 1949, p. 381, 388.

⁸ P. Idiart, "Prêtre païen et prêtre chrétien", in Etudes sur le sacrement de l'ordre, p. 347, 355.

This explanation is given by means of images. As a result some myths are more actions than narratives. They are not mere verbal recitations of events learned by heart. Their role is to give a model and a pattern of behaviour.⁹ They are controlling motives of conduct.¹⁰ The literary aspect of myths should not be emphasized too much, otherwise some myths would be automatically excluded, for instance legends.

Some myths are secret.¹¹ Their recitation and performance is restricted to a group of initiated people only. They can only be recited by special persons at specified times and places.¹² An example of such myths is found among myths of initiation which were not to be recited outside their sacred time and seasons. It goes without saying that this note does not apply to all myths. In other words, other myths are public.

In order to understand the nature of myths we have to place them in their circumstances of time. So far we know that myths are expressions of man's understanding of the universe within the early stage of his intellectual development. In other words myths come from a pre-scientific

9 M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 73.

10 R. Gaillois, Le mythe et l'homme, p. 98.

11 Idem, op. cit., p. 143.

12 M. Eliade, op. cit., p. 74.

unercritical and naive stage of consciousness. That is why myths are found among the primitive Egyptians, Greeks, Babylonians and among primitives of Africa, Fiji and New Zealand.¹³ It is in these forms that inexplicable events were attributed to the direct intervention of the gods. Since myths have a necessary connection with the primitive stage of a people and since each group of people has had its primitive stage, myths can be named after each people and civilisation. That is why Pépin concluded: "c'est dans cette perspective que l'on parle de mythologie hindoue, de mythologie grecque".¹⁴

2. Kinds of Myths

We do not intend to give an exhaustive classification of myths. According to their contents, however, myths can be grouped into myths of creation, myths of gods of vegetation, myths of transformation or of passage, myths of evocation and exorcism, and myths of eschatology or of death.

It is this quasi-overall enveloping character of myths that led Childs to state that myths are concerned with the great realities through which life is determined, death,

¹³ B. Childs, Myth and Reality in the Old Testament, p. 13-14.

¹⁴ J. Pépin, Mythe et allégorie, p. [33].

fertility and the origin of life.¹⁵ The extension of myths is wide. There are myths about gods, about man, about nature, the moon, the sun, about mysteries of nature such as generation, life, death and fertility.

We would like to deal with myths of origin in some detail because of their importance in primitive religions. As we have said, myths of origin are just a part of the number of myths which exist. These myths are literary forms about the origin of the world. As Idiart says, they describe the creation of the world.¹⁶ Caillois has the same idea.¹⁷ These authors do not mean creation in the strict sense as productio ex nihilo formae et subjecti. They mean the beginning of the existence of the universe, in a very large sense. Myths are an attempt to give a psychologically satisfactory explanation of the origin of existing things which are around us. In this way, the description given is proportionate to the comprehension of the people who make them. In history, the two principles were, according to Eliade's research, heroes and gods.¹⁸ Relations between

¹⁵ B. Childs, Myth and Reality in the Old Testament, p. 22.

¹⁶ P. Idiart, "Prêtre païen et prêtre chrétien", in Etudes sur le sacrement de l'ordre, p. 342; J. Henninger, S.V.D., "Mythe en ethnologie", in Dictionnaire de la Bible, suppl., fasc. xxx, p. 251.

¹⁷ R. Caillois, Le mythe et l'homme, p. 27-28.

¹⁸ M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 12.

these two principles were not always clearly expressed. To be more precise, in myths the problem of subordination of original principles seems not to have existed. Gods and heroes were models without distinction based on their nature. The explanation of the world by gods led Van der Leeuw to call myths history of the gods.¹⁹ Although Childs admits that some myths are stories about gods, he adds that myths should not be restricted to stories of gods because in myths other existing structures were expressed.²⁰ In myths, mysteries about nature, man, animals, the moon and the sun were equally expressed. According to Henninger, there is a connection between gods and heroes in the attempt to explain creation.²¹

Heroes and gods, as Henninger describes them, are supra-sensible and invisible realities.²² They belong to a world beyond our sensible experience. They are not totally different from us or from our world because they are described in a manner closer to us. In other words, the transcendent and the divine are personified in myths and

19 G. van der Leeuw, L'homme primitif et la religion, p. 130, 102.

20 B. Childs, Myth and Reality in the Old Testament, p. 15, 29.

21 J. Henninger, "Mythe en ethnologie", in Dictionnaire de la Bible, suppl., fasc. xxx, p. 227.

22 Idem, ibid., p. 230-231, 237.

consequently the divine appears in a human form, the supra-human as terrestrial, the non-spatial as spatial, the atemporal as measured by time, the unknowable as knowable, and the inaccessible as accessible.

Heroes are a little more described than gods. They are the ancestors of a given community.²³ They are the first members of a particular family or tribe not only because they gave that tribe life but also because they founded, instituted customs and traditions and organized the nation. On account of these original functions, ancestors have certain privileges and prerogatives. They are above tribal taboos, consequently they can do what is prohibited for the rest of the community. Caillois says that, besides their original actions, ancestors have solutions for tribal problems, that they have a happy or an unfortunate influence for members of their community.²⁴ Happiness of mortals depends on them. In order to understand the role of the heroes, Idiart says:

Le récit mythique est l'histoire des dieux, des grands ancêtres, des héros civilisateurs, des premiers hommes, qui, dans un lieu qui n'est ni terre ni ciel mais l'un et l'autre ensemble, ont façonné le monde des techniques et les coutumes des tribus, distribué aux êtres vivants leurs prérogatives,

23 J. Henninger, "Mythe en ethnologie", in Dictionnaire de la Bible, suppl., fasc. xxx, p. 227.

24 R. Caillois, Le mythe et l'homme, p. 27.

leurs rôles et leurs places, organisé la nature et la société.²⁵

In this passage, the role of ancestors, their nature, activity and place are clearly described. By their function they differ from us. They are representations of what is thought or imagined to have happened. Gods and ancestors have their own special time which is not similar to ours.²⁶ That time, which Idiart calls prehistoric, precedes organization of the world as well as our time.²⁷ It is the time of transition of the universe from chaos to cosmos, from disorder and confusion to order and distinction. Since mythical causes are gods and ancestors, we do not see the inconveniency of admitting the description of time as given above. This time strictly speaking presupposes real creation by God and follows that creation. It is time during which the evolution of the world and the apparition of life took place. In comparison to our historic time, the mythical time of ancestors is called primordial and atemporal.²⁸ Because it was at the service of divine beings, rather, the

25 P. Idiart, "Prêtre païen et prêtre chrétien", in Etudes sur le sacrement de l'ordre, p. 343.

26 J. Henninger, "Mythe en ethnologie", in Dictionnaire de la Bible, suppl., fasc. xxx, p. 244.

27 P. Idiart, loc. cit., p. 343, 352.

28 G. van der Leeuw, L'homme primitif et la religion, p. 100.

so-called divine gods and ancestors, Eliade qualifies it as sacred time, great time and grand epoch.²⁹ This original time is paradoxical because it was not perpetual, because it is measurable, and yet it is different from ours. Primitive religions themselves do not give a satisfactory distinction between these times.

Description of this original time permitted those who either recited or listened to them to know past events. It made the contact of the human mind with the other spheres possible. It was a sort of bridge between the human and the transcendent. Its description took man out of his present time and individual historic duration, and by imagination and super-excitation projected him symbolically to the Great Time. The narration of primordial time separated man from his natural existence and the surrounding world. That illud tempus is an important circumstance which will give mythical personages and events their original and sacred character. Without it pagan myths cannot be called literary forms about the origin of the universe, life and the people. That is why Eliade affirms that primordial time opens the way to atemporal events and personages, that it introduces man to

29 M. Eliade, Image et symbole, Paris, Gallimard, 1952, p. 73-75; J. Henninger, "Mythe en ethnologie", in Dictionnaire de la Bible, suppl., fasc. xxx, p. 243.

an indescribable world.³⁰ It also permits initiates to communicate with ancestors.³¹

It is during that great time that ancestors and gods accomplished their primordial great act, which, according to Eliade and Henninger, consisted in the creation of the world.³² It was in the same epoch that ancestors created the species and founded the community.³³ That act is not only the original and prototype but also the pattern for present and future actions of the mortals.³⁴ It goes without saying that these agents were more perfect than those people still alive. Mythical repetition differentiates pagan myth from Christian myths, inasmuch as it makes them cyclic, whereas Christian myths are concerned with the achievement of history; their motive is a future event or happening, whereas the motive of pagan myths is linear. Pagan myths are stable and unprogressive, Christian myths are typological

³⁰ M. Eliade, Image et symbole, p. 75; idem, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 18.

³¹ J. Maritain, Quatre essais sur l'esprit dans sa condition charnelle, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, [1939], p. 110.

³² M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 429-430; J. Henninger, "Mythe en ethnologie", in Dictionnaire de la Bible, suppl., fasc. xxx, p. 243, 245-246.

³³ R. Caillois, Le mythe et l'homme, p. 105.

³⁴ G. van der Leeuw, L'homme primitif et la religion, p. 130.

and progressive. Although that event looks natural, for the primitive man it was an essential part of his magico-religion. It was both a kratophany and hierophany. It was something religious on that account.³⁵ Without original event and time myths are no more influential and practical.³⁶ Separation of gods and heroes makes them lose their force and become suppositions and insignificant gesticulations.

3. Myth and action

Myths are projections of collective psychology, modes of understanding and symbolic norms of individual psychology. They are not mere static recitations, means of knowledge, nor pieces of literature to be learned by heart and recited in a parrot-like manner. They are not material for dry speculations or aimless recitations. They are principles of culture and community organization. They are means of infiltrating religious ideas and driving men to action. They are practical.³⁷ Their first aim is to give initiates information about the origin of the universe, to show them their position and duty in life. What is

35 M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 425.

36 P. Idiart, "Prêtre païen et prêtre chrétien", in Etudes sur le sacrement de l'ordre, p. 357.

37 R. Caillois, Le mythe et l'homme, p. 342.

particular about them is to encourage and to urge initiates, or those who either listen or recite them, to act.³⁸ The principal aim of myths is to be lived, practiced and realized.³⁹ They are a guarantee of the existence and the validity of the creative act and of the heroes, repeated by the people during their lives. In other words myths want continuation of the species and the survival of the community concerned. They incite and solicit those who recite them to action.⁴⁰ In this way they control the belief, behavior and conduct of a tribe.⁴¹ That is why Eliade called them symbols of representation and conduct.⁴²

But how are people induced to repeat the primordial act? How are they indoctrinated and given the spirit of the ancestors? The normal way was to learn and recite myths.⁴³ Repetition was a means of information. It worked on the psychology of the reciter and of the audience as well.⁴⁴

38 J. Maritain, Quatre essais sur l'esprit dans sa condition charnelle, p. 110-112.

39 G. van der Leeuw, L'homme primitif et la religion, p. 105, 107.

40 R. Caillois, Le mythe et l'homme, p. 24-25, 98, 143.

41 G. van der Leeuw, op. cit., p. 107.

42 M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 388.

43 R. Caillois, op. cit., p. 143.

44 G. van der Leeuw, op. cit., p. 131.

It gave them suggestions and images of the reality expressed. In those myths the realities are described in a human way. The act is personified and made vivid by using detailed descriptions giving almost the scene of what was estimated to have happened. The effect of those repetitions was like the effect produced in the psychology of an actor. Gradually, he forgets what he is in reality. He puts himself in the circumstances of his part by his imagination. Listeners and spectators of myths are like the audience of a play. Such repetition gives myths their value, meaning to present and future actions of the neophytes. They abolish historic time symbolically in order to introduce the audience to the other supra-human world in which the ancestors at a primordial time fulfilled the original event.⁴⁵ This is promoted by a very high tension and excitation of the imagination and the other senses. The role played by imagination is very important in order to enable man to form a picture or an idea of the reality expressed in myths.

Since myths are not only literary forms but also vital actions and performances, they have to have some characteristic by which they may induce people to action. These activities were important because it is the mutual relationship of myths and cult that created an intelligible unity

45 M. Eliade, Image et symbole, p. 74-75.

between the past and the present, between the this-worldly and the other-worldly.⁴⁶ Indeed, it is in the drama of the cult that actualization of mythical realities was expressed.⁴⁷ True myths which had a practical importance were necessarily accompanied by certain ritual observances. The influence of action is more effective than that of recitation. Action is better and sometimes stronger than theory. In myths of origin and those of passage whose aim was action and repetition of the expressed event, mimic and gestures were so necessary that without them myths lose the best part of their influential power, if not their "raison d'être".⁴⁸ Without dramatisation myths become mere literary productions like some of the Greek mythologies. This theatrical demonstration gave both reciters and listeners the spirit of mythical personages. The mime gave reciters the occasion to re-live the act they acted. Therefore, the combination of recitation and dramatisation of myths promoted the communion of the actors with the heroes and enabled them to undergo the experience expressed in myths. On account of this dramatized repetition some myths are identified with action.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ B. Childs, Myth and Reality in the Old Testament, p. 20.

⁴⁷ P. Idiart, "Prêtre païen et prêtre chrétien", in Etudes sur le sacrement de l'ordre, p. 347-348.

⁴⁸ A. Caillois, Le mythe et l'homme, p. 30, 142.

⁴⁹ Idem, op. cit., p. 99.

Myths of origin and passage are what they are on account of that act. That is why Henninger concluded: "La fonction du mythe n'était pas connaissance mais action, action essentielle, pour l'existence même de la communauté."⁵⁰ The function of myths is to lead to the knowledge of the original events and by that knowledge to control the conduct of the people.

4. Truth in Myths

In the XVIIIth century myths and mythology were considered as naive and imaginative explanations which primitives gave about the universe. Mythology was considered as an erroneous and anthropomorphic explanation of natural phenomena. In myths superior beings were described like men. Pépin says that Schelling attributed this unfavourable attitude to the French anticlericalism of that century.⁵¹ He also mentions that Fontenelle was one of its most staunch and ardent supporters. According to him the origin of mythologies depended on three factors: first, on the spirit fond of fables and legends; secondly, on the blind respect of antiquity; and thirdly, on mistaken ideas that priests had about myths and mythology.⁵² The positivist school of

⁵⁰ J. Henninger, "Mythe en ethnologie", in Dictionnaire de la Bible, suppl., fasc. xxx, p. 247.

⁵¹ J. Pépin, Mythe et allégorie, p. 34-35.

⁵² Idem, op. cit., p. 35.

philosophy condemned mythology as a collection of mystified errors and obscure descriptions of the world.⁵³

In the XVIIIth century myths and mythology were said to have a Jewish origin. According to that hypothesis, various pagan myths were considered as deformations and corruptions of Jewish monotheistic revelations.⁵⁴ Among defenders of this opinion it is sufficient to mention Hume and Voltaire. The latter held that primitive and initial revelation or religion was monotheistic. The first form of religion is monotheistic. Its corruption gives rise to polytheism and to pagan mythologies.⁵⁵

Other less sympathetic opinions maintained that myths were valueless because they were formed out of a lack of scientific terms and vocabulary. In that way myths are not exact and therefore not true.⁵⁶

According to F.W. Schelling myths are true in their own manner. We shall try to explain his opinion, which seems to be admissible.

A. Psychological Need for Myths

In order to understand myths we have to know the motives for and circumstances of their existence. Myths were

53 J. Pépin, Mythe et allégorie, p. 35-36.

54 Idem, op. cit., p. 37.

55 Idem, op. cit., p. 37-38.

56 Idem, op. cit., p. 39-40.

composed because man felt a psychological need to know the world around him, because he wanted an answer that could satisfy his questions about daily realities.⁵⁷ This desire to understand the universe pushed men to make myths. It is this autocomprehension that myths, as Henninger said, are not cosmological only but also anthropological.⁵⁸ They are centered on human activity and existence more than on that of the universe. Because man is the centre of myths, realities are described according to his imaginative comprehension. Divinities are manifested in the same way.

The need to know the divinity has always been felt by people. Of course, the idea was not always direct or clear. Man felt the transcendence of certain realities such as height, thunder, change and life. Unknowingly, these phenomena aroused curiosity and the desire of understanding something of those mysteries. Of course, we should not forget that myths were formed spontaneously, without reflection.⁵⁹ Such intuitive formation is normal to primitives because at that stage of human development there are less rational or philosophical activities. The main problem of the people was related to the beginning of those mysteries.

⁵⁷ P. Idiart, "Prêtre païen et prêtre chrétien", in Etudes sur le sacrement de l'ordre, p. 344.

⁵⁸ J. Henninger, "Mythe en ethnologie", in Dictionnaire de la Bible, suppl., fasc. xxx, p. 232, 252.

⁵⁹ J. Pépin, Mythe et allégorie, p. [33].

"Proofs" of the existence of the universe and the tribe were wanted.⁶⁰ That yearning to know the past gave myths a character of knowing the "unknowable". By myths man made efforts to know what nobody witnessed.⁶¹ This was not the case for all myths, because there existed other myths besides myths of the origin of the world. In this way some myths were, therefore, psychological answers to the psychological problems and needs that man felt in order to know the origin of the universe. Others were answers to the need of expressing man's understanding of reality.

B. Origin of Myths

One of the important points to remember is that myths are not created by abstract and speculative philosophers.⁶² Henninger explains the same opinion saying that myths are not produced by cold thinkers who are interested in objective knowledge of the universe.⁶³ On the contrary, myths are formed by men in a primitive stage of their intellectual activities. Whereas the philosopher and the man of

⁶⁰ M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 430.

⁶¹ J. Henninger, "Mythe en ethnologie", in Dictionnaire de la Bible, suppl., fasc. xxx, p. 345.

⁶² G. van der Leeuw, L'homme primitif et la religion, p. 131.

⁶³ J. Henninger, loc. cit., p. 245.

critical mind thinks of the world as something passive and impersonal, the primitive conceives his surroundings as active and living. The universe for him is full of power which influences his life. As a result, the sensible world is for primitives something other than what it is for people of critical habits. As Pépin says: "les phénomènes naturels lui paraissent pénétrés d'interventions mystiques; dès lors, la différence qui sépare théoriquement le monde sensible et le monde mythique s'estompe."⁶⁴ Undoubtedly, the primitive still feels the difference between the two worlds, but his non-conceptual mentality at times fuses the two. This interpenetration of these worlds explains why the primitive has no difficulty in adhering to the "truth" of myths, because for him mythical facts do exist and do come to pass. For instance, myths of perpetual rhythmic change of the moon, or of life and death, are true for the primitive because the moon appears and disappears rhythmically in reality.

The existence and origin of myths cannot be explained without a certain real experience of nature, for the simple reason that myths in their primitive form are not merely stories told but reality lived. They are not something totally of fiction. Something of them is experienced.

64 J. Pépin, Mythe et allégorie, p. 64.

"Because man experiences the reality of growth and decay in his fields, this experience is expressed, for instance, in the form of the Tammuz myth, the god of growth and decay."⁶⁵ Therefore, myths are formed by multiple and various impressions from nature. In other words sensations, perceptions and impressions of real objective phenomena serve as material for the formation of myths.⁶⁶

Besides the conscious experience of nature, the raw material of myths includes the whole mass of psychological stimuli arising from the human subconscious, such as dreams and hallucinations which for the primitive man are just as objective as the sensible world about him.⁶⁷ It is on account of these elements that for Pépin myth is closer to dreams inasmuch as both are revelations of realities not less real for primitives than sensible phenomena.⁶⁸

In this organization of perceptions man expresses his understanding. Naturally this gives myths an anthropomorphic character.⁶⁹ Then comes the imagination, which plays a major role in myth's formation. In fulfilling this

⁶⁵ B. Childs, Myth and Reality in the Old Testament, p. 20.

⁶⁶ Idem, op. cit., p. 17-18.

⁶⁷ Idem, op. cit., p. 18.

⁶⁸ J. Pépin, Mythe et allégorie, p. 64.

⁶⁹ Idem, op. cit., p. 34.

task, however, the imagination does not work alone. This would not be normal for it. Its pictures are already stored in the faculty of memory, where it can take them according to its need. This co-operation restricts the imagination so much that myths composed by the imagination are not products of free fantasy.⁷⁰ This function of imagination has led ethnologists to call myths creations of the spirit.⁷¹ Of course, the word "creation" should not be taken in its strict philosophical meaning. The spirit does not produce myths without any presupposed existing reality whose phantasm it will use as a matter of its productions. In other words myths are formed by means of perceptions and impressions that a person or a group of people had in the past. When observation of natural mysteries, such as procreation, birth, death, lunar changes and solar influences, has been made, the human mind begins to form myths. Its main function is to put an order among existing impressions. The mind organizes these experiences into an intelligible and unified whole.⁷² In this production the activity of the senses is more intense than that of the intellectual

⁷⁰ G. van der Leeuw, L'homme primitif et la religion, p. 131.

⁷¹ J. Heminger, "Mythe en ethnologie", in Dictionnaire de la Bible, suppl., fasc. xxx, p. 233, 239.

⁷² B. Childs, Myth and Reality in the Old Testament, p. 18.

faculties. It has to be noted also that myths are formed by a process which is less logical and reflexive. As a result exaggerated and imaginary descriptions that are found in myths are easily understood.

Briefly, we may say with Henninger that myths are produced by the imagination in co-operation with the sentiments and the intellect of the primitive mind of people who wanted to understand and express their comprehension of the universe in which they lived. This imagination personifies primordial events and the objects of nature, because myths are formed according to the human mode of understanding. In that formation objective and subjective elements are necessary. Without one of these we could not have myths. Just as without the sun, solar myths would not exist, without the intellect myths could not exist.⁷³ Objective elements which enter into the formation of myths are all natural objects of geography, history and social institutions which surround man. All of them are necessary for the experience of man and consequently for the genesis of myths.⁷⁴

⁷³ J. Henninger, "Mythe en ethnologie", in Dictionnaire de la Bible, suppl., fasc. xxx, p. 228, 233-245.

⁷⁴ A. Rostie, Du mythe à la religion. La psychologie analytique de C.G. Jung, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, [c1955], p. 55.

C. Truth in Myths Themselves

A certain attitude of spirit is required in order to understand the nature of myths in relation to truth. A negative attitude which looks at mythology as an impostor, as a misunderstanding, as a fable and a regression cannot help anybody to understand them. A simple removal or separation of myths from history cannot help but be unfavourable to the existence of truth in myths. In order to appreciate the existence of truth in myths we have to remember that myths are expressions of man's understanding of reality at a given moment and epoch. In order to understand the nature of truth in myths we have to remember that myths are expressions of the human mind in a state of becoming, in its primitive naive and simple condition; we have to know that in reality the epoch of becoming is original and precious, that it ought not to be sacrificed for another, not even the barbarian state of becoming to the advanced state of becoming. Both are changing and therefore inclined to their respective perfections. As Pépin said: "Il faut se résigner à accorder à la mythologie une certaine valeur de vérité."⁷⁵ Consequently, a certain value of truth has to be admitted in myths. The problem is the nature of that truth. It is the theory of allegory which has admitted truth in myth.

75 J. Pépin, Mythe et allégorie, p. 44.

According to that theory truth in myth is either immediate and intrinsic or indirect and exterior to myths.⁷⁶

Myths are true in an immediate and intrinsic manner when they are considered in themselves without reference to another thing. Its truth consists in the fact that myths are essentially lived and experienced realities. This kind of truth is not doctrinal but a sequence of historical events which have really happened, even though they do not exist at present except in the conscious.⁷⁷ In this way myths are existential truth, if one may use the expression. This real foundation in reality explains the serious attitude and piety, the terror and the firm attachment of the pagans and primitives to their myths. This also explains the effective influential power of myths on the conscious of the people. From this follows that symbolism of myths and mythology is actual. It consists in an imitation by which gestures and actions of described myths are reproduced. In the same line liturgical mutilations are imitations of the castration of Ouranos, while dances of Corybantes imitate the foolish joy of Cybele.⁷⁸ Therefore, the truth of myths

76 J. Pépin, Mythe et allégorie, p. 44.

77 "Toutefois sa vérité est de l'ordre, non de la représentation, mais de la réalité vécue; elle est vraie, non à la façon d'une doctrine, mais comme une suite d'événements historiques qui ont vraiment eu lieu, même s'ils n'ont existé que dans l'histoire de la conscience." Idem, op. cit., p. 60.

78 Idem, op. cit., p. 60.

should not be looked for in its narrative formulation, but in its lived and experienced reality. This intrinsic truth of myth is not rational nor defined as an adequation of an exterior reality with its representation in the spirit and vice versa; as Pépin says: "ce dédoublement du sujet et de l'objet est étranger au mythe; la présence même d'une représentation est exclue de sa forme primitive et authentique."⁷⁹ Briefly, the immediate truth in myth is essentially an attitude of life. It is experienced and perceived therefore and it is understood and formulated. Its aim is to integrate man in the universe.

The immediate truth of myths is, therefore, in the order of affection. As we have seen, primitives had ordinary experience of the sensible world and what may be called "mystical" experience of the world. In spite of their distinctions the two worlds were sometimes even fused into one by the primitives. In the experience of the mystical world they came into contact with supernatural realities, with the holy and the sacred. From that contact they got an affective category of the supernatural.⁸⁰ In other words, out of their experience and perception of the non-created, the more-powerful-than-man or numen, external change of the sun,

79 J. Pépin, Mythe et allégorie, p. 66.

80 Idem, op. cit., p. 63.

moon, seasons, life and so on, the primitives came to the truth of the god of nature, of vegetation, of hunting, of the origin of life and of the cosmic changes.⁸¹ Out of that affective union with natural events primitives got the revelation of the sanctity and holiness of human existence, the universe, life, fertility, generation and death.⁸²

The immediate and intrinsic truth of myth has a close connection with its indirect and exterior truth. As we have just seen, the immediate truth of myth is the experienced reality; it is an attitude of life and a principle of conduct. This truth is not only concerned with the past experience but also with the present and future life of primitive man. It is in this way that myths are a rule of conduct. For this reason myths are a revelation of the lived reality, and therefore their indirect truth is their translation of that reality by images, gestures and actions.⁸³ Its truth is essentially their reference to basic structures of being within the present world. "This 'truth' consists in a recognition of the life-determining reality which the mythical mind has apprehended in the powers of

⁸¹ B. Childs, Myth and Reality in the Old Testament, p. 20.

⁸² M. Eliade, Naissances mystiques, Paris, Gallimard, 1959, p. 53.

⁸³ J. Pépin, Mythe et allégorie, p. 45.

nature."⁸⁴ In other words myths are true inasmuch as they have relations with real objective realities and phenomena whose expressions and translations they are. It is in this meaning and context that myths are historic, because they recall and recapitulate what has been perceived and experienced, because they recapitulate the history of nature, man and of the tribe.⁸⁵ For the same reason myths having relations with physical or moral realities in which gods are incarnated in order to characterize one virtue or property, are said to have physical or moral truths.⁸⁶ Allegorist theory, therefore, admits the existence of some truth in mythologies. Pépin adds: "mais il s'agit d'une vérité extrinsèque et empruntée, en ce sens que ce n'est pas la mythologie elle-même qui est vraie, mais une signification qui s'en écarte souvent à l'extrême et ne s'y ramène qu'avec violence."⁸⁷ Myths are true indirectly because their signification is true. For instance, the signification of myths of fertility and the menstrual cycle are true because their signification which is the rhythmical change is true for the moon and for women alike. Myths are true also because in

⁸⁴ B. Childs, Myth and Reality in the Old Testament, p. 20.

⁸⁵ M. Eliade, Naissances mystiques, p. 53.

⁸⁶ J. Pépin, Mythe et allégorie, p. 50.

⁸⁷ Idem, op. cit., p. 56.

them initiates can read and interpret secrets of the divinities. In the myths of Osiris and Dionysos initiates could read types and figures of some incarnations of some divinities.⁸⁸

Conclusion

Myths can be defined as expression of man's understanding of reality. They are manifestations of human comprehension of the surroundings. They are formed by man in his early, non-conceptual stage of understanding. As such, myths are not only literary descriptions but also gestures, actions and vital activities.

According to the realities experienced, there are myths of creation or of origins, myths of vegetation, of fertility and generation, of transformation or of initiation, of passage, as well as myths of death or of eschatology.

Formation of myths presupposes anterior experience or perception of natural phenomena such as the existence of life and death, rhythmic changes of seasons and the coincidence of periods of fertility with lunar changes. Therefore, true objective and historic facts are necessary for the formation of myths. In other words, myths are inspired

⁸⁸ J. Pépin, Mythe et allégorie, p. 46-47.

by real historic facts and experience. Once experience of the world and realities around is present, the mind begins to reorganize facts into a united intelligible sequence. The mind with its sensitive and intellectual faculties begins to express its comprehension in literary forms, actions and gestures.

Myths are true in two ways. They are true immediately and intrinsically because in themselves they are the affective experience of basic structures of the universe, because they express their understanding of real historic perception of the surrounding realities. They are also true indirectly, in the sense that realities to which they refer and to which they are related, namely, perceived nature and its mysteries, are true. In this way myths are said to be extrinsically true because in that sense what is true is their signified and revealed phenomena. It is upon this signifying capacity that we may speak of physical, moral, religious truth in myths. Of course, imagination, circumstances of space and time could easily introduce or emphasize minor erroneous aspects in myths as we find in myths of initiation. Nevertheless, this minor deficiency does not destroy the value of myths as containing truth in the primitive stage of mankind, and as the expression of man's understanding at that period of his history.

CHAPTER III

NOTION OF THE DIVINITY

In order to distinguish religious symbols of the Basotho from their profane symbols, we have to know the nature of the religion they had. To know whether a religion is monotheistic or polytheistic we have to know the idea of the divinity that a people has, because religious acts of knowledge and of worship are specified by their object. Consequently, it is necessary to know the nature of the divinity according to the Basotho. That notion will enable us to know, first of all, their religion, and ultimately their religious symbols.

To study the idea or notion of the divinity of pagan Basotho, a hundred and twenty nine years after the arrival of Christianity in Basutoland, is not an easy task. Our difficulty arises not only from the lack of historical documents written by Basotho but also from the cultural and religious evolution that has taken place ever since. Remarkable variations in their oral traditions on this subject create other problems.

It goes without saying that discoveries of ethnology and history of religions will be of great help to us in order to interpret some difficult rites and facts. Special attention will be paid to philological remarks and precisions; that is why we shall examine words, legends and

stories in which, most likely, we shall get the notion of the divinity of the Basotho.

In this chapter our aim is not to justify nor to criticise what was considered to be the divinity. Neither is it to know whether that object of cult was the true God or not. What interests us is to know what the Basotho had as object of their worship.

1. Existence of the Name Molino

A. In Various Prayers

The word Molino which is used for the divinity is found explicitly in some prayers of the Basotho. One of them is quoted by Fr. Laydevant. On account of its importance, it is profitable to quote it completely:

Molino ako utloe, rea rapela,
 O Dieu, écoute, nous te prions,
 Molino o mecha rapela oa Khale.
 O dieu nouveau, prie l'ancien.
 Se rapele 'na, rapela melimo,
 Ce n'est pas moi qui prie, ce sont les dieux,
 Melimo bonkhono ba lillela matlala.
 Les dieux grand'mères qui réclament la viande
 des sacrifices.
 Katlala ba a bona kang ba shoele?
 La viande, comment la voient-elles, étant mortes?
 Ba bona ka paka tsa mabitla.
 Elles voient par les interstices des pierres
 tombales.
 Ho itsoe shoe-shoe, ho iloe kae?
 Tous sont morts, où sont-ils allés?
 Ho iloe ha sekoti ha se tlale,
 Ils sont allés dans la fosse qui ne se remplit
 pas,
 Oa ho olla lichaba.
 Qui engloutit toutes les nations.
 Ha le rapele, lea saoa.
 Vous ne priez pas, vous vous amusez.

Ke molimo oa eng, ha e le molingoana?
 Quel dieu est-il, ce petit dieu?
 E le molingoanyana oa tumela baloi
 Ce tout petit dieu qui laisse agir les jetours
 de sorts
 Ba metse e methating.
 Qui habitent au bord des précipices.
 Bana ba Ra'moloki,
 Les fils du Père de sauveur,
 Ra'moloki liatla li maroba,
 Le Père de sauveur aux mains percées,
 Li makutumala ho batho,
 Qui réchauffent les humains,
 Li ontsoe ke ho re bopa.
 Et qui sont ainsi pour nous avoir façonnés.¹

In this prayer the term molimo which means currently God, or rather which has been used to mean God, appears seven times in different forms of the sesuto version. In the first, second and the twelfth line it is written thrice in the singular form of molimo. While in the third and fourth lines it is written in the plural form of molimo — gods. In the twelfth and thirteenth lines we find the diminutive form molingoanyana which means little god. In descriptive languages such variations are important and full of signification. At the same time they give rise to many problems too. In sesuto it is the same thing. For example, does the plural form mean that there are many gods? Does it mean that the god has many natures? Then, what is the diminutive form for? On what is it based? Logically we would have to conclude that there are many gods, if we consider the plural

¹ F. Laydevant, O.M.I., "Idées de Dieu chez les Anciens Basutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 320-321.

form of the word molimo, i.e. malimo. At least, we are tempted to affirm degrees in the divinities. These are problems coming from the nominal description or from the name given to divinities in *sesuto*. They will be examined in the notion itself. Fr. Laydevant quotes another prayer which was said by sterile women in order to receive the blessing of motherhood. Here are the first and the last two lines in which the word molimo is found.

Molimo ako utloe, rea rapela [...]
 O Dieu, écoute, nous te prions [...]
 Ntili o bitsea ka balimong.
 On appelle Ntili chez les ancêtres.
 Molimo ako utloe, rea rapela.
 O Dieu, écoute, nous te prions.²

In this prayer two forms of the word molimo are found. In the first and the last line the singular form molimo is used. In fact this introductory address seems to be the same as the one found in the long prayer that we have just quoted. In the second last line of this prayer we find another form: balimo, which also means currently goats. Fr. Laydevant in this prayer translated this word by "ancestors". It is to be remarked that in this prayer nothing is explicitly said about the difference between the singular and plural forms of molimo. The difficulty lies in the use of two different forms. The second difficulty is to know the

² F. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Basutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 327.

difference between what is signified by the other plural form balimo. In other words, is there a difference between the plural forms malimo and balimo? Problems of terminology will be discussed at length in the following paragraphs.

Casalis quotes one of the shortest prayers which was used: "Dieux nouveaux, priez pour nous les dieux anciens."³ We notice that in this prayer the term Dieux is in the plural form, that there are recent and ancient gods. This prayer looks like the one quoted by Fr. Laydevant; the only difference between them is that in the version given by Fr. Laydevant the word dieu is in the singular form while in Casalis' version recent qualifies dieux. This brings about many questions. Are there differences in number between recent gods? Do they have the same nature? Is the difference brought forth by the authors? We shall try to give explanations in the paragraph on the notion of the divinity itself.

In spite of these difficulties it is undoubtedly sure that the word to designate the divinity existed among ancient Basotho. That word is found in their prayers in which it appears in different forms. It is the word molimo which means god in current language. It appears in the diminutive form of molingoanyana. In the plural form it appears twice differently, as malimo and balimo. The

³ E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, Paris, Société des Missions Évangéliques, 1933, p. 311.

difference of their signification will be dealt with in the paragraph on the real signification of molimo.

B. Myth of Kholumo-lumo

The idea of molimo is found implicitly in myths of the Basotho. One of the commonest and the most disputed is that of Kholumo-lumo. This was a mythical giant ferocious animal which is said to have devoured all people, with the exception of one woman who eventually gave birth to a boy without having known man. That baby was not like other babies because it had teeth and amulets at its birth. His name was Litaolane because of the amulets and the divining bones he had around his neck. He grew up in an extraordinarily fast manner on the day of his birth, while his mother had gone to draw water. The mother was surprised to find her baby already grown up and ready to attack the monster. Litaolane went to kill the monster and thus saved the people and the animals. The people crowned him their king. Later on, however, they killed him out of jealousy and misunderstanding.

Fr. Laydevant's narrative is a little different from the other given by Casalis. Fr. Laydevant calls the monster Kholumo-lumo.⁴ Casalis calls it Kammapa.⁵ According to the

⁴ F. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Bassutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 322-323.

⁵ E. Casalis, Les Bassutos, p. 423-426.

narrative given by Fr. Laydevant, the boy was called Senkane or Litaolane. He grew up while his mother had gone to draw water. According to Casalis' version, the boy grew up while his mother had gone to collect fire wood or, more precisely, cow dung for fire. Another difference is that Fr. Laydevant's description is more explicit than that of Casalis in regard to the mysterious conception of the boy, i.e. he says explicitly that the boy's conception was virginal.

This myth or legend has caused many discussions among missionaries. Some of them thought that it had a Jewish origin. For them this myth had a Christian inspiration and as a result they thought that it did not exist before Jesus Christ. All of them recognize, therefore, a certain dependence of the myth of Litaolane on the historical events of Jesus Christ. All of them admit the similarity of the legend and the history of the Redeemer.

Casalis hesitates to affirm the connection of this legend and the history of our redemption by Jesus Christ.⁶ At any rate, he considers Kammapa as a figure of satan. He admits the close similarity between the life of Litaolane and that of Jesus Christ.

Fr. Laydevant tells us that Fr. Porte saw a complete history of our Saviour in this legend.⁷

6 E. Casalis, Les Bassutos, p. 425-426.

7 F. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Bassutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 323.

The position of Fr. Laydevant is that this myth has a Christian origin.⁸ He puts a connection between it and the long prayer quoted above where the prayer is addressed to Ra'moleki — father of the saviour. For him, the ancient Basotho knew the promise and the realization of our salvation. He has a little difficulty in explaining how the ancient Basotho came to possess that knowledge. We notice a certain lack of clarity in the explanation. He seems to put a connection between the ancient Basotho and the Congolese, who, according to him, had the notion of the true God from Christian missionaries. The weak point of Fr. Laydevant's position is that he does not give historical proofs for his opinion. He does not tell us the time, place and occasion of the evangelization of the Congo, nor the time when the ancient Basotho met the Congolese. His logic is not clear because later on in the same chapter he admits that there are some legends, for example, that of Leobu and Khatooane, which do not have a Christian origin, although they have some points similar to Christian doctrine.

It is worthwhile remembering that long, long before the coming of Jesus Christ, pagans had myths about virginal birth, cult of the dead, the death of a redeeming god, the resurrection of a murdered god and the ascension to the place of the divinities.

⁸ F. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Basutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, p. 323.

The existence of such ideas in the pagan world before Christ is found in myths of various pagan people of the past. Fr. Botte tells us that in Alexandria, Egypt, pagans celebrated a festival in the temple Koreion, which was dedicated to the god Kore.⁹ The pagans spent the whole night in that sanctuary singing hymns to the accompaniment of flutes. They did that in honour of their idols. Their celebrations began in the evening and stopped at dawn of the following day. At cock-crow the assembled congregation, carrying burning candles and lamps, descended to a subterranean place where a naked wooden statue of a person in sitting position was carried on a stretcher. The statue had a golden cross on its forehead, hands and knees. All these five marks were golden. A procession was made seven times with the statue around the temple while the congregation sang hymns accompanied by flutes and drums. After the procession the statue was carried back to its subterranean place. Fr. Botte adds: "Et quand on leur demande ce qu'est ce mystère, ils répondent: Aujourd'hui, à cette heure, Koré, c'est-à-dire la Vierge, a enfanté l'Aïon (καυση εν ωρα η Κορον, εουειθεν η παρθευς, εγεννησεν τον Αϊωνα).¹⁰ Fr. Botte adds that

9 B. Botte, O.S.B., Les origines de la Noël et de l'épiphanie, Louvain, Abbaye du Mont César, 1932 (réimpression anastatique 1960), p. 69; see also H. Rahner, S.J., Mythes grecs et mystère chrétien, Paris, Payot, [c1954], p. 154-155.

10 Idem, op. cit., p. 69.

similar celebrations existed in the metropolitan city of Arabia, Edom, where people sang hymns in Arabian to a virgin, calling her "chaman" (that is to say, a young lady or virgin), and to her son Donsares (that is to say, the only son of the lord). The same thing happened in Edouaa, Alexandria, and at Putra.¹¹ In that myth the important event was the birth of a god. The celebration had a connection with solar divinities and the winter solstice, natalis invicti solis, natalis dei invicti, which was otherwise called the mystery of Mythra, and which was called the feast of fertility of Saturn by Romans, Kronia by Egyptians, and Kikkellia by Alexandrians.¹²

It is to be noted that the feast of virginal birth existed among pagans before the promulgation of Christianity. On this point Fr. Botte gives the testimony of a certain Cosmas of Jerusalem, an author of the IXth century A.D., who, speaking about Christmas, wrote: "Les païens célébraient cette fête chaque année depuis longtemps, appelant le jour où le Christ est né $\alpha\upsilon\gamma\epsilon\iota\ \phi\omega\varsigma$. Ils la célébraient au milieu de la nuit, entrant dans certains sanctuaires d'où ils sortaient en criant: La vierge a enfanté, la lumière croit ($\eta\ \pi\alpha\rho\beta\epsilon\nu\alpha\varsigma\ \sigma\epsilon\tau\omicron\kappa\epsilon\iota\ \chi\upsilon\zeta\epsilon\iota\ \phi\omega\varsigma$)."¹³ The existence

¹¹ B. Botte, Les origines de la Noël et de l'épiphanie, p. 69-70.

¹² Idem, op. cit., p. 62-69.

¹³ Idem, op. cit., p. 70.

of the idea of virginal birth in the myth of Kholumo-lumo should not surprise us. It should not make us think that it had a necessary connection with the Jewish or Christian traditions. In other words, this legend is like other legends and myths of virginal birth which existed in the pagan world before the coming of Christ and did not have Christian inspiration.

The pagans had an idea of an incarnation of the divinity. Their idea is enveloped in the very nature of myths. Prophecy in the sense of prefiguring and foretelling the future has not been a monopoly of Christianity. Evidently, no comparison is intended here. Direct influence and intervention of Yahweh, his Dabar and his Ruah in the continuous progressive revelation of Himself in the History of Salvation of Israel and of the whole human race accomplished by Jesus Christ gives Christianity a truly supreme value over other revelations, means and efforts of man to know and love God. Nevertheless, a point blank denial of some natural revelation in creation and in the expression of man's understanding of it would betray a lack of elementary comprehension of myths and the divine pedagogy through the wonders of creation. That is why it is not surprising that Greek mythology was also prophetic. Its function was analogous to Hebrew prophecy. In Hellenistic myths, as Pópin says: "tout y converge vers le second Dionysios; le nom même d'Eléusis signifie l'avent' du Dieu spirituel; Hermès est

le 'messager' des dieux futurs; etc. Mais l'activité prophétique de la mythologie s'étend aussi hors d'elle-même: elle prophétise sa propre ruine, c'est-à-dire l'apparition du Messie; on discerne dans la religion grecque le sentiment d'une grande chose à venir, mais non encore reconnaissable; plusieurs expressions de Platon peuvent passer pour des anticipations du christianisme; Héraclès, Dionysos, Osiris sont en quelque sorte des préincarnations du Christ."¹⁴

The idea of the death and resurrection of a god likewise existed among pagans before the Christian era. In Greece, Dionysus was devoured by Titan to rise immortal afterwards, while in Egypt the god Osiris was murdered by Seth and was brought back to life by the god Isis.

What has been said does not mean that Christian mysteries are identified with pagan mysteries. We cannot put them on the same level. In the above-mentioned Greek mythologies it is the incarnation of a god of vegetation, Dionysus. It is also the resurrection of the Greek Zagreus who dies and rises again in a human form. In this myth the Greeks were waiting for something for a god whose messenger was Hermes. That coming was certainly a great event. They ignored the other possible meaning of their myth. Just the same their myth remains a prefigure of the mystery of Christ,

¹⁴ J. Pépin, Mythe et allégorie. Les origines grecques et les contestations, Paris, Aubier, [c1958], p. 48.

although they did not know it. Like the Greeks, the ancient Basotho did not know that their myth and legend of Kholumo-lumo was a figure and a prototype of the mystery of Jesus Christ. Just the same, in both peoples the idea of the virginal birth and of the death of a divine person existed.

Some might find it hard to admit that the myth of Kholumo-lumo was a figure of Christ because in it there are brutes. We know that among the ancient Persians similar myths existed. In those myths Mythra was said to have immolated a bullock for the creation of other beings. The death of the animal was the occasion and the condition of the creation of other things of creation. Among African initiation rites, mythical persons are presented in animal forms.¹⁵ This presentation of divinities in animal forms reveals that the rite belongs to an archaic culture of hunters. The animal plays the role of a person who kills human beings in order to give them life again. The animal in the myth of Kholumo-lumo plays therefore the role of a super-human power according to the hunters mentality.

Briefly, this myth of Kholumo-lumo does not have a Christian origin, because pagans had myths of the same kind before Christ. It simply shows the need that primitives had to communicate with divinities in a human manner, and how

¹⁵ M. Eliade, Naissances mystiques, Paris, Gallimard, 1959, p. 59-60.

man expected his salvation or his participation of the divine perfections by the help of a divinity who would take a human form. This insinuates a remote preparation of the human race to receive supernatural revelation. It insinuates a universal activity of the divine pedagogy in view of the historical salvation by Christ.

By so saying I agree with Casalis that there is a very close similarity between the legend of Litaolane and the history of Jesus Christ.¹⁶ One thing is certain, that is, our salvation has been revealed by God to Abraham and to his posterity. It is also certain that we are saved by the redemptive action of Jesus Christ who founded his Church and gave his apostles the mission to preach the Good News to all nations. If the hypothesis of Fr. Laydevant is true or tenable, when and where did the Basotho meet the Jews before the arrival of the first Christian missionaries in 1833? To answer this question dates and historical facts are necessary.

It seems hard to believe that the Basotho met the Jews for the following reasons. The absence of the names of Jesus and Mary in the myth of Kholumo-lumo is rather unfavourable to the hypothesis. Besides this, there is no indication which shows that the legend of the Basotho had a

16 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 423-426.

connection with the Jewish traditions of the promise of the Messiah. It is doubtful that the ancient Basotho ever knew Jewish traditions of the promise or of the realization of our salvation by Jesus Christ. At any rate, the legend reveals no Jewish origin in so far as names of people and places are concerned.

Some might say that the ancient Basotho met other people who were already Christianized. This is possible speculatively. Historical proofs have to be given. So far we cannot give affirmative arguments.

Ellenberger says that the Basotho met Christian missionaries for the first time in 1833.¹⁷ Up to now we have no historical proofs against his affirmation. Nevertheless, let us examine briefly the possibility of meeting Christians during migrations from the north.

Fliche-Martin reports that the first group of Catholic missionaries arrived in the Congo in 1484.¹⁸ Most of these missionaries were lay people. In 1490-1491 came the first group of religious missionaries from Spain. He also adds that in 1490 the group was composed of

¹⁷ V. Ellenberger, Un siècle de missions au Lessouto 1833-1933, Paris, Société des Missions Évangéliques, 1932, p. 11.

¹⁸ A. Fliche and V. Martin, Histoire de l'Église, t. XVII, Lyon, Bloud-Gay, 1948, p. 470.

Dominicans.¹⁹ In Fliche-Martin we read also that in 1491 there were 100,000 people at the first baptism ceremony there.²⁰ In 1518 the first Congolese priest was ordained in Spain. The year 1547 saw the arrival of the Jesuits, who were, unfortunately, expelled from the territory in 1555. The second half of the XVIth century was the time of a great decadence of Christianity in the Congo.

If the ancient Basotho came from the Congo before 1484, their legend would not be mixed with Christian doctrine. If they met or passed that place between 1484 and the beginning of the XVIIth century, they could have met some people with some elements of Christianity. The possibility cannot be denied. But we do not know whether the Basotho came from the Congo. If they did, the time of their departure from there is unknown so far.

As a matter of fact, they could have passed elsewhere. They could have passed west of the Congo, i.e. Angola. We knew that Jesuits arrived in Angola in the XVIth century.²¹ This statement is not very detailed. Just the

19 A. Fliche-and V. Martin, Histoire de l'Eglise, t. XV, p. 116-117.

20 Idem, op. cit., t. XV, p. 470.

21 A. Boulenger, Histoire générale de l'Eglise, t. III, vol. IX, Lyon-Paris, Vitte, 1950, p. 958.

same it may help us to know the time of Christianizing Angola.

Here again we cannot know with certitude that the ancient Basotho passed there during their migratory voyages. We cannot give precise data about the time and place of their passage, if they came down that way at all. If they passed there later than the XVIth century, they could have picked up some elements of Christian doctrine. Before that it would seem to be impossible.

Let us now examine the possibility of their meeting Christians of the eastern coast, i.e. around Mozambique. According to Boulenger, Mozambique was Christianized by Dominicans first, then by the Jesuits, followed by Augustinians in the XVIth century.²² Franciscans arrived in the XVIIth century. The Basotho could have learned Christian doctrine if they passed there after the XVIth and the XVIIth centuries. We do not have historical data so far to affirm that they did. The Basotho do not help us to answer the question for the lack of historical facts.

Many are inclined to say that Rhodesia was the place where the Basotho came from. The Basotho themselves seem to agree that they spent some time there. No specified time is given for their arrival nor for their departure. Boulenger

²² A. Boulenger, Histoire générale de l'Eglise, t. III, vol. IX, p. 958-959.

tells us that Rhodesia was evangelized by the Jesuits towards the end of the XVIth century.²³ Fr. Brown mentions that in 1560 Portuguese Jesuits undertook missions on both the Western and the Eastern coasts of Africa. At that time Dominicans had already been on the Zambezi for fourteen years, which means that they had arrived in about 1546.²⁴ Boulenger tells us that in 1879 at the arrival of missionaries in Rhodesia, there was no trace of Christianity in the country. That was a very strange thing. We do not know how long missionaries had worked there. We do not know either what had happened between the second part of the XVIth century and 1879. Here again we cannot give data nor historical facts to show the time when the Basotho left that part of the country.

The possibility can be regarded from the south of the continent. Fr. Brown says that in 1660 a certain bishop was forbidden to land at the Cape (Cape of Good Hope). In 1688 a group of Jesuits astronomers arrived at the Cape, where they ministered to some Catholics. Fr. Brady, on the other hand, says that from 1686 to 1804 nothing is known about the Catholic Church in South Africa. Before this time

23 A. Boulenger, Histoire générale de l'Eglise, t. III, vol. IX, p. 976.

24 W.E. Brown, The Catholic Church in South Africa, London, Burns and Oates, 1960, p. 4.

he mentions some isolated cases of Catholics who escaped from shipwrecks. No missionary activity among the Africans is mentioned.²⁵

In a nutshell, we may say that historically we cannot prove affirmatively that the Basotho had met Jews of Christians before 1833. On the other hand we have affirmative indications that they did not know Christian traditions. In other words the position of Fr. Laydevant who proposed Christian inspiration as the explanation of the myths and legends of the Basotho does not seem to be substantiated so far.

What complicates the problem even more is that at that time the Basotho did not exist as the organized group that we find to-day. What existed then were different and more or less independent little tribes. As Lageden says: "The tribes which form the Basuto nation are Bafuking, Bakwena, Batlokoa, Basia, Bachwening, Banareng, Batloug, Bataung, Baphuthing, Bakhatla, Bataung, Bahaleroa. These are from the Seboko, or coat of arms."²⁶ These clans combined for the common purpose of offense and defense. It has to be noted that two paths seem to have been followed. The Sotho

25 J.E. Brady, O.M.I., Trekking for souls, Cedara, Natal, Missionary Association of Mary Immaculata - St. Joseph Scholasticate, 1952, p. 14.

26 Sir G. Lageden, K.C.M.G., The Basutos, Vol. I, London, Hutchinson and Co., 1909, p. 22.

group seems to have come down by the western coast, while the Nguni group seems to have followed the eastern coast. Another group seems to have followed the great Lakes Victoria, Tanganyika and Nyasa.

In short, it would be rash to conclude that the myth of Kholumo-lumo had a Christian origin without giving scientific data. The similarity of ideas between this myth and the history of Jesus Christ cannot be denied totally.

C. Burial Services

Burial services of the Basotho have been a center of great interest to those who examined them closely. Fr. Desrosiers took them as a proof of the existence of the idea of God.²⁷ He was struck by the position of the dead in the tomb and by the objects which were placed near the dead man's body. According to Fr. Lebreton, the dead person was buried in a sitting position facing the East, which was considered to be the cardinal point where the Basotho came from.²⁸ Beside the dead man's body seeds of corn, maize, beans, pumpkin, fruits, a tuft of grass, weapons and preferred objects of the dead person were placed. Some objects

27 J.-D. Desrosiers, O.M.I., "Paganisme et catholicisme envahissant", in Bulletin des Missions, t. XVIII, 1er semestre 1939, p. 20.

28 H. Lebreton, O.M.I., "Mort et funérailles", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 36 (1931), p. 285.

which the dead used during his life, which were thought to be necessary for him to make a living, were also buried with him. This was done because the ancient Basotho believed that death was a passage between this life and another life beyond the grave. They did not give details about the nature of the life of the dead. They conceived it according to terms of the present life. Fr. DesRosiers took these burial rites as an implicit proof of the existence of God and as a result of the existence of the notion of God among the ancient Basotho.

As far I can see, this kind of burial service is a direct proof of the existence of life beyond the grave. It is a proof or an indication that the ancient Basotho believed that something of the dead person survived after death. It may be a proof of the immortality of the soul. This point is very delicate because the primitives do not make a clear distinction between the soul and the body. Burial services are a very weak proof of the existence of God. It is a proof of the existence of the balimo.

What we can say about the nature of the divinity according to the Basotho is that they had a name for it. That name is molimo. This name is found in the singular form of molimo, in the diminutive form of molingoanyana, in the plural form of melimo and balimo in their prayers. The legends of the Basotho alone are not sufficient to prove that the ancient Basotho had the notion of the divinity. Those who

want to affirm that these legends have a Christian origin do not give satisfactory proofs of history to back their theories.

2. Etymological Signification of Molino

The etymology of the word molino has caused many discussions. According to the narrative of Fr. Laydevant, some authors thought that this word is derived from the root ema or ina, which mean "to stand".²⁹ From the philological point of view that opinion is not exact. Fr. Laydevant has mentioned this imprecision in his article.

Grammatical rules of the formation of nouns from verbs are not observed in that opinion. Paroz, explaining rules of derivative nouns, says that nouns are formed from verbs by the addition of a prefix of one of the seven classes of nouns. Besides this addition of a prefix, the last vowel of the new word is changed into "i".³⁰ For example, from the verb ho ja which means "to eat", we may add the prefix of the first class mo- to the root ja and replace the vowel "a" by the vowel "i". These changes will give us the word moji which means "who eats". From the verbs ho nka "to

²⁹ Fr. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Basutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 314.

³⁰ R.A. Paroz, Elements of Southern Sotho, Morija, Basutoland, Morija Book Depot, 1945, p. 45-47.

take", ho tsoma which means "to hunt", ho ema which means "to stand", the following derivative nouns monki, motsomi and moemi are formed respectively. It is important to notice that from the verb ho ema "to stand" the derivative formed is moemi rather than molimo, as supporters of the above mentioned opinion explained. In this way their theory is grammatically incorrect. The etymology of molimo is therefore not the verb ho ema nor ho ima as they proposed.

Fr. Laydevant thought that the word molimo had a Phoenician origin. He thought that it was borrowed from the Hebrew word elim which means "gods".³¹ According to him, the root of molimo is the root of elim. The prefix mo- of the first class of suto nouns was added to that radical. The addition of this prefix and of a suffix gives molimo. The last vowel of the new word is added probably for reasons of euphony. Fr. Laydevant explains that the first word to be formed was melimo because the addition of the prefix mo- to the root elim plus the suffix vowel -o gives mo-elim-o which becomes melimo on account of the strong open vowel "e". In a few sentences Fr. Laydevant's position is this. The word for the divinity is molimo in sesuto. It is borrowed from the semitic word elim. The process of its formation is

³¹ F. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Basutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 314-318.

this. First of all the word melimo was formed; then from it the singular form of molimo was formed.

One of the reasons why Fr. Laydevant looked for the solution and explanation of the word molimo elsewhere is that he had found no sesuto words which could give a satisfactory explanation. Since words like holimo, leholimo and lehalima had the same radical but, according to him, did not explain enough, he sought a solution in semitic languages. It is rather surprising that he did not try to find a solution in suto or bantu languages or at least in other African languages. His solution is rather far-fetched.

Even if we would admit that the word molimo is borrowed from semitic languages some difficulties remain. For instance, does it mean the ancient Basotho did not have words to signify the divinity before they borrowed the word from the Semites? If they did not have words to signify divinities, does that mean that they ignored the divinity before the borrowing? If they knew it, how did they talk about it without a word to signify it? How did they convoke meetings for sacrifices to their object of cult? It is very hard and unconvincing to say that the ancient basotho could make public sacrifices to a divinity without knowing how to call it, without having a word to designate it and without talking about it.

Even if we admitted that the word molimo is derived from a Semitic word, there is another difficulty to solve.

In the word elim there is the consonant lamed. In the word molimo we have to distinguish the manner of writing from that of pronouncing. The word is written with the consonant "l" but it is pronounced with the consonant "d" as if it were written modimo. The "l" of elim seems not to be identical with the "l" of molimo, if we may judge by the manner of their respective pronunciations. Phonetically speaking, therefore, we have two radicals. As a result the radical of molimo seems to be that of elim. Grammatically, the radical is not elim, as Fr. Laydevant proposed, but dim.³²

One might answer that the "l" of the radical elim has been changed to "d" for reasons of phonetics. It is true that Paroz says that in Sesutho the consonant "l" before the vowel "i" and "u" is pronounced "d".³³ Such changes happen when the borrowed word has a consonant which does not exist in suto, for example, v, z, x, etc., as in venke - shop, Zion, in which the "v" and the "z" are pronounced like "b" and "s" respectively. The rule does not apply in the borrowed word elim because the vowel "l" exists in suto.

32 F. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Basutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 315.

33 R.A. Paroz, Elements of Southern Sotho, p. 7.

Casalis explains the nominal etymology of the word molimo in a better way.³⁴ His explanation is the best so far. It is also simple and more coherent. According to him molimo is a suto word. It is derived from another suto word holimo which means up, elevated or high. Its formation has followed the normal process of addition of the prefix mo- of the first class to the word holimo. Since the "h" in that word is silent on account of the preceding and the consequent closed vowel "o", phonetic contraction took place between mo- and ho-. The "h" was dropped; consequently, we have molimo. The prefix mo- can belong to the first class of nouns and to the second class too. In this word it seems to belong to class one more to the second class. This explanation goes well with the object signified because it seems to be considered as a person more than a thing. Therefore the name belongs more to the class of persons than to the class of things. Therefore, the etymological meaning of molimo is connected with the meaning of its source and therefore it is connected with high and elevated places. Etymologically, the word for divinities means "the one on high", "who is up" and "the one in the sky".

Relations between molimo and balimo from the point of view of etymology are not easy. Fr. Laydevant resolved

34 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 310.

this problem in the same way as he had done for molimo. For him both words had a Semitic origin.³⁵ His reason is based on the similarity between rites of initiation of the Basotho and those of the Semites. For him balimo is a word that proves that Basotho had some Semitic rites of initiation, that they had met Semites somewhere at an unknown time. It is a remnant of the Canaanean cult of Baal.

Fr. Laydevant's position seems to restrict the existence of initiation in the Semitic world. This is not exact because initiation and circumcision ceremonies existed among other people who were not Semites. This is supported by writers of the history of religions, such as Eliade.³⁶ According to the latter, initiation rites existed not only in Palestine but also in Africa, in Oceania, in Persia and among populations of South America. As a result, there is no necessary connection between initiation rites of the Basotho and those of the Semites. To conclude that the word balimo has a Semite origin basing the argument on initiation rites is not sufficient and necessarily true.

35 F. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Basutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 316-317.

36 "Quoi qu'il en soit de son origine, la circoncision constitue le rite de puberté par excellence aussi bien dans toute l'Océanie qu'en Afrique, et elle est également attestée chez certaines populations de l'Amérique du Nord et du Sud. En tant que rite initiatique de puberté, la circoncision connaît la diffusion la plus vaste, quasi universelle." M. Eliade, Naissances mystiques, p. [54]-55.

The word balimo is really suto. It is the normal way of writing the molimo in the plural. This word is found in other bantu languages. The Bapedi of the Transvaal call their dead ancestors balimo; Vendas call them badzimo; the Ila call them nizhimo. These little variations, however, make it hard to get the common derivation.³⁷ Fr. Laydevant denies that balimo is the plural form of molimo. Grammatical and philological reasons against his theory seem to destroy it.³⁸ Paroz confirms this for he adds that grammatical analysis of groups of nouns reveals that the first class is reserved almost exclusively to human beings, that nouns of the second class cannot be mistaken for those of the first class for the same reason.³⁹

3. Real Signification

A. Molimo: Sky-Divinity

The word molimo kept its etymological meaning to express the nature of the divinity. It signifies a being in a high position, an elevated thing. Divinities for ancient Basotho were beings on a high place. This being was closely

³⁷ H.P. Junod, Bantu Heritage, Johannesburg, Heritors Limited, 1938, p. 125-126.

³⁸ F. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Basutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 316-318.

³⁹ R.A. Paroz, Elements of Southern Sotho, p. [20]-21.

connected with the sky. The divinities were known by a kind of similitude or comparison with the sky. As a result divinities were as high as the sky, as elevated as the sky and as far as the sky.

In fact this idea of transcendence was found in ancient religions. Divinities were beings inhabiting the sky and the mountains. Divinities were sky-gods. Eliade explains why ancient people conceived God or divinities in this manner.⁴⁰ The reason he gives is that the sky signified immensity, infinity, superiority, transcendence and inaccessibility.

Molimo had the same connection with the sky. Its very etymology is the word meaning the sky, the heavens. Basotho, therefore, signified a being which had attributes of the sky. Molimo was a sky divinity. It was an infinite, superior, elevated, inaccessible divinity. In other words the divinity of ancient Basotho was the MOST HIGH ONE.

The idea of inaccessibility is the most explicit one. It is shown by the attitude of Basotho towards the molimo. Sacrifices were offered to him very rarely. Such sacrifices were offered in cases of extreme need. The reason for this remarkable lack of worship or limited manifestation of cult to the sky-divinity was the distance between

⁴⁰ M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, London-New York, Sheed and Ward, 1958, p. 38-40.

the people and the sky-divinity. It was the infinite distance that the people gave to the divinity. This distance made the action of the molimo less felt and noticed. This seemingly inactive attitude gave the Basotho the impression that their sky-divinity was passive and indifferent to their affairs. He was consequently a deus otiosus. He was not as dangerous as the balimo. As a result molimo of the Basotho played a very minor role in the religion of the people. That is why fewer sacrifices were offered to him than to balimo.⁴¹ Practically, molimo was forgotten very often. This is a common phenomenon in religions which have the sky-divinities.⁴²

In the prayer that Fr. Laydevant quoted, the divinity of Basotho has some attributes.⁴³ He is called the ancient god. According to the context the word ancient refers to time. The comparison is between the recent and the ancient god. The recent god seems to be one of the ancestors. The priority of nature is not explicitly said if there is one at all. It seems that recent gods were intermediaries who interceded for the people. Basotho prayed to them

41 F. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Basutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 327.

42 M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 44-45.

43 F. Laydevant, loc. cit., p. 310.

directly and through them they address the sky-god. Probably this was done out of respect, in about the same way as women respected their fathers-in-law. At least the ancient god seems to be respected more than the recent. This is not sufficient because probably the ancient and recent gods are of the same nature.

Fr. Laydevant hesitantly affirms that the ancient god was the first ancestor of the tribe; as a result, he had the same nature as the recent ones.⁴⁴ Verbal analysis of the prayer itself does not help us to detect any priority of the ancient gods with certitude except priority of time.

Another attribute which seems to have been given to the sky-god is that of number. In the prayers quoted by Fr. Laydevant, the singular form is used. Casalis seems to contradict Fr. Laydevant; in fact he does not.⁴⁵ If we look at the context, Casalis quotes a prayer which has a special signification. He speaks about ancestors, and therefore his prayer applies to them alone. In that prayer the distinctions recent and ancient are put between ancestors themselves. In that case recent ancestors pray to the ancient ones. Fr. Laydevant on the other hand spoke about one

⁴⁴ F. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Bassutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 309.

⁴⁵ E. Casalis, Les Bassutos, p. 310; F. Laydevant, loc. cit., p. 320.

ancient who is prayed by one recent. Therefore, there is no contradiction between the number of the most high and that of the ancients. It should be noticed that the problem of number of the molimo is not treated by these authors explicitly.

B. Balimo: Ancestors

The first distinction which we are able to make between balimo and molimo is that of time. The balimo are inferior to the sky-divinity. At least this seems to be explicit in the quoted prayers. There are certain degrees in balimo also. Some are recent while other are ancient. This difference depends on the time of their entrance into the ranks of the dead. It also depends on the importance of each one of them in the construction and foundation of the tribe and its traditions. That is why some of them are more known and influential than others.

According to the prayer given in the article of Fr. Laydevant the balimo are the dead.⁴⁶ Casalis has the same opinion.⁴⁷ All people without distinction of sex, except notorious ones who were exiled on account of their evil activities towards the community, were balimo. All those who

⁴⁶ F. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les anciens Bassutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 310, 320-321, 326-327.

⁴⁷ E. Casalis, Les Bassutos, p. 310-311.

worked against the common good of the nation were considered to have no relatives among the dead. They were by that fact not admitted to the land of the ancestors. This was the common belief of the Basotho towards the dead. Nothing is said about children who died before accomplishing an act worthy of memory for the nation. Balimo were divided into public and private ones according to their actions during their life on earth. If they did something for the nation's foundation then they were considered to be public such as Mohlomi, Tšoloane and Monaheng. If they were simple people then their activity was limited to family affairs and therefore they were private or family ancestors only.

It has to be noted that for the ancient Basotho, ancestors were not completely inactive, without life and as a result passive. Casalis affirmed this opinion.⁴⁸ Fr. Laydevant held that balimo were spirits and souls of the dead.⁴⁹ I do not think so, because burial services of the ancient Basotho seem to insinuate that they had a wider consideration than that. For them the dead were body and soul, but they could not be seen as they could be during their life time. The very position of the dead man's body in the grave seems to be against this idea of spirit-ancestors. We

48 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 310-311.

49 F. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Bassutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 320-322.

know that the graves of the ancient Basotho had a partition in which the dead man was placed in a sitting position. This position had a special signification because the ancient Basotho believed that it would facilitate the rising up of the dead person. They even thought that people buried in a sleeping position would crouch and crawl like snakes when they wake up. It is true that the ancient Basotho believed that there was something of the dead man's body remaining. For them that remaining thing had something of body because they placed near the dead material objects which they thought that he would use in the other life. On account of this, the balimo were not spirits but had something of body and of spirit.

Fr. Laydevant calls balimo semi-gods and intermediary beings.⁵⁰ They had much to do with the people. They interceded for them and afflicted them also when tribal customs were not kept. Fr. Laydevant and Casalis agree that the ancestors punished people especially when customs and traditions were not observed.⁵¹ Their usual means of punishment were misfortune that befell the culprit. Sometimes death was considered by the ancient Basotho as a punishment

50 F. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Basutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 322, 327-330.

51 Idem, loc. cit., p. 315.

from the balimo. As a result they were looked upon with fear. The Basotho respected them more than the sky-divinity. This attitude gives rise to problems of their relations with the sky-divinity, because they seem to be uncontrollable.

Conclusion

We cannot prove with scientific proofs that historically the ancient Basotho had the notion of God by divine supernatural revelation. So far it seems more positive that Basotho did not know that supernatural revelation before 1833. Therefore, the ancient Basotho did not know God on account of Christian evangelization before 1833 with the arrival of the first Christian missionaries.

Fr. Laydevant said that the myth of Kholumo-lumo had a Christian origin. That opinion cannot be proved scientifically. It is also incorrect to affirm that the name for the divinity which the ancient Basotho had came from the Jews because that hypothesis has grammatical deficiencies and imprecisions. These linguistic mistakes certainly weaken it.

As a result the ancient Basotho had the notion of the divinity not only in their prayers but also in their myths or legends. They had a suto word to designate that divinity. Their word was molimo in the singular. Its plural form is balimo or melimo. It is derived from the word holimo which meant the sky, heaven, elevated and high. On

account of this etymology the divinity of ancient Basotho was closely related with the sky and heights. For them, therefore, divinities were sky-gods. They were as high, as infinite, as far, as inaccessible, as transcendent as the sky. In short, for the ancient Basotho, divinities were the most high divinities.

On account of his distance, the sky-divinity of the Basotho was considered as an indifferent being and inactive when the people were in extreme need. Consequently, he was eclipsed by the active ancestors. Nevertheless, that did not make the Basotho deny their sky-divinity nor his activity. It did not make them forget him totally nor deprive him of the due worship. This is normal in religions of the sky-god.⁵²

⁵² M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 44-45.

CHAPTER IV

COMMON RELIGIOUS RITES AND CEREMONIES

Religious symbols are distinguished from profane symbols by their functions and relation with religious rites and ceremonies. Such symbols are better understood when they are considered in their proper context, which is religious. In order to distinguish the religious symbols of the Basotho from their profane symbols, therefore, it is important and almost necessary to study their religious rites and ceremonies. It is in these rites that we shall be able to discover religious symbols.

Some authors, however, doubted the existence of religious rites, ceremonies and symbols among rites of the Basotho. Among them we may mention Casalis, who wrote the following statement:

En tout temps et sous tous les climats, l'homme a chargé des monuments en rapport avec ses progrès dans les arts d'exprimer sa pensée religieuse ou d'abriter son culte. Ici, rien de semblable; pas même une pierre consacrée, comme celle que Jacob dressa à Luz, en attendant qu'il pût bâtir un autel.¹

Casalis looked for religious rites which were similar to European Calvinist rites. Of course he did not find them because the ancient Basotho were not Calvinist but pagan.

¹ E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, Paris, Société des Missions Evangéliques, 1933, p. 297.

What he should have looked for were pagan religious rites. The absence of rites similar to Calvinist rites does not mean the absence of any other form of rites. Therefore, the conclusion of Casalis and the Arabs who called the Basotho non-believers is not precise, if the word belief is understood in a large sense.

In this chapter the words rites and ceremonies mean actions, gestures or objects used during celebrations of any kind of worship. The same applies to words spoken over objects during religious activities. The word religious is taken in a broad meaning. It means any action, gesture or word made in an attitude of prayer and petition, whether the object of worship is true or not.

In this chapter our aim is to give a description of pagan rites and ceremonies of the ancient Basotho. For the sake of clarity we have divided the chapter into three main parts, namely, sacrifices, purifications and anointing ceremonies.

1. Sacrifices

A. Motives

One of the most common rites in any religion whatsoever is that of sacrifice. As we know, sacrifices were offered to their object of belief which was double, namely, ancestors and the sky-divinity. We have also remarked that

"Tous les sacrifices étaient offerts aux ancêtres, tandis que rien, ou presque rien, n'était réservé au vrai Dieu."² This disproportion of sacrifices must have had reasons to back it. Veneration of ancestors was remarkable and easily noticed.³ Fr. Laydevant says that ancestors were considered as evil and malicious sometimes.⁴ Basotho had some devotion to them. Fr. Lebreton mentions that Basotho interpreted sickness as a manifestation of the dissatisfaction of ancestors which was caused by the bad conduct of the nation or of certain individuals of the tribe or of the nation.⁵ This dissatisfaction made them angry and was the cause of the subsequent punishment that the people received. The ancient Basotho believed that ancestors had a direct influence upon human beings. On account of this direct influence and the dissatisfaction of the ancestors, whatever sickness, misfortune or any private or public evil occurred whose cause was not known was attributed to them. This belief created fear

2 F. Laydevant, O.M.I., "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Basutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 312.

3 T. Arbousset, Voyage d'exploration aux montagnes bleues, Paris, Société des Missions Évangéliques, 1931, p. 245.

4 F. Laydevant, loc. cit., p. 315.

5 H. Lebreton, O.M.I., "Mort et funérailles", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 36 (1931), p. 283.

and the attitude of supplication and prayer for pardon. Casalis says that the Basotho pacified ancestors by offering sacrifices.⁶ These sacrifices had two motives which overlapped. They were motives of fear and of satisfaction. Fear seems to have been primary and the stronger.

One of the most common and usual motives of sacrifices among the ancient Basotho was that of petition. Life seems to have been asked for oftener than other gifts. The Basotho women considered sterility as a disgrace and shame.⁷ Consequently, they used to pray for childbearing.⁸

The ancient Basotho used to ask for the preservation of life also. Sacrifices were offered in order to prevent ancestors from punishing the people by sickness. These sacrifices were offered by the medicine-man or by his order before the death of an elderly person whose recovery was doubtful and who was considered as a burden by those who took care of him.⁹ In the latter case people prayed more for a happy death than for recovery. Fr. Lebreton suspects that such patients or old persons were murdered. According

6 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 311.

7 P. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Bassoutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 326.

8 E. Casalis, op. cit., p. 313-314.

9 H. Lebreton, "Mort et funérailles", in petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 36 (1931), p. 283.

to him they were either exposed to severe temperature, to wild beasts or abandoned to die of thirst or hunger. History gives some facts which affirm this opinion. It seems that this happened most often during migrations from northern Africa.

In order to pray for a happy death, a sacrifice was offered immediately after the death of a person.¹⁰ This sacrifice is not the same as the one offered for an old person whose death was desired. It is a sacrifice for a regretted person. It was offered as a provision for the dead and at the same time as a sacrifice to him, so that he might rest in peace without troubling the living.

Besides motives of fear and satisfaction and petition, some sacrifices were offered to ask for rain. Fr. Baudry gives a very detailed description of such sacrifices.¹¹ By these sacrifices the ancient Basotho asked for protection against public danger. Fr. J. Gilbert mentions war, epidemics and famine among such public dangers.¹²

Other sacrifices were offered in thanksgiving. For example, a goat or ram was immolated eight days after the

10 E. Canalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 320.

11 A. Baudry, O.M.I., "La prière pour la pluie chez les Basutos", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 6 (1896), p. 172.

12 J. Gilbert, O.M.I., "Meurtres rituels et pendaisons", ibid., 1948, p. 177.

birth of a child. A blanket was made for the baby out of the skin of the victim. There is one particular manner of thanksgiving that existed among the Basotho. This consisted in placing a few grains of the harvest in a little hole dug in the center of the threshing ground. Those grains were left there as an offering to the ancestors for the gift of successful harvest.¹³

B. Ministers

Sacrifices for the ancient Basotho needed no special ministers. At any rate, the medicine-man, who was called ngaka in suto, was the common or the ordinary minister. Some called them priests and doctors of the Basotho. At least he played a very considerable role in the religion of the people. His function in the immolation of the victim was either to give prescriptions or to offer the sacrifice itself. Medicine-men were generally men. Women could exercise these functions but their number was very small. The function of the medicine-man was not hereditary. As we have said, there were special initiation rites for them.

It is important to note that these ministers were not only practicing medicine although Europeans call them medicine-men. They were ministers of sacrifices. Casalis describes them as skillful, cunning people who, as he says,

13 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 315.

"remplissent les fonctions de prêtres, de prophètes, de devins, de médecins, et s'enrichissent aux dépens de la crédulité publique".¹⁴ In the first place they were medical doctors. They knew some herbs which could really cure sicknesses more or less serious. Their competence should not be exaggerated nor universalized, because their medical science was imperfect due to the imperfect, unprecise and incomplete preparation in regard to scientific studies of biology and physiology. We cannot deny that they knew some true medicine without violence to historical facts. This is why it is not always true to say that they enriched themselves with the bona fide confidence of their clients although they knew nothing.

Their important instruments were an undetermined number of shells and bones of various sizes and shapes which Fr. Lebreton calls osselets, which in suto were called litaola (bones used for divining).¹⁵ They were kept carefully, interpreted and consulted by the medicine-man. They were consulted for almost all cases of theft, sickness and other troubles. On account of them medicine-men were called balaoli. Their duty as a result was to divine, to foretell the future and to interpret events to the common people.

14 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 352.

15 H. Lebreton, "Mort et funérailles", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 36 (1931), p. 282-283; cf. E. Casalis, op. cit., p. 312, 352.

Some medicine-men used drums in order to sing and to dance. Fr. E. Gilbert gives a very detailed description of the dress and vestments of this kind of medicine-men.¹⁶ These functionaries were called mathuela. They are otherwise called either sorcerer or medicine-sorcerer.¹⁷ Of course, the medicine-man could be at the same time a lethuela.

What interests us here is the function of the medicine-man in the offering of sacrifices. According to Casalis he decided whether a sacrifice was to be offered or not.¹⁸ His decision, nevertheless, was not made at will but according to the position of the divining bones. His duty was to designate the victim by indicating its size, colour and sex. Fr. Lebreton says that the victim could be designated according to the description seen in a dream of the sick person for whom the sacrifice was to be offered.¹⁹

16 E. Gilbert, O.M.I., "Locadia, la sorcière", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1949, p. 18.

17 F. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Basutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 313; cf. also A. Baudry, "La prière pour la pluie chez les Basutos", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 6 (1896), p. 172; T. Arbousset, Voyage d'exploration aux montagnes bleues, p. 250.

18 E. Casalis, Les Basutos, p. 312.

19 H. Lebreton, "Mort et funérailles", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 36 (1931), p. 283.

Medicine-men were not the exclusive ministers of sacrifices, as we have said. Sometimes the maternal uncle could be in charge of a sacrifice. For instance, he was the minister of lustral sacrifices, offered during the sickness of his nephews or nieces. The animal destined to feed a sick person was sometimes killed by a young man of good reputation. Besides individual ministers, the ancient Basotho had collective ministers for collective or group sacrifices. These sacrifices were offered when the nation was menaced by famine, epidemic or war. In other words such sacrifices were offered for the common good. During the time of drought an ox was immolated in the village. Thereafter, all men went hunting and killed all the wild animals they met as a sacrifice asking for rain or for protection from the imminent danger. In the rites of thanksgiving the sacrifice was also collective because it was offered by the owners or partners of the harvest.

C. Victims

The ancient Basotho had a variety of victims. The usual or common victims were animals. According to Fr. Lebreton victims could be cattle, oxen, sheep or goats.²⁰

²⁰ H. Lebreton, "Mort et funérailles", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 36 (1931), p. 283; cf. also A. Baudry, "La prière pour la pluie chez les Basutos", ibid., 6 (1896), p. 172

Sheep and goats were immolated in order to pray for pregnant women, to give thanks after a successful delivery.²¹ In public collective sacrifices victims were wild animals. Birds were chosen very seldom.

Fr. J. Gilbert mentions human victims.²² This kind of victim was used as one of the ingredients of the lustral horn. For the enthronement of a new king or chief the medical horn was also used. The ancient Basotho believed that this horn could assure them good fortune; that it could help the chief to avoid hostile plans and misfortune. They also believed that without it royal power could not be established on a solid basis. Besides medicinal herbs and animal flesh special parts of the human flesh specified by the medicine-man were mixed to form the sacred contents of the horn. These parts were cut off while the person was still alive. The choice of these parts depended on the needs to be met. If power was needed, a strong man or warrior was sacrificed; to get intellectual abilities, a clever person was chosen; in order to obtain a good harvest, an industrious, successful person was immolated. The victim was chosen by the chief according to the description given by the

21 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 313.

22 J. Gilbert, "Meurtres rituels et pendaisons", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1948, p. 317.

medicine-man. Sometimes the medicine-man made the choice himself. Most of the time a man or a young man was chosen. Sometimes a woman was a victim. Very, very seldom a pregnant woman, a boy or a child were victims. Europeans would call these ceremonies ritual murders or medicinal murders. They were called ritual by those who took them as part of the pagan religion. They were called medicinal by those who saw a medical character in them, or who looked at them as a means of obtaining magic ingredients. With Casalis, I think that we may say: "ainsi la médecine est-elle chez ces peuples une affaire presque entièrement religieuse."²³ Consequently, some medical ceremonies such as these were not only medical but also religious.

2. Purifications

The ancient Basotho had other religious rites besides sacrifices. Some of them are called rites of purification which according to Casalis can be divided into purification by fire and by water.²⁴

A. Fumigations

Fumigation was undertaken in order to purify places and objects such as plants and animals. Huts were purified

23 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 311.

24 Idem, op. cit., p. 320-323.

by a little fire lit in the center of the hut. On that fire a few odorous drugs were burned. The same process was followed in the purification of fields. The Basotho believed that the smoke of the fire had the power of expelling evil and danger from the hut. They believed that fields were protected from damage in a similar manner. These rites could be performed by any adult.

After a battle, captured cattle had to be purified before mixing with the cattle of the village. This purification was done by men who encircled them with smoking branches. The smoke was supposed to expel evil powers from the cattle. It has to be noted that in these rites no verbal expressions were made. In this way the aspect of prayer seems to be implicit. We may even ask ourselves whether there was any.

B. Aspersions

Special water was used in religious rites of aspersion. The water was mixed with ingredients of the ritual horn. Aspersion was twofold. Our distinction or division is based on the person purified.

Casalis described one of these aspersions which took place at the outbreak of an epidemic. In that case the whole village had to be purified.²⁵ The chief of the village or

25 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 322.

whoever was in charge of the medical horn assembled the people at a determined place. There he retired with the medicine-man in a secluded place in order to prepare the water for the aspersion. They dissolved ingredients of the horn in water. The chief sprinkled himself with it. Afterwards, the medicine-man proceeded to sprinkle the whole village, people and their animals. In this rite the medicine-man used a special sprinkler made of tassels of a cow's tail.

Other ablutions took place after each battle or war. All soldiers had to undergo a special ritual of purification lest they be haunted by their victims of war. These soldiers went to a nearby river where they bathed and washed their weapons. Sometimes the medicine-man threw some herbs into the water.

The Basotho had special purification of the sick. Bile of the animal sacrificed was used. In fact they considered it as a sacred part of the animal. In the ceremony of ablutions it was poured on the head of the patient while the following prayer was said: "O dieux, retirez-vous (ou plutôt dissipez-vous), laissez notre frère en repos, afin qu'il puisse dormir son sommeil."²⁶ After this peculiar "baptism" the maternal uncle, who was in charge of the ceremony, attached the little container of bile to the head of

26 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 312.

the patient as a sign of his purification.²⁷ Similar ablutions used to take place in case some misfortune or bad luck befell somebody.

Sometimes purifications were done by a combination of water and fire. New fruits and especially the harvest of the year was considered to be impure, in the sense that they could not be eaten without danger before their purification. Consequently, they had to be purified. To do this, a few grains of the harvested corn, if it were corn, were taken from the heap and then boiled. When they were sufficiently boiled, one of the workers took a handful of them and then threw it on the pile saying: "Merci, dieux, demain encore donnez-nous du pain."²⁸ This gesture of mixing grains purified, or rather was thought to purify, the rest of the harvest.

c. Anointings

Religious rites and ceremonies which used oils were very rare among the ancient Basotho. Nevertheless, we find some rites in which fat was used besides the fatty contents of the horn. Such a ritual is found in the narrative of

27 H. Lebreton, "Mort et funérailles", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 36 (1931), p. 283.

28 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 314.

Fr. Lebreton and that of Casalis.²⁹ The part used in such quasi-anointing ceremonies was the fatty white tissue found around the intestines of the animal. This tissue was considered to be sacred. It was given in the form of a collar and then hung around the neck of the patient. It is evident that no anointing was done. Sometimes the fatty medicine of the horn was mixed with bile and then the patient was anointed on the forehead with it. This ointment was considered to possess the power to heal sicknesses.

Conclusion

Religious rites and ceremonies of the ancient Basotho were closely related with their medicine. This association of religion and medicine was basically founded on their religion which was not totally freed from magic elements. We do not mean that all medicine was religious among the ancient Basotho. There were some ceremonies which were purely religious, which were not mixed with medicine. Likewise some medical practices were purely medical by character; they had no mixture of religion. This connection of religion and medicine among the Basotho makes it difficult

²⁹ H. Lebreton, "Mort et funérailles", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 36 (1931), p. 288; cf. also E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 312.

for scholars to distinguish religious rites from mere medical practices.

Among pagan ceremonies of the Basotho there were sacrifices made of animals, plants and sometimes human beings. There were individual ministers as well as collective ministers. These sacrifices were offered for satisfaction mostly to the ancestors. There were sacrifices for thanksgiving and for petition. They were offered mostly out of fear of the ancestors. They were offered to divert their punishment also. This gives some sacrifices of the Basotho a magic aspect. They were also offered to obtain favours from the ancestors.

Besides sacrifices, the Basotho had rites of purification which were distinguished by their mode of purifying objects. There was purification by fumigation and by aspersion. Anointing rites were very rare.

Religious rites and ceremonies had more of a social character. No special place, however, was reserved for cult. That is why there were no temples nor church buildings for their religious services.

CHAPTER V

RELIGIOUS SYMBOLISM

In the first part of our dissertation we studied symbols and myths. In the second part we examined religious rites and ceremonies of the ancient Basotho. With all these elements in mind we may now attempt to explain their religious symbolism.

Fr. Laydevant has written that:

Ce qui, pour eux, tenait lieu de religion, était un certain nombre de coutumes, de sacrifices, de chants et de danses dont ils faisaient usage sans qu'ils se missent en peine de connaître la signification symbolique cachée là-dessous.¹

It is hard to admit that the Basotho were ignorant of the symbolism of all their rites and ceremonies. Casalis on the other hand not only admits the existence of religious symbols in the religion of the Basotho but also gives the signification of some of them. His interpretation remains limited.

Our aim is to explain clearly the symbolism found in religious rites and ceremonies of the Basotho. In order to avoid the danger of giving private interpretation universal value, we intend to use discoveries of ethnologists and of authorities in the history of religions.

¹ F. Laydevant, O.M.I., "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Basutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 312-313.

In this chapter, therefore, we will name some symbols which we have found in the rites of the Basotho and then explain their symbolism by applying notions of symbols and characteristics described in the history of religions. By so speaking we do not mean to ignore the symbolism given by the Basotho themselves. In fact we will take symbols whose symbolism was known by the Basotho. We will explain those symbols whose symbolism was manifested either in prayers or in words by the Basotho. In this way we shall avoid giving our interpretation to them. This will also help us to find the symbolism admitted by the people at that time.

1. The Horn: Power and Confidence

Among the Israelites the horn was a symbol of power and force. The bull and the horn were often used as signs of power. Not only among the Israelites did the bull signify power because in "all near-eastern cultures 'power' is primarily symbolized by the bull, in Akkadian 'breaking the horn' is equivalent to destroying the power".²

In magico-ancestral religions such as we find among the Basotho, the horn was used to express the same symbolism. The horn was used in public purification ceremonies. At the

² M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, London-New York, Sheed and Ward, 1958, p. 89.

outbreak of an epidemic its contents were dissolved in water which was used to sprinkle the people and their property as a means of protection. To establish his power and authority on solid basis a young chief used the horn.³

This power of the horn stimulated certain reactions in the Basotho. One of these reactions was confidence. The ancient Basotho placed their trust in the horn because they expected help from it. They believed that with the horn they could resist attacks of the enemies, expel all misfortune and avoid evil. On account of this the horn was something attractive. It was guarded with care and respected. It was not a common object. It was sacred and as a result both a hierophany and a kratophany. It manifested a holy power.

This power made it not only attractive and loved but also respected and feared. It was dangerous for those who were not marked with its contents, especially for the enemies of its possessor. This ambivalent nature enabled the horn to produce opposed reactions in the people. Indeed it expressed simultaneously many meanings, namely, power and fecundity. Because of its quality of bipolarity it produced varied reactions in man. It made him have confidence and

³ J. Gilbert, O.M.I., "Meurtres rituels et pendaisons", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1948, p. 177.

fear at the same time. To those who did not use its contents it produced evil and to those who used its contents it was considered as a protection. It is to be noted that this was the belief of the people. We do not speak of what really happened or whether the horn really had power or not. We simply give what the people thought about the horn.

This horn was a symbol of power because of its ingredients which were chosen carefully. Not any plant or animal flesh was taken to make the horn. Only those which either manifested and signified power or strength or which were related to powerful parts of a plant or of an animal were selected. That is why in the horn there were leaves of plants resistant to severe colds of winter, thorny leaves of mimosa which could not be touched without danger, lion's mane and claws, the tuft of fur at the base of the horn of a bull, the skin of a venomous snake, feathers of a falcon or a hawk, perhaps pieces of human flesh. Speaking about this mixture, Casalis said that: "le choix des ingrédients dont se compose le mélange lustral est toujours symbolique."⁴ Favre also admits that these ingredients were symbolic.⁵ Those ingredients symbolize power and protection because by

4 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, Paris, Société des Missions Évangéliques, 1933, p. 321.

5 E. Favre, Les vingt-cinq ans de Coillard au Les-souto, Paris, Société des Missions Évangéliques, 1931, p. 79.

their own natures and functions they protect the plant or the animal. For better understanding of this natural capacity of symbols we have only to examine closely those ingredients. Leaves of ever-green trees offer passive resistance to winter colds; mimosa spikes offer an impenetrable barrier and wall of defense for the plant. Lion's claws and the horn of the bull are instruments for protection. The tuft of fur at the base of the horn and the lion's mane are associated with the force and protection of these animals inasmuch as they are manifestations of anger and are around the instrument of the animals. The skin of a snake is a protection against rain, hail, heat and cold. Feathers of a falcon are connected with the wings of that bird by which it avoids danger with agility and rapidity.

This resemblance between these objects and the symbolised thing is one of the characteristics of symbols, as Destouches said: "le symbole comporte une ressemblance intrinsèque avec la chose."⁶ On account of this, the horn was a symbol of power and protection for the Basotho. Casalis, speaking of this symbolism, said that the horn was "emblème de la force et de la fécondité".⁷ The reason of its

⁶ J.-M. Destouches, "L'expression symbolique dans la physique théorique", in Etudes Carmélitaines, no. spécial 1960, p. 125.

⁷ E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 321.

ambivalence is based on the double capacities of the bull, namely, force and fecundity. This made the horn polyvalent and as a result a symbol of fear and confidence at once.⁸

2. Water: Purification

Water has the natural quality of purifying and cleansing. In it dirt is dissolved. Every uncleanness ceases to exist. As Eliade says, water has the power of breaking up forms of impurities and crimes.⁹ It nullifies the past and restores the integrity of the thing. What is immersed in it disappears and "dies" in a way; by emersion it rises from it clean, innocent and rid of its dirt. Having lost its impurities it begins life anew. On account of this natural quality of purifying, water can be a symbol of another purification. For the Basotho it could be a purifying element from the unlucky presence of the dead, from sin and from physical uncleanness. The ablutions were made by the ritual of immersion. In fact, this "immemorial and oecumenical symbolism of immersion in water as an instrument of purification and regeneration was adapted by Christianity and given still richer religious meaning".¹⁰

⁸ E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 320.

⁹ M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 194-195.

¹⁰ Idem, op. cit., p. 196.

The ancient Basotho used water as a symbol of purification. Casalis remarks that aspersions were very frequent.¹¹ There were purifications of the whole village and of soldiers after battle. For the pagan Basotho, water was a symbol of visible and invisible purification. Water purified physical and invisible dirt and danger of being haunted by the dead. This is what the people believed and understood by the rites of ablution.

Like other symbols, water is ambivalent. Its ambivalence is in a way particular. It produces double effects simultaneously. Those effects are opposed inasmuch as some of them are good while others are evil. By immersion death of the impure state follows; whereas by emersion life and the innocent state of a thing is restored. To use Eliade's expression, "immersion in water symbolizes a return to the pre-formal, a total regeneration, a new birth, for immersion means a dissolution of forms, a reintegration into the formless of pre-existence, and emerging from the water is a repetition of the act of creation in which form was first expressed".¹²

The ritual of lustration includes two acts, namely, immersion and emersion. Each of them produces an effect in

11 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 322.

12 M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 188.

the object purified. It is not surprising that water is said to produce death and a reduction to the pre-formal state because it has the capacity of taking away life. Too much water is detrimental to the life of plants as well as to the life of animals and man. That is why this immersion is equivalent to death at the cosmic level, to the cataclysm. Nevertheless, this death is temporary and transitory because the immersion is only temporary. It is not a final extinction but a passing "death". Emersion follows immersion, just as purity follows impurity in ablution ceremonies. It is equivalent to birth because water has the capacity of restoring life; for instance, life can be restored to plants after a dry period by watering them. It is an undoubted fact that water is one of the elements necessary for life. On account of its life-giving capacity, water can be a symbol of regeneration. The same symbolism is found in initiation rites. Eliade says that in "initiation rituals water confers a 'new birth', because it incorporates in itself all potentiality".¹³

Initiation ceremonies of the ancient Basotho had this symbolism. Purifications were not rare in such rites. Fr. Lebreton reveals the frequent occasions of ablutions.¹⁴

¹³ M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 189.

¹⁴ H. Lebreton, O.M.I., "La rille chez les Basutos", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1929, p. 233-240, 242.

Girls, for example, had to bathe very often during the initiation period. The author mentions seven occasions in detail. After the first bathing ceremony he adds that: "cette cérémonie se répète plusieurs fois."¹⁵ Indeed, the close connection between the rebirth effected by the initiation rites and the purification rites is clear. The same association between the supposed regenerating action of the mythical personage motanyane, "serpent" or "wolf", and the antecedent ablutions affirms the similarity of symbolism of purification and the mythical and psychological rebirth.

On account of these associations of symbols of water, ablutions, psychological rebirth of initiation rites, it seems that water was a symbol of regeneration for the Basotho. It was ambivalent because it manifested death and the consequent rebirth of the neophytes. Its succession of immersion and emersion was a symbol of dissolution and recreation of new beings. It was a symbol of the disappearance of infancy and the subsequent appearance of maturity.

3. Night: Transition

We cannot help but be struck by the time during which initiation rites took place. Preparatory ceremonies

¹⁵ H. Lebreton, "La fille chez les Basutos", in petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1929, p. 238.

for girls were made in moonlight.¹⁶ The opening and the closing ceremonies likewise took place at night. The flight from the "wolf", i.e. from the mythical personage, was also in the evening.¹⁷

The principal ceremony of malibeng which was supposed to transform neophytes was celebrated at dawn.¹⁸ This ritual was followed by the washing away of the black ochre with which neophytes were anointed since the beginning of the initiation. This clean-up ritual was also performed during the night.

Initiation rites of boys did not use darkness as often as did feminine initiation. Their entry ceremonies, however, were held at night also. Their first entrance of the initiation hut was made at night. It is at this time that they were told of the mythical "wolf".

Although the ancient Basotho have not told us the exact signification of darkness, we may suppose that they had the same symbolism as most of the primitives in similar circumstances. We know that darkness was connected with a kind of reduction to chaos. It was also used to manifest a

16 H. Lebreton, "La fille chez les Basutos", in Pe-
tites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée,
1929, p. 238.

17 Idem, loc. cit., p. 238, 243.

18 Idem, loc. cit., p. 239.

state of transition. These were the effects of man's understanding of darkness in his daily activities. Darkness is a period of obscurity, of absence of clarity and colour. All things look alike in darkness. For these reasons darkness is a state of indifference and confusion. Eliade says that: "les Ténèbres sont homologables au chaos, car aucune forme n'est discernable, aucune structure ne se dégage; c'est la modalité du préformé."¹⁹

Besides this, darkness symbolizes inactivity because at night most living beings rest. Consequently, things lose their consciousness. Primitives observed this coincidence of darkness and the universal resting period of living beings. Darkness, eventually, acquired a secondary meaning and symbolism which was based on this coincidence. For the primitive mentality darkness was ambivalent; it manifested two different states. As Eliade said: "Les Ténèbres symbolisent en même temps ce qu'est la manifestation des formes et après leur disparition, lorsque les formes sont réintégrées dans la masse primordiale."²⁰ Darkness is a symbol of transition, inactivity and of reduction to chaos. Judging from the ritual context of darkness, we may say that it had the same symbolism for the ancient Basotho.

19 M. Eliade, "Le symbolisme des ténèbres dans les religions archaïques", in Etudes Carmélitaines, no. spécial 1960, p. 19.

20 Idem, ibid.

4. Moon: Life and Death

The symbolism of the moon depends on its rhythmical change. We know that the moon is subject to the universal law of becoming. It shines brightly for a time and then wanes and disappears. This is what it seems to do to the naked eye. Its career involves a tragedy. When the sky was deprived of the moon the archaic mentality said that the moon was dead. Of course, the word dead does not mean that primitives thought that the moon was a living thing. Since the moon disappeared only for a time its "death" was not permanent.

Primitive women noticed a certain coincidence between the rhythm of the moon and their menstrual cycle. A connection was made between this periodic change and the fertility of women. Consequently, the moon became a universal measure of the rhythms of life. As Eliade says, "it is bound with the reality of life and nature, rain and the tides, the time of sowing, the menstrual cycle".²¹

Pagan Basotho women established the same connection between the moon and their fertility period. They thought that the moon had a direct influence or a positive role in the biological change. Their initiation rites attached

²¹ M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 155.

great importance to the moon. Their preparatory ceremonies of the "race to the moon" were performed after the first menstrual period.²² These associations of the moon and the period of fertility made the moon a symbol of periodic return and fecundity.

Besides this, the moon seems to have been a symbol of the change of life, because names of months were based on the activity of plant as well as animal life. Each month was named according to the change observed in the life of plants and animals. September was called Loetse because at that time growth of plants began, it was the sowing and raining period. October was named Mphalane because at that time a kind of iris began to germinate. Since the wild beasts appeared in the month of November, this month was called Pulungoana, the name of the wild beast. December was the month in which the cricket began to chirp, as a result this month was called Tâitoe which is the suto name for cricket. January was called Pherekhong because huts for workers in the fields were built at this time. February was called Hlakola to signify the formation of the spike of a certain flower. The name Hlakubele was given to the month of May to signify the formation of the grains of corn or sorghum. April on the other hand was named Motšeanong to

22 H. Lebreton, "La fille chez les Basutos", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1929, p. 238-239.

signify the hardness of those grains which were considered in a personified way because they are said to be laughing at the birds. June and July described a kind of lettuce which was still green at that time in spite of the cold winds of winter; they were called as a result Phupu and Phuptjoane. August was called Phato probably to signify the drought which made cows give less milk; as the ancient Basotho said, it made cows hide their milk.

These names were symbolic, for they manifested the change in life as a whole. They show that the moon was closely associated with different stages of life for the Basotho. The pattern can be thus presented: moon-water-fertility-woman-periodic regeneration. To conclude we may say with Eliade:

Thus, for instance, from the earliest times, certainly since the Neolithic Age, with the discovery of agriculture the symbol has linked together the moon, the sea, water, rain, the fertility of women and of animals, plant life, man's destiny after death and the ceremonies of initiation.²³

5. Initiation: Passage

We have seen that initiation was an occasion of learning, because during that period neophytes learned the corpus of moral, social and tribal laws and traditions.

²³ M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 155.

They also learned the origin of the universe and of the human race. Initiation, however, was not a period of instruction but also a ritual of regeneration.²⁴ Its major function was to prepare the neophytes for a new birth, to introduce him to a new kind of life. According to Eliade this symbolism of regeneration explained the presence of the moon, numerous ablutions, snakes, the wolf and other mythical personages.²⁵ Flagellations and the changing of clothes and names are nothing else but the expression of the change which is believed to have taken place in the neophytes. Mythical persons are the efficient cause of the psychological change which is to be realized.

The changing of clothes and of names symbolize mythical mutation and the mythical resurrection of the neophyte. Initiation according to the primitive comprehension was a symbol of a passage between death and resurrection, between historic time and the sacred illud tempus of myths.²⁶ According to this belief ancient peoples thought that boys and girls underwent this change during initiation rites.

Initiation rites of Basotho had similar symbolism because their rites were held during the night which in

24 M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 56-59.

25 Idem, op. cit., p. 169, 175, 210.

26 Idem, op. cit., p. 135, 104-105.

itself symbolized a passage between clarity and confusion, which also symbolized a certain passage. The narration of Fr. Lebreton has shown the frequency of the rites during the night.²⁷

The role of the mythical personages was precisely to effect the psychological change. That is why the neophyte was told of his being devoured by the "wolf" or his being swallowed by the "serpent".²⁸ In order to concretize this death, boys and girls were very often flogged during the initiation rites. In fact girls were flogged by the mythical person motanyane.²⁹

Neophytes changes names after the mythical death.³⁰ This was a manifestation of the mutation which was supposed to have taken place. Manners of neophytes had to change accordingly.³¹

The change of vestments also was symbolic. Old clothes were burned with the initiation hut which was considered as the place where neophytes had left the evil

27 H. Lebreton, "La fille chez les Basutos", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1929, p. 238-243.

28 Idem, loc. cit., p. 239.

29 Idem, loc. cit., p. 238-244.

30 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 331.

31 H. Lebreton, loc. cit., p. 240.

tendencies of their state of infancy.³² The idea that initiation was a period of transformation is expressed by the ancient Basotho themselves. Evidently, their purpose of initiating youths was to make men out of them.³³ Likewise girls were initiated so that real and worthy women might be formed out of them.³⁴

Initiation as a whole was a symbol of change for the ancient Basotho. It was rather more a psychological change than physical. This idea is affirmed by Casalis, who said that initiation was considered "comme symbole de transformation morale".³⁵

6. Other Symbolic Actions

The Basotho had other rites which are not easily interpreted. When a sick person was sick a sacrifice was offered to pray for him. After the immolation of an animal some relatives touched the patient while the maternal uncle said the following prayer: "O dieux, retirez-vous (ou plutôt dissipez-vous), laissez notre frère en repos, afin qu'il puisse dormir son sommeil."³⁶ Fr. Lebreton gives a similar

32 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 331-332.

33 Idem, op. cit., p. 327.

34 H. Lebreton, "La fille chez les Basutos", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1929, p. 242, 244.

35 E. Casalis, op. cit., p. 235.

36 Idem, op. cit., p. 312.

description.³⁷ This imposition of hands seems to have been a symbol of the reception of good health.

The Basotho had a special ceremony after their harvest. A few grains of the harvested crop were cooked and then some of them were thrown on to the heap in order to purify it. While those grains were being thrown the owner of the field said a short prayer of thanksgiving.³⁸ The symbolism of the gesture of throwing grains to the heap seems to have been the coming of purifying elements of the crop.

Conclusion

This brief exposition has brought some light to some objects which would seem to be symbols of the ancient Basotho. Some of them are religious without doubt. The accompanying prayers give them a religious character. Others seem to be less religious. Among them we have mentioned the horn which was a symbol of power and confidence. We also tried to explain the symbolism of water, which was purification and regeneration. Darkness was a religious symbol of

37 "O vous, ancêtres, aidez-nous à prier! Et toi, malade, en te touchant ainsi de nos mains nous disons: dors." H. Lebreton, O.M.I., "Mort et funérailles", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 36 (1931), p. 283.

38 "Les personnes auxquelles les blés appartiennent, apportent près de l'aire un pot neuf et y font bouillir du grain. Lorsqu'il est cuit, on en jette quelques poignées sur le tas, en prononçant ces mots: 'Merci, dieux; demain encore donnez-nous du pain.' Cela dit, on mange ce qui reste, et la provision de l'année passe pour pure et propre à faire du bien." E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 314.

the reduction to the pre-formal condition of chaos or death. The moon was a symbol of perpetual and periodic change, regeneration and fertility. Initiation, consequently, was the symbol of moral and psychological change and maturity.

These symbols, undoubtedly, had so degenerated that they had become more or less superstitious. Casalis, speaking of them, said:

La superstition s'en est emparée, l'ignorance en a fait une pratique barbare et ridicule à plusieurs égards, et cependant l'idée religieuse et morale a survécu.³⁹

By so saying he admitted that some objects had a religious character. He admitted that others were superstitious, in one way or another.

The absurdity of these practices should not make us forget their religious value; their superstitious character should not make us blind to their pagan religious importance and influence which, perhaps, is still strong among the Bassutos of to-day.

39 E. Casalis, Les Bassutos, p. 326.

CHAPTER VI

THE GREAT RITE OF INITIATION AND ITS SYMBOLISM

Initiation rites are among the most complicated rites and ceremonies of the ancient Basotho. Because of this complexity we have thought it profitable to devote a complete chapter to them. Studies about them are not easy because of the secrecy which surrounded them. The Basotho had two kinds of initiation. There were initiation rites of puberty which obliged every boy and girl. There were initiation rites for the medicine-men only. These were special.

Our present study does not cover the special initiation of the medicine-men. It is limited to the initiation of puberty. This initiation was held separately. Boys were initiated alone at a different period and place. Girls likewise had their own separately. Nevertheless, masculine and feminine initiations were fundamentally the same. For clarity's sake we have dealt with them separately in this chapter.

1. Initiation of Boys

A. Motives

The ancient Basotho believed that people who had not undergone rites of initiation were not capable of performing

rational acts in life.¹ Such people were therefore thought to be minors, psychologically and morally unfit. They could not be entrusted with certain responsibilities. It was taken for granted that they were not aware of their duties. They were thought to be ignorant of the mysteries of life, especially the mysteries of human reproduction and the implications of conjugal life. Consequently, they had no right to marry. Above all they did not know the great mysteries of the holy. One of the motives of initiation of puberty was, as a result, to introduce neophytes into the zone of the holy. This introduction necessarily implied death to infancy, asexuality, ignorance and to the profane state which ended by the simultaneous transition to the adult stage.² For this reason boys and girls were despised and illtreated till they were initiated or taught to defend themselves otherwise. Initiation was, therefore, an institution to teach them the nature of marriage, its duties and responsibilities. Above all, it was the institution to make men out of boys.³

In order to leave that supposedly miserable state, and to avoid psychological persecution and torture, boys

1 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, Paris, Société des Missions Evangéliques, 1933, p. 327.

2 M. Eliade, Naissances mystiques, Paris, Gallimard, 1959, p. 52.

3 E. Casalis, op. cit., p. 326-327.

asked to be initiated. Sometimes ignorance of what awaited them and curiosity urged them even more than the reasons given above. The normal age required for entry was between thirteen and twenty. Casalis said that it was about the age of Ishmael when he was circumcised.⁴ However, exceptions could be made for particular reasons. For instance, initiation of some boys was postponed or advanced in order to enable them to be initiated at the same time with the chief's son.

B. Preparation

Remote preparation was called ho qacha. This rite consisted of daily repetitions of more or less monotonous songs and simple poems on mysterious themes. At this time also boys collected moli which is a special kind of grass with which ropes necessary for the building of the initiation hut were woven. At this time the chief, as supreme master of the initiation, with the advice of his counsellors chose the director of the neophytes and the site of the initiation place. At the village, women prepared the entry festival.

Immediate preparation, which was called malingoana, took place in the evening of the fixed day in the village public grounds. Aspirants, according to Casalis, hid

4 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 327.

themselves in the fields as a sign of their dissatisfaction with the inferior state in which they were, i.e. psychological childhood.⁵ In the evening men went to get them. A procession was formed. In the procession boys carried wood for the festival bonfire and poles necessary for the building of the initiation hut. On their arrival at the prepared place they were asked to wrestle a bull empty handed. That was a test that they had to pass. While they held down their still living victim, the official medicine-man of the ceremony cut off its right front shoulder. The leg was divided into pieces equivalent to the number of aspirants and then half roasted. When it was estimated to be sufficiently roasted for the purpose, a warrior spat into it while another suspended each piece on a lance or spear. Each boy had to take his piece without using hands while he was flogged mercilessly. When the meat was detached, he could pick it up with his hands and eat it while going to a special house well guarded by one or two directors. All the aspirants spent that night in that hut and from that time on they were separated from the rest of the community till the last day of their initiation. Favre recounts the same event also.⁶

5 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 327-328.

6 E. Favre, Les vingt-cinq ans de Coillard au Les-souto, Paris, Société des Missions Évangéliques, 1931, p. 80-81.

C. Initiation Proper

Early in the morning they left the village unnoticed. According to Eliade, suffering caused by the operation of circumcision had a connection with the initiation because it was closely related to mythical death, inasmuch as the suffering was the expression of mythical death.⁷ This symbolism was made more explicit among Australians, by the rite of the bull-roarers which signified the presence of super-human beings which initiated boys and killed them mythically.⁸ Circumcision in African rites of initiation had the same role and symbolism. It was equivalent to the mythical death.⁹ The same idea existed among the ancient Basotho. That is why boys were circumcised. The rite was performed by an old man assisted by a group of directors. Before the operation boys were given a drug called sehoere which was supposed to make neophytes feel the pain less. While they were drinking it they were scourged. Casalis is of the opinion that this operation took place a few months after the entry. It is our opinion that it took place at the beginning of initiation because it would prevent boys from running away, since they could not run fast on account of

7 M. Eliade, Naissances mystiques, p. 61.

8 Idem, op. cit., p. 58.

9 Idem, op. cit., p. 59.

the operation itself. This seems to have been the hardest part of masculine initiation. It would seem that it was advisable to put it at the beginning of the rite in order to encourage boys to endure the rest easily. This problem of time has little consequence on the nature of the institution. What is important is its realization.

After the operation of circumcision, neophytes went to the initiation hut for the first time. On their way they were asked to sing or recite the following verses which are known by their introductory word: halikokotoana.

Tlase tlase koana,
 Down down below,
 Tau lia rora,
 Lions roar.
 Li rora li jang?
 They roar, what do they eat?
 Li rora li ja nyopa.
 They roar while eating the sterile.
 Nyopa ramosito,
 The sterile, father of the fault [sin],
 Ramosita hlolo,
 Father of the fault [sin]: hare,
 Hlolo maritsane,
 The hare crawling,
 O ritsa ka mpana,
 He crawls on his stomach,
 Ka mpana tšoana,
 On his dark stomach,
 E chele ke hlaha.
 Burned by the fire.

This myth is about mysterious lions which inhabit subterranean places where they devour sterile people. The second part speaks about a crawling beast that has been burnt. The aim of the myth is to terrorize boys. The myth was recited while going to the initiation hut. At this time a man

playing the role of a mythical person and hence called "wolf" made a fire in the hut. Boys were told that the "wolf" had lighted the fire. The identity of that "wolf" remained mysterious almost till the end of the initiation. Boys spent six to eight months at the initiation.¹⁰ This "novitiate", if we may call it that, was built in a secluded place, preferably far from the village so that neophytes could not be seen during their period of training and formation. Women, children and strangers, and other non-initiated people were not allowed to go there.¹¹ Separation of neophytes during the initiation period, be it in the jungle, open-veld or anywhere, symbolized mythical death to the profane condition and the existence in spirit of new born beings.¹² Women bringing food for the boys had to leave it a certain distance away where directors or boys had to take it. If by mistake an uncircumcised man or boy went to the initiation place, he was circumcised.

Initiated men on the other hand had the right to visit neophytes. Nevertheless, they could not enter the hut itself because it was believed that the operation would take a longer time to heal.¹³ Visiting men could even give

10 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 326-328.

11 Idem, op. cit., p. 330.

12 M. Eliade, Naissances mystiques, p. 46.

13 E. Casalis, op. cit., p. 330.

lectures or lessons if they wanted to. The director was called mosue. He was chosen carefully. He had to be a man of proved qualities. He had to be a virtuous man, honest, temperate especially in matters of sex. During the initiation period he had to abstain from sexual relations. He had to be a good musician. He was assisted by a certain number of directors who could go to the village if they wanted to.

Initiation activities may be classified into physical, intellectual and moral. Physical activities included daily military training and exercises. Neophytes were taught how to throw the spear with force and precision and how to avoid them.¹⁴ They were also taught how to use the shield. They were flogged often in order to give them opportunities of enduring pain and suffering courageously without complaints. They were offered many other occasions of suffering, such as sleeping without sufficient blankets in cold seasons, going to bed late, eating less than usual. They were not allowed to complain. Absolute obedience to a severe regulation and training was asked of them. An attempt to escape was punished severely. Casalis says that sometimes capital punishment was given to punish such run-aways.¹⁵ The training of initiation was so hard that

14 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 326.

15 Idem, op. cit., p. 329.

weaklings would hardly survive. Whoever died there was buried secretly and the accident was kept secret till the last day.

Intellectual activities consisted of musical lessons and certain lectures about mysteries of nature. Short poems about the sun, the moon, the earth, animals, hunting and army expeditions were taught. In fact boys had to learn some of these poems by heart. Much attention was paid to rhyme and poetical measure.¹⁶ Principal phenomena of nature were taught by means of allegory. The sun was compared to a man, the moon to a woman, the earth to an animal whose bones were stones and its blood water and on it little beasts fought. At this time neophytes were taught tribal traditions.

Moral instructions consisted of a certain initiation to the mystery of life, especially to the mystery of the origin and continuation of human life. Boys were given information about the physiognomy and anatomy of the genital organs. They were taught or given information about sexual relations by means of descriptive poems. They were told the what, the when, the where, the why, and the how of those relations. Sterility was presented as a misfortune, shame and a disgrace.

Other moral lessons were given by dictation while one of the directors flogged them. While they were given

¹⁶ E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 331.

the moral code, the following words were said: "Amendez-vous! Soyez hommes! Craignez le vol, craignez l'adultère! Honorez vos pères et mères. Obéissez à vos chefs."¹⁷

D. Closing Day

At the end of the eighth or the ninth month, neophytes were anointed with a red ochre. They put on new or at least decent clothing. They chose new names for themselves. At a given signal they ran to the village without looking back at the initiation hut where they were supposed to have left their foolish habits and evil dispositions of infancy.¹⁸ The hut was burned together with their old clothes used during the initiation. At the village, the boys were received with joyous acclamations and dances, which were followed by a big festival during which the boys then called makoloane recited their own poems and compositions.

From then on, as Casalis says, they were considered no more as boys but as men devoted to public service.¹⁹ They were to work without pay. They could be sent by the chief at any time. Above all they had to work for a good

17 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 329.

18 Idem, op. cit., p. 332.

19 Idem, ibid.

reputation by avoiding late nocturnal meetings and journeys. They were men and could marry if they wanted to.

2. Initiation of Girls

A. Preparatory Rites

Here we intend to give a brief outline of feminine initiation of the Basotho without insisting on minor differences between local customs of the Batlokoa and the Bataung and so on. Non-initiated girls, like boys, were considered incapable of contracting marriage. They were considered unable to accept the responsibilities of life. This idea was so popular that uninitiated girls were thought to be unable to bear children. Out of the love of motherhood and, perhaps, out of curiosity, these girls sometimes volunteered to be initiated. Exceptions existed just the same.

We think sometimes that feminine initiation rites were very rare. As a matter of fact they are found in Northern territories of Australia, in India, New Zealand, in Brazil (Coroado), among the Shuswap, Wintum and other tribes of North America. They are found in Africa among various tribes such as the Vendas, Pedis, Bechuanas, Xosa, Swahili and others.²⁰

It is true, however, that feminine initiation was more surrounded with mystery than that of men on account of

20 M. Eliade, Naissances mystiques, p. [91]-94.

the natural apparition of biological changes and of the menstrual cycle.²¹ It was the time when girls became conscious of a real transformation that took place in their constitution.

Among the Basotho such elements existed also. The time of admission varied according to authors. Fr. Laydevant, for example, says that girls were admitted at the age of puberty, most probably after the first menstrual period.²² According to Casalis, girls entered the initiation school at the age of twelve or thirteen.²³ Fr. Lebreton in his famous article tells us that circumcision of girls took place at the age of thirteen and fifteen, sometimes a little later, seldom earlier than that.²⁴ In spite of these varied precisions, the authors agree that initiation period was during the time of puberty. Preparatory rites were called ho likisa which meant "to help another to try". These ceremonies included, in the first place, what was called "la course à la lune" as Fr. Lebreton has said. This ceremony took place at

21 M. Eliade, Naissances mystiques, p. 102.

22 F. Laydevant, O.M.I., "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Basutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 317.

23 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 334.

24 H. Lebreton, O.M.I., "La fille chez les Basutos", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1929, p. 216.

full moon. Aspirants were brought to a river to take a bath. Thereafter they were flogged in order to give them occasions of enduring suffering. This was supposed to prepare them for the difficulties of conjugal life. This scourging rite was performed usually by a sterile woman so that the girls might hate sterility. This ceremony was repeated several times.

B. Opening Day

On the day of the official entry a big feast was celebrated. Parents, relatives, neighbours and friends were invited. After eating, drinking, singing and dancing, everybody slept outdoors except the aspirants, who from that time on were separated from the rest of the community. They spent the night in a hut carefully guarded. That marked the beginning of their "novitiate".²⁵

Early on the following day, neophytes were led to a nearby river where bathing and penitential ceremonies took place among the cries and the remarks of more or less drunken women. Neophytes returned to the village at sunset. Their initiation hut was built in the village itself and "consecrated" by the medicine-man. All males except very

25 H. Lebreton, "La fille chez les Basutos", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1929, p. 238-244.

young boys were prohibited from approaching the hut. Similar restrictions applied to non-initiated women.

C. Proper Initiation Rites

The first ceremony was called marallo. In the afternoon a group of women and girls hid behind a hill. Later on neophytes and their matron joined them. Both groups went to a neighbouring river where neophytes were undressed and lashed once more. In the evening neophytes were carried like children to the village. It is to be noted that neophytes were still undressed during this last rite.

Nudity during initiation rites had many symbolisms. It was a symbol of the primordial state where shame and sin did not exist, that is to say the state of infancy. It was the symbol of primeval happiness. Nudity of this kind symbolized the unprovocative and innocent state of children.²⁶ For the Basotho women, it is probable that ritual nudity during this ceremony was the symbol of ignorance and incapacity to act for oneself. This is perhaps the reason why neophytes were carried like children. Neophytes were carried in a race. During this race women standing by had to shout in panic announcing the arrival of the "wolf" which was a mythical person. This shouting and announcing of the "wolf" were meant to terrorize the neophytes. This mythical

26 M. Eliade, Naissances mystiques, p. 153.

"wolf" seems to play a role similar to that of the bull-roarers in Australian initiation rites.²⁷ The neophytes spent the night with initiated girls who had to accompany them wherever they went.

The second ceremony, which formed the essential part of the initiation, was called the ceremony of malibeng. It took place at the river or at a near dam from which the mythical person was said to emerge. It was also called the ceremony of motanyane (another name for the mythical person).²⁸ At dawn, the neophytes went to the river, where they were ordered to stand or kneel while matrons sprinkled them with water as long as they wanted. After this bathing ceremony, the neophytes were ordered to lie down. They prepared themselves to meet motanyane whom they were not allowed to see nor to look at. Fr. Lebreton says that motanyane was: "le personnage mythique qui est supposé devoir et circoncrire les filles".²⁹ In fact it was a group of women wearing terrifying masks which gave them a horrible appearance. While this mythical actor emerged from the water, as the neophytes were told, assisting women shouted and yelled in order to frighten

27 M. Eliade, Naissances mystiques, p. 42-43.

28 H. Lebreton, "La fille chez les Basutos", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1929, p. 239-240.

29 Idem, ibid., p. 289.

them. This mysterious person began to lash the girls mercilessly. When she was satisfied she retired in exactly the same way as she had appeared.

Casalis calls this person a big snake or serpent instead of motanyane.³⁰ He also gives a slightly different description of the ceremony. According to him, girls were ordered to cover their heads while they waited for the serpent which was supposed to devour them mythically.

The role of motanyane and the serpent are, nevertheless, similar. The apparition of their mysterious person was followed by a banquet. No villagers were admitted to this banquet. At night the novices were led to the village, and guarded carefully.

This ceremony was followed by the distribution of the official symbolic garments of initiation. This consisted of a dress and a blanket of leather. Besides these, girls wore four or five ropes of straw which were called likholokoane around their waists. These ropes were supposed to ensure successful conception and delivery. On their faces they wore a kind of veil called leaira which was made of thin ropes of straw neatly knitted together. With this veil they hid their faces in order that they could not be seen by men till the end of the initiation. Casalis

30 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 334.

describes this veil as "emblème de la pudeur qui doit désormais régler leurs actions".³¹ From then on they had to carry forked sticks on which they would hang ropes necessary to bind fire-wood. Their bodies were painted with a black ochre called pilo. At this time they were given new masculine names, which were made by an addition of the masculine prefix ra- to their former girl names.³² Neophytes were obliged from that time until the end of their initiation to behave like men. In order to do that they were asked to be rough, to carry objects like men on their shoulders not on their heads as women do. They were ordered to march in a single file slowly singing melancholic songs every morning when they left the village.

Their daily activities were partially to work in the fields. The reason of this kind of work was to give some opportunities to learn how to work in case they ever had the occasion, because they would have to do that kind of work in the future. They collected some wood and were given time to amuse themselves also. At night they would sing to the accompaniment of a drum. Fr. Lebreton says that one of the activities of neophytes was to steal maize, potatoes and

31 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 334.

32 Idem, op. cit., p. 240; cf. also F. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Basutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 318.

chickens.³³ Casalis and Fr. Laydevant do not mention this point. Whenever they met somebody they asked for tšœli, that is, any kind of gift. If their request was not granted they threatened, illtreated or insulted people.

A month later, after the investiture, neophytes were led to the river in the evening to meet motanyane for the second time. The same apparition and mythical death took place. On the following day they washed away the black ochre and anointed themselves with a white one which was called phepa. During the night the mythical person-motanyane distributed gifts and prizes.

Feminine initiation was also a period of information. Besides practical lessons on agriculture and obedience and perseverance neophytes were taught music. These elements were common to initiation rites of other bantu tribes too.³⁴

One of the most important information given during the initiation was conjugal life, especially sexuals problems. Neophytes were told the role and duty of women in the process of procreation. These lessons were given by

33 H. Lebreton, "La fille chez les Basutos", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1929, p. 241; cf. also J.-E. Siordet, Au Lessouto et au Zambèze, Paris-Genève, Société des Missions Evangéliques, 1926, p. 49-50.

34 M. Eliade, Naissances mystiques, p. 41, 100.

detailed poems which described the sexual organs of both sexes as well as the implied sexual relations. Neophytes had to memorize these poems. Sterility was presented to them as an evil, a disgrace and shame. Probably it is at this time that girls had to stretch their genital organs ope manu os vaginae prolatando. When sufficient information was given cloing festivities were prepared. It is to be noted that these instructions were not only biological but also spiritual for Eliade says: "l'initiation féminine par excellence est l'introduction au mystère de la génération, symbole primordial de la régénération spirituelle."³⁵

D. Closing Day

On the eve of the closing day neophytes went to the river to meet motanyane for the last time. They were washed and given new or at least decent clothing. Their old clothes were burned. They were considered as adults, ready for marriage and by that fact they entered the group of matrons. A big banquet was celebrated in their honour. All the people were invited. This is the only ceremony at which men could take part, because feminine initiation was strictly reserved for women. The law of secrecy was rigidly observed as in the case of masculine initiation rites.

35 M. Eliade, Naissances mystiques, p. 172.

E. Initiation and Morality

Initiation is usually classified as immoral. Eliade is also of the opinion that youths, especially in Africa and Oceania, enjoyed much sexual liberty after their initiation.³⁶ Such obscenities and immorality existed in primitive Caucasian regions, among the Stuks of Esturia, in Trobriand Islands and in Sierra Leone.³⁷ He mentions that sexual licence existed in primitive Russia and Ukraine.³⁸

Fr. Laydevant speaking about the Basotho wrote that "de même que la jeunesse phénicienne ou juive se prostituait en honneur de Baal, ainsi les jeunes filles basutos, au terme de l'initiation, ont à subir, sinon une vraie prostitution, tout au moins une profanation de leur virginité".³⁹ The author put the immorality at the end or towards the end of initiation. His reason for that affirmation is that there was a connection between the Basotho initiation and that of the Phoenicians. It is this connection which made him conclude that prostitution existed among the Basotho girls at the end of their initiation. It is to be noted that feminine initiation did not exist among the Jews. Therefore,

36 M. Eliade, Naissances mystiques, p. 61-62.

37 Idem, op. cit., p. 165-167.

38 Idem, op. cit., p. 101-102.

39 F. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Basutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 318.

the conclusion of the author is not exact. On the other hand Fr. Laydevant has not given a historical proof of the time and place of the meeting of the Basotho and the Jews. Therefore, his conclusion about prostitution is not proved. It is no more than a conjecture. This conclusion does not agree with description given by Fr. Lebreton.⁴⁰ According to the latter there was no time or occasion for prostitution during the initiation or at the end of it. He affirms that men took no part in feminine initiation rites. All that was related to initiation was reserved to women. Fr. Lebreton does not mention the presence of men during the ceremonies at the river.⁴¹ In the village the neophytes were guarded carefully and they spent the night with initiated girls. Here once more Fr. Lebreton does not mention the presence of men.⁴² On the opening day the girls were separated from the rest of the community; they were closed in a hut alone.⁴³ On the final day men were invited and they took part: "ils y prendront part sans cependant se mêler trop aux femmes, ni surtout approcher des 'Bale'."⁴⁴ They had to keep away from

⁴⁰ H. Lebreton, "La fille chez les Basutos", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1929, p. 243.

⁴¹ Idem, loc. cit., p. 238-239.

⁴² Idem, loc. cit., p. 238-244.

⁴³ Idem, loc. cit., p. 241-243.

⁴⁴ Idem, loc. cit., p. 243.

the girls. In the above mentioned quotations Fr. Lebreton does not mention the presence of men during night activities of initiation. Fr. Laydevant does not mention even a single occasion when prostitution took place. The silence of Fr. Lebreton does not deny the existence of prostitution, but in a detailed description like his such a silence seems to imply the opposite.

During the day neophytes were out in the open fields with their matron either working, receiving instructions or amusing themselves in one way or another. The Basotho girls during the initiation period, as Fr. Lebreton says, asked for gifts, not for prostitution.⁴⁵ They asked for food, amulets, money and for bracelets.

After the initiation there was a possibility of prostitution. We do not have proofs to declare its taking place as in a group or as part of the initiation rite. Fr. Laydevant does not give us instances of such an event either. He does not substantiate what is no more than a suspicion.

To say that initiation was not at all morally bad would be untrue. To say that it was totally morally bad would be no less untrue. Therefore, one has to explain what he means by the immorality of initiation. As we have seen,

⁴⁵ H. Lebreton, "La fille chez les Basutos", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1929, p. 241.

some songs of the initiation described sexual relations. Such poems were learned by the neophytes as means of information. We cannot deny the danger of temptations and the occasion of temptations which could come from those poems. That such poems had a powerful suggestive exhortation cannot be denied. The danger of scandal existed undoubtedly. But would it be right to conclude that persons who recited them were automatically prostitutes? Is it correct that any information concerning problems of sex is sinful and immoral? Does every girl who takes part in such lessons of information necessarily become a prostitute afterwards? Prudence, of course, and honest intention had to be safeguarded in such points. We cannot judge each case here about those who participated in initiation ceremonies and about those who gave such lessons. To judge the whole institution we have to look at its end or intention. If, indeed, the aim of the Basotho was to instruct boys and girls, to teach them their duty and their role in the generation of the tribe and to teach them their duty in marriage, our judgment on initiation should be proportionate. If some of the means used were not good, then our judgment should be about means, not about the end of the institution. If a part of the institution was morally bad, then our judgment should be about that part and as a result not too universal. Westermann says: "Néanmoins, de pareilles considérations ne devraient pas

amener à condamner la coutume globalement."⁴⁶ Therefore, initiation of the Basotho, on account of some morally dangerous parts, was immoral. It is certain that instructions of the kind could be given otherwise. Therefore, it would be good if the manner of instruction, particularly instruction on sexual questions, could be changed, given in less provocative fashion.

Conclusion

For the Basotho initiation was a school for physical, intellectual and moral training as understood by those people at that time. It offered adults the occasion of giving information to boys and girls about the origin of life, especially that of the tribe, and about the continuation of it by generation. Initiated people were taught their duties and the tribal moral code. It was the time of handing over the tribal traditions.

It is true that moral abuses crept in on account of ignorance, unworthy persons and the special accent and emphasis on sexuality, which resulted in less instruction given about moral and religious traditions of the tribe. Nevertheless, we should not close our eyes to the psychological values and influence of this institution as a symbol and myth.

⁴⁶ D. Westermann, Noirs et blancs en Afrique, Paris, Payot, 1937, p. 172.

CHAPTER VII

CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE SACRED

In the preceding chapter we enumerated and explained some religious symbols which existed in the institutions of the ancient Basotho. If it is true that religious characteristics emerge as religion itself emerges, what religious characteristics did the ancient Basotho have? What predominant attitude did they have in regard to those symbols?

Our aim is to find out whether the ancient Basotho really had the sense of the sacred, whether they had the experience of the sacred. We do not intend to prove whether or not their object of worship was really sacred. We would like to know whether they had the feeling of the holy towards their object of cult. The objective here is to find out the religious reactions of the Basotho. We shall find out whether their fear was based on a religious attitude.

1. Elements of the Sacred

The existence of fear among the ancient Basotho seems to be an indication of the attitude of the holy. This is normal in magico-ancestral religions, because the sentiment of the holy is the commonest religious feeling that primitives had of the divinity. Without a proper definition by genus and specific difference, they experienced the order between beings and the imposing numen.

According to them, some objects could not be approached without danger unless the person concerned was prepared by a ritual purification. Certain foods were called impure, others pure. All these things were classified under two major groups, namely, the secular in opposition to the religious, the profane in opposition to the sacred. Indeed the distinction between secular and religious, profane and sacred has always existed among people for different reasons.

This distinction is not explained by chance nor by common collective agreement nor by simple coincidence. It is based on the collective archetypes and the reactions stimulated in them by the objective phenomena. This happens when one is in front of an object or person charged with some power or mysterious numen by which that object or person imposes itself or himself on the others. The very strange, mysterious, uncomprehended and incomprehensible nature of a thing stirs in the knowing person the feeling of something canny, eerie or weird. It produces in the primitive man sentiments of fear and horror.¹

Such a mysterious atmosphere is found during the medico-religious ritual by which the medicine-man consulted divining bones. As Casalis explains, this medico-religious minister used "une langue inconnue pour se faire respecter

¹ R. Otto, The Idea of the Holy, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1923, p. 36, 147.

du vulgaire".² We know that Zulu and Xosa expressions were employed in this ritual by the Basotho medicine-men. We know also that most of the Basotho did not understand these languages. Therefore, for the majority of the people the ritual had a mysterious and incomprehensible appearance. That is why they respected the medicine-man. Their respect was a consequence of the fear produced by the strange atmosphere of the rite. Fear and respect are manifested and confirmed by the fact that the solution given was unquestionable.³

Anything unusual, extraordinary and novel has always been a stimulus of reactions of fear. Among ancient Basotho black sheep and goats had this influence. They aroused fear and feelings of the mysterious by their rare occurrence and unusualness. Manifestations of the unaccustomed and the extraordinary generally provoke fear and withdrawal.⁴ It is clear that death and sickness are phenomena which come within the category of the unusual and frightening. People are never used to them. The body of a dead man casts a spell on the people.

2 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, Paris, Société des Missions Évangéliques, 1933, p. 358-359.

3 H. Lebreton, O.M.I., "Mort et funérailles", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 36 (1931), p. 283.

4 M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, London-New York, Sheed and Ward, 1958, p. 18.

This attitude and reaction to death and sickness was found among ancient Basotho also. Burial ceremonies were performed as secretly as possible. Work was forbidden on the day of the death of an influential person or of the medicine-man.⁵ Sickness produced horror and fear in the people, that is why moral preparation and purification was required when a sacrifice was offered in favour of the sick person: "on écartera soigneusement les personnes souillées."⁶ Eliade says that unknown and extraordinary objects, rites and events are disturbing epiphanies.⁷ They show us the presence of something other than the natural, imaginary or real. They indicate the presence of something else. This apprehension or perception of the mysterious and the unaccustomed is a kind of meeting of the knowing person and an unknown or overpowering force which Otto calls the numen.⁸

Etymologically, numen comes from nuo which means to give a sign by the head, to show by a gesture of the head. From nuo a derivative word nutus was formed. It means a head sign, as a manifestation of order or of will. That is why numen signifies divine commanding power. From numen the

5 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 325.

6 Idea, op. cit., p. 312.

7 M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 19, 12-13.

8 R. Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p. 20.

qualificative or adjective numinous was formed. In Otto's work we find both words used to express the same idea; both are substantives. Now let us examine the nature of the numen.

2. Numen

According to Otto's description the numen or the numinous is a mysterious imposing power which produces an extraordinary trembling and terror.⁹ It is not any kind of perfection. It consists essentially of power and might. In comparison to the person in front of it, it is sublime and superior. It exceeds that person's strength. It is, therefore, naturally a certain greatness, a feeling of being overpowered, of absolute power. This superlative character of the numinous is based, as we have said, on the comparison made between it and the person who is seized or captured by it. The numinous is a quality of the objective reality. Caillois describes it as a force and a kind of energy which is eminently efficacious and active.¹⁰ On account of its activity and transcendent power it is hard to manage, handle and control. Further, it is a quality of the sacred which

9 R. Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p. 144.

10 R. Caillois, L'homme et le sacré, Paris, Gallimard, 1950, p. 21.

may be stable or ephemeral.¹¹ It adheres to certain things of cult, places unusual or lofty, or on certain persons like kings. It may also be a property of certain special occasions, days or unusual events and times set aside for determined services.

Eliade explains taboos as interdicts due to temporary concentration of power in some person or thing. Besides taboos based on temporary powers, there are taboos based on the specific mode of being of the person or thing tabooed. Kings, for example, are absolute powerhouses of forces, that is why they were respected, feared and almost unapproachable. In the mind of the primitives precautions were necessary when dealing with such persons.

Eliade divided things into profane and hierophanies. By their nature, hierophanies manifested modalities of the sacred.¹² More than this hierophanies were also kratophanies because they manifested power also.¹³ All beings are of various degrees of kratophanies by which they belong to another order of beings, and enjoy certain prerogatives and privileges.

11 R. Caillois, L'homme et le sacré, p. 18.

12 M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 17-18.

13 Idem, op. cit., p. 10-18.

3. Intuition

The numinous is known by no rational and progressive activity, but by intuition. It is seized by a kind of intellectual sympathy or feeling by which the knowing person is carried, as it were, to the internal structure of an object. It is an act by which the knowing person is introduced to the intimate nature of the object. The knowledge one has by intuition is unique, inexpressible and indescribable. Intuition of the numinous is an irresistible act which makes man feel that he is in the presence of something divine, imposing, heavy, powerful and commanding.¹⁴ It is by this act that something inaccessible to conceptual comprehension is revealed. "Dans ce fait, as Vincent says, quelque chose se révèle comme inaccessible à la compréhension conceptuelle et constitue ce que les Grecs appelaient 'arreton' ineffable."¹⁵

Likewise, in the experience of the numinous one seizes something different from oneself, something more profound than particular impressions, something really outside of oneself. The object of intuition as religious experience of the holy is not only the numinous but also the omnipotent

14 M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 144.

15 A. Vincent, "Trois notions religieuses", in Ami du Clergé, 32 (1962), p. 500.

being. This intuition-knowledge of the numinous is in fact the stimulus of many subjective reactions which we must now explain.

4. Reactions

A. Awe

The numinous produces a state of silence and recollection in the soul. The person feels the imposing dignity of it. He has an impression of being captured by it. This imperative power fills him with an impression of solemnity and amazement and leaves him aghast. As Vincent affirms: "Cette forme, en se manifestant, crée dans l'âme un état de recueillement solennel et de saisissement."¹⁶ The perfection of the numinous makes man aware of his nothingness and of his humble state. The more he admires the perfection of that power, the more he sees his imperfection. The more he contemplates its sublimity, the more he sees his imperfection, the more he becomes creature-conscious. Briefly, man in front of the numen undergoes the emotion of a creature; in other words he becomes aware of his ^{ndc}dependence on it. He feels abased and overwhelmed by his own nothingness. He realizes the contrast between the Above-all-creature and

¹⁶ A. Vincent, "Trois notions religieuses", in Ami du Clergé, 32 (1962), p. 500.

himself as creature.¹⁷ Combination of the intuition of the perfection of the numinous and the simultaneous intuition of the imperfection of the creature gives rise to the self-subjection of the creature to the overpowerful somethingness. This act of subjection is followed by an act of veneration and respect.¹⁸

B. Tremendum

The imposing power of the numinous produces another effect in the soul of the person in front of it. As we have seen, the numinous has incomparable power. It exceeds human power, to such a degree that it is unmanageable and therefore uncontrollable by the creature. Since man cannot control nor moderate it, he finds himself in a dangerous position.¹⁹ For this reason the power in front of him is also known as a dangerous thing. Consequently, it produces fear and horror.²⁰ The numen is the something from which people are inclined to shrink. It is an object which urges man to look for shelter and protection.²¹ It is terrible and gives rise to a retreat, to a backing away and a retiring. This

17 R. Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p. 10.

18 Idem, op. cit., p. 13.

19 R. Caillois, L'homme et le sacré, p. 21, 43.

20 Idem, op. cit., p. 30.

21 Idem, op. cit., p. 56.

fear gives reverence the characteristic of the tremendum. It is reverence mixed with some elements of fear. Nevertheless, it is not servile fear, because it has some elements of confidence and hope to receive help from the numen itself. In other words, man recognizes the power of the sacred and his own incapacity. He is afraid of that uncontrollable power. At the same time he realizes his dependence on it and therefore he hopes to get the necessary protection. It is to be noted that the numen is the cause of these varied reactions.

The role played by fear and imagination among the ancient Basotho is a fact. Its existence is seen easily in the rites and ceremonies of their magico-ancestral religion. Certain things, persons, objects, and places of cult stimulated reactions of fear, trembling and reverence. This may be illustrated by some examples taken from their religious rites. A good number of our examples are taken from their medical rites because, as Casalis said, "médecine, est-elle chez ces peuples une affaire presque entièrement religieuse".²² The horn and all its contents, which Casalis does not hesitate to call sacred elements, were feared and venerated in a special way.²³ This horn was considered as the

22 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 311.

23 Idem, op. cit., p. 320.

powerhouse of the numinous. Whoever possessed or took care of it was considered to participate in its imposing and imperative power. The horn, according to Casalis, was source of confidence and severity.²⁴ All instruments of the magico-ancestral worship were venerated in more or less the same fashion. This was the case for divining bones.²⁵ Nobody could touch them without the permission of the medicine-man. Persons who took part in religious services were considered to have a higher participation of the power of the sacred objects and rites. This is manifested by the fear, hope, confidence and respect the people had for the medicine-man — doctor and religious minister. The chief of the village was a sacred person. He acquired his sacred character by the initiation ceremonies, as Casalis said: "c'est la cérémonie de la circoncision qui donne son caractère sacré."²⁶ He had some degree of the numen because the lustral horn resided in his home also. Bale (neophytes) in feminine initiation were likewise sacred; they could not be touched.²⁷ No harm could be done to them not only by women but also by men.

24 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 320.

25 Idem, ibid.

26 Idem, op. cit., p. 327.

27 H. Lebreton, O.M.I., "La fille chez les Basutos", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1929, p. 241.

Something more remarkable is the fear of the balimo. An overcast day was venerated also. No work in the fields could be done lest the order of nature be disturbed. This is well said by Casalis:

A l'approche de nuages qui semblent promettre de la pluie, on se garde d'aller aux champs, ou l'on s'en retire en toute hâte, afin de se recueillir en présence de la bénédiction désirée et de peur de troubler la nature en opération.²⁸

This was one of the sacred days of the religious calendar of the ancient Basotho.

C. Fascinans

We have seen that the fear man had for the numinous was mixed with confidence of help and success.²⁹ Man is afraid and trembles in front of the numinous. But his fear is not totally pessimistic; it has an optimistic aspect. Awe and admiration of the numinous is prolonged and perfected by a tranquil mood of deepest worship, by a more or less lasting attitude of the soul which vibrates and becomes resonant till the soul resumes its profane, non-religious mood of everyday life.³⁰ The numinous produces within the soul a taste and desire for itself. It attracts the soul and

28 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 325.

29 R. Caillois, L'homme et le sacré, p. 21.

30 R. Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p. 12.

allures it with charm.³¹ It is in this that the antinomy of the numinous consists. One is full of reserve on account of the unknown, imposing and superior power of the numinous; at the same time one is attracted by it inasmuch as one wants to strengthen and enrich oneself with its majestic power. The sentiment of interest is a partial manifestation of the dialectical nature and activity of the numinous.³² It is the quality by which the numinous provokes in the knowing person fear and desire. It is by virtue of this quality that we approach the numinous instead of running away.³³ As Otto adds, one has the impulse to turn to it and make it his own. It attracts and fascinates irresistibly.³⁴ This fascination corresponds to the bounty of the superior object or to the thing which is considered that way. Vincent summarizes this idea in the following words:

Et pourtant, malgré la frayeur qu'il inspire, malgré la crainte révérentielle qui remplit l'homme et qui devrait le tenir éloigné, le sacré possède quelque chose qui séduit, qui ravit, qui croît en intensité jusqu'à produire le délire et l'ivresse. C'est ce que Otto appelle "le fascinant".³⁵

31 R. Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p. 147.

32 A. Vincent, "Trois notions religieuses", in Ami du Clergé, 32 (1962), p. 504.

33 R. Caillois, L'homme et le sacré, p. 21, 39.

34 R. Otto, op. cit., p. 30.

35 A. Vincent, loc. cit., p. 501.

The Basotho seem to have had this reaction of fascinations, because on one hand they feared the horn and its contents, on the other they desired to secure and to strengthen themselves by the possession and contact with it. That is why at the outbreak of an epidemic or when the tribe was in danger of famine or war the people were purified by the aspersion with a liquid mixed with some contents of the horn.³⁶

D. Sacred: Set Aside

By intuition man knows a value transcending all notions. That value asks for a certain ritual preparation and purity, otherwise evil may be caused to the unfavourable and the unprepared. This is one of the consequences which depends on the ambivalent nature of the numen. The sacred is pure and impure; it is defiled and undefiled. On account of its purity it fascinates and attracts. Whoever approaches it has to be prepared, must have the requisite dispositions, otherwise he has no right to touch it. We say that unworthy contact with the sacred becomes an occasion of condemnation and malediction. Without proper ritual preparation it is dangerous to come near any consecrated object.³⁷ Any contact with such objects or persons is thought to produce an

36 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 322.

37 M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 17.

upheaval and disorder in nature. Those defiled things or persons are called tabooed. The word is Polynesian by origin. Ethnologists have taken it in order to signify objects, places and persons forbidden and cut off from secular use because contact with them is dangerous, that is to say, it is thought to be so. Caillois explains taboo as ritual interdictions whose purpose is to prevent dangerous effects which may follow the contact of a superior power by an inferior one.³⁸ It is something similar to a negative category which consists essentially in a defense, and in a negative prescription. In other words, it is a prohibition by which sacred objects are set aside and separated from profane contact. This setting-apart sometimes has positive effects, it does not merely isolate, but it invites too.³⁹

We know that the Basotho had an indefinite number of taboos. Not all of them had a religious character, nor did all of them exist in a religious context. Among those which were religious we may mention the rites of initiation. Prohibitions concerning the initiation hut were some of the religious taboos of the Basotho.⁴⁰ It was strictly forbidden for women, girls and uninitiated men to visit the initiation

38 R. Caillois, L'homme et le sacré, p. 23, 40.

39 M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 18.

40 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 228-230.

place of boys. Similar restrictions and prohibitions existed for men, boys and uninitiated women in regard to the initiation hut of girls. Such places were considered to have a participation in the power of the horn with whose contents the hut was anointed by the medicine-man. Casalis speaking of this anointing rite says:

ce même sorcier badigeonnera de drogues quelques bouts de bois qu'on emportera à la maison où demeureront les "Bale", et qui auront la vertu d'éloigner l'influence pernicieuse de mauvais esprit.⁴¹

That is why neophytes had to undergo the same anointings before their initiation. Casalis mentions a day of prohibition or abstinence, if it may be so called. People were forbidden to work in the fields on the day of the death of the medicine-man or of an influential man.⁴² It was believed that disobedience to this prescription would cause hail and disturbance in the order of nature. Garments used by boys during their initiation could not be used by young women and girls because the Basotho believed that they had sacred power by which they could harm women and render them sterile.

Sticks used by bale during the initiation could not be jumped over by the people unless they had given them ransom. These sticks were considered to have the numen. As a

⁴¹ E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 239.

⁴² Idem, op. cit., p. 325.

result all those who did not take part in feminine initiations could not touch them nor jump over them without danger. Another point to illustrate the sacred character of initiation rites is the prohibition of marital relations. All the directors of the initiation were forbidden to have marital relations during the period of initiation. This prohibition was backed by a belief that boys could not get their circumcision operation cured if such conjugal acts were exercised. During the harvest, people of immoral reputation were not allowed to put the harvest into the bags. They were considered to be impure and unworthy to touch the purified harvest.⁴³

E. Separation

The idea of the sacred is manifested by the attitude of the people towards sacred objects. The same idea is manifested clearly in the case of things which had become sacred by consecration. Any anointing rite was considered to add something to the objects anointed.⁴⁴ This quality could be a reality established between one object and another. It may be based on the new function by which a certain duty is fulfilled. For instance, pagan divining bones were sacred

⁴³ E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 314.

⁴⁴ R. Caillois, L'homme et le sacré, p. 22.

because of their functions. Sacred objects of this kind were kept in seclusion and separated from the others.

The ancient Basotho had some objects set apart from others because of their functions. The initiation hut of boys was built far from the village, in a remote place, where neophytes could not be seen easily.⁴⁵ Boys and girls on the preparatory festival of their initiation were separated from the rest of the community; they were carefully enclosed in a hut.⁴⁶ On the closing day a similar separation ritual was observed. The initiation period, especially that of boys, was a period of complete separation from the secular life of the village and from the family. As Casalis says, boys spent "plusieurs mois de reclusion" at the initiation place.⁴⁷ For girls, separation was less marked because their hut was in the village itself. But they were not allowed to mix with other people. They did most of their daily activities alone in the fields.

Conclusion

Religious language gives the name of sign to demonstrations and manifestations in which holiness or the sacred

45 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 328-330.

46 H. Lebreton, "La fille chez les Basutos", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1929, p. 241-243.

47 E. Casalis, op. cit., p. 326.

stands palpably self-revealed. During the time of the magico-ancestral religion of the Basotho, almost everything counted as a sign that could arouse in the people the sense of the holy. Every object was looked upon as having the capacity to excite the feeling of apprehended sanctity, having the capacity to stimulate people to open religious activity.

By so saying we do not mean that the Basotho did not make any distinction between profane and religious things. They did make such a distinction. But their religion was too closely connected with medicine. For that reason it is difficult to see what was simply medical and what was purely religious. This lack of clear distinctions made it hard to see merely religious reactions without some mixture of medicine and magic.

That is why their consciousness of the holy is manifested by their reactions towards the horn and divining bones, as well as to the unusual nature of black sheep.

The innumerable taboos respected by the Basotho show their respect which was motivated by the over-imposing numen of some objects and persons. Their reactions of veneration, respect, fear, confidence and hope before the magico-ancestral objects of cult are indications of their consciousness of the sacred.

CHAPTER VIII

IS ADAPTATION POSSIBLE?

Most people in the countries of the West are inclined to consider the Roman Rite as an absolutely immovable, ready-made rite that, as it were, fell down from heaven in order to remain unchanged. A close study of the history of the Church and of the "Roman" rite clearly shows that the Church did not have "Roman" rites till the conversion and foundation of the Church in Rome. History also reveals a steady evolution of ecclesiastical rites in so far as their external constitution is concerned.

The first Christian community of Jerusalem issued from Judaism and lived within the Jewish religious structure and institutions. The young Church with St. Peter and the Apostles at its head participated faithfully in the liturgical offices of the Temple.¹

With the extension of the Church outside the Palestinian community problems of adaptation arose. It is at this time that the problem of liturgical languages was discussed for the first time in Church history. It is at the same time also that the problem of circumcision of the neophytes in order to adhere to Christ was discussed.² Until

1 Act. 2:43, 3:1, 5:12.

2 Act. 15:7-11,28.

that time Christian worship was Jewish in character. With those problems a certain adaptation was called for.

Le culte chrétien était juif chez les Juifs, mais il ne s'était pas pour autant lié au judaïsme; il devait pareillement se faire grec chez les peuples hellénophones.³

That adaptation gave the cult of the Church a hellenistic character and marked the beginning of a variety of Greek rites which still exist to-day.

The implantation of the Church in the Greco-Roman world gave the Christian liturgy an occasion to assume local forms of Greco-Roman cult.

L'Eglise s'implantant dans le monde gréco-romain, la liturgie chrétienne épousa les formes cultuelles gréco-romaines, même celles qui jusqu'alors avaient servi les déviations manifestes du paganisme.⁴

That adaptation gave birth to the Roman rite.

It is a well known fact that the Church cannot be a stranger anywhere. She adapts herself according to circumstances of space and time. For the good and benefit of souls the Church assumes any local values and customs which are authentically religious.

Having discovered the religious symbols of the ancient Basotho, having analyzed their symbolism, is it too

³ A. Seuzois, O.K.I., La papauté et les missions au cours des six premiers siècles. Méthodologie antique et orientations modernes, Paris-Louvain, Ed. Eglise Vivante, [1953], p. 146.

⁴ Idem, op. cit., p. 147.

ambitious to study those symbols in view of adaptation? Briefly, is adaptation of ancient Basotho religious symbols possible? Do they possess authentic religious values which can be adapted or used in our Catholic rites? In this chapter we do not suggest adaptation. Our intention is to find out the possibility of such an adaptation. Our intention is to make an objective study and to find out authentic values of religious symbols of the Basotho.

1. Adaptable Figures of Sacraments

A. Initiation as a Figure of the Catechumenate

African initiation rites have been given more negative consideration than positive. Among authors who considered initiation in comparison with Christian traditions and faith we may mention Fr. Humphreys, who said that

initiation took place with many complicated ceremonies, and some useful training as well, but on the whole accompanied by very much that is totally distasteful to Christian tradition, and which may even be very disturbing psychologically.⁵

If indeed, initiation was distasteful to Christian tradition how can it be adapted? If it may be the cause of psychological disturbances can it be adapted for the good of Christians? It seems impossible at first sight.

⁵ N. Humphreys, O.P., Missionary in South Africa, London, Blackfriars Publications, 1953, p. 76.

Westermann on the other hand admits the existence of religious ideas in initiation rites but concludes:

Il n'est donc pas facile de comprendre comment elle peut continuer à exister dans une communauté chrétienne si elle n'est pas profondément modifiée.⁶

This statement is not as strict as the previous one. By so saying Westermann admitted the possibility of adaptation of African initiation rites. For him, however, that adaptation would have to affect the heart and the fundamental elements of that institution.

For Fr. Lebreton adaptation seems impossible.⁷ Accordingly, it would be good to do away with the rite in question specially feminine initiation. These opinions would seem to make any talk of adaptation of initiation incompatible with Christian belief.

a. Inscription and Entry Rites. — It is a well known fact that pagan initiation rites were held at a special period. Most of the ceremonies were performed at night and in the evening, for the simple reason that darkness was a symbol of transition. For instance, among the Basotho, immediate preparations began in the afternoon when boys

⁶ D. Westermann, Noirs et blancs en Afrique, Paris, Payot, 1937, p. 172.

⁷ H. Lebreton, C.M.I., "La fille chez les Basutos", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1929, p. 242.

manifested their request for initiation by hiding themselves in the fields. In the evening a group of warriors went to get them. A procession was made to the village public grounds where entry rites were celebrated. On their arrival, rites of malingoana began.⁸ These rites consisted of a test for courage. In that test boys had to wrestle a bullock empty-handed till one of its front legs was amputated. Then followed penitential rites of ho qacha in which each boy was flogged while he tried to catch a piece of meat suspended and swung to and fro purposely in front of him. That rite ended with the initial separation of neophytes from the community and the profane life of the village till the end of their initiation. After this separation of neophytes a big festival was celebrated. The night was passed in universal rejoicing.

Initiation rites for girls had similar introductory ceremonies. Remote preparations included the "race to the moon" — ho mathela khoeling. These took place at full moon at a nearby river where neophytes were scourged while they took their cold bath. The purpose of such penitential rites was to test them and to train them to endure pain and suffering patiently. Immediate rites for the beginning of initiation were celebrated at night at the public grounds.

⁸ E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, Paris, Société des Missions Evangéliques, 1933, p. 327-328.

Neophytes were separated from profane life of the community till the last day of their initiation.⁹ A big feast was likewise celebrated during the night.

Similar preparatory rites for baptism existed in the early period of the Church. As Fr. Daniélou says, preparation for baptism was introduced by the rite of enrolment, which consisted in the candidate's giving his name to the deacon in the evening.¹⁰ On the following day catechumens, accompanied by their godparents, underwent an examination in which they had to ensure their honesty and purity of intention. After this test, the bishop inscribed their names officially in the registers. From that time on candidates constituted a new group which was called symbolically the photizonenoi, that is to say, "those who are coming into the light". The Christian initiation period lasted the whole time of Lent.¹¹

Inscription and entry rites of Christian and Basotho initiations have three points in common. Neophytes formed special new groups which were more or less separated from

9 H. Lebreton, "La fille chez les Basutos", in Festivals Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1929, p. 216.

10 J. Daniélou, S.J., The Bible and the Liturgy, Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1956, p. [19]-20.

11 Idem, op. cit., p. [19].

profane community life. That separation was more strict in the masculine initiation of Basotho than for the feminine initiation and for Christian initiation too. In both initiations, entry rites included some tests and examinations. Basotho neophytes had their directors just as Christian neophytes had their godparents. Entry festivities took place at night in Basotho initiation; catechumens gave their names in the evening of the eve of Lent.

b. Daily Exercises. — In the primitive Church, catechumens were obliged to three functions during Lent. In the first place they were obliged to assist at the instruction part of the Mass. After the hour of Prime, catechumens were exorcized by the bishop or clerics.¹² The main purpose of exorcism was to free the soul little by little from the power of the demon. In other words, exorcism was essentially a rite of gradual purification and separation of neophytes from the influence of the devil. These exorcisms ended with the renunciation of the devil on the vigil of Easter, before the reception of Baptism. It has to be noted that while some were being exorcized, men stayed together in order to listen to some reading, while women in a group softly chanted psalms.¹³

12 J. Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, p. 24-25.

13 Idem, op. cit., p. 23.

Every morning after exorcisms catechesis began. All catechumens accompanied by their godparents and other Christians who wanted to follow instructions sat in a circle around the bishop for lessons. During those forty days the bishop explained Sacred Scripture.¹⁴ The symbol was handed to the catechumens and then explained. Later on the Pater Noster was also taught.¹⁵ Exorcisms in a way were negative instructions inasmuch as they intended a destruction of the devil's influence on the neophytes. Catechesis, on the contrary, was positive because it encouraged the adherence of neophytes to Christ. By catechesis, Christian doctrine was explained also.

Initiation rites of the Basotho had three parts similar to Christian daily functions, lessons and exorcisms. Whereas primitive Christians were obliged to assist at some liturgical services during Lent, Basotho boys had to learn and do military exercises daily.¹⁶ Basotho girls, on the other hand, had to learn and do practical work in the fields as preparation for married life. Christian catechumens were exorcised and encouraged to break away from the slavery of sin. Basotho neophytes were told: "Amendez-vous! Soyez

14 J. Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, p. 25.

15 A. Dondeyne, "La discipline des scrutins", in Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique, 28 (1932), p. 14-15.

16 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 328.

hommes! Craignez le vol, craignez l'adultère! Honorez vos pères et mères. Obéissez à vos chefs."¹⁷ Instruction during initiation of Basotho youths were abundant. In fact initiation was their school par excellence. Lessons on tribal traditions, nature, world, life, fertility, sexual and conjugal problems were given. Such lessons, however, were not given in a speculative view, they were given in order to be practiced, to be lived. Girls used to sing till late at night.¹⁸ Much attention was given to poetry, rhyme and poetical measure.¹⁹

c. Immediate Preparation. — Christian initiation rites were crowned by the administration of the sacrament of Baptism during the Easter vigil.²⁰ Rites of Baptism included three major sacred actions, namely, the entrance of neophytes into the baptistry, the laying aside of clothing accompanied with the anointing with holy oils and the renunciation of the devil which was followed by the profession of faith.

17 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 329.

18 H. Lebreton, "La fille chez les Basutos", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1929, p. 214.

19 E. Casalis, op. cit., p. 331.

20 J. Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, p. 26, 35, 41.

The entrance of the neophytes into the baptistry was symbolic like other Baptism rites. Neophytes, having entered the vestibule, undressed and stood facing the West. They outstretched their hands and then renounced the devil as if he were present saying: "I renounce you, Satan, and all your pomp and all your worship."²¹ The baptistry and the baptismal pool were symbols of danger, death and the tomb.²² This symbolism was derived from the symbolism of water which, according to the primitive mentality, was the dwelling place of the dragon of the sea — Behemoth. By association with water, the baptismal font was the seat of that dragon. It was the place of the devil; that is why baptismal water had to be blessed and exorcised. This symbolism is explicitly found in the following prayer of the greek rite:

Thou, Thou hast sanctified the waters of the Jordan by sending from on high Thy Holy Spirit, and Thou hast crushed the heads of the dragons hidden therein.²³

This symbolism of water as the seat of the devil also explains exorcism and the reason why neophytes had to renounce the devil as if he were present.

The renunciation was made facing the West because the West, for the primitive mentality, was a symbol of death,

21 J. Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, p. 26.

22 Idem, op. cit., p. 41-44.

23 Idem, op. cit., p. 42.

for it is in the West that the sun sets. Sunset, nevertheless, was not recognized as the "death" of the sun but as its descent into the lower regions of the earth which were looked upon as the regions of the dead.²⁴

The baptismal font was polyvalent because it symbolized the death and life of the neophytes. Its polyvalence comes from its association with water which was not only "the tomb in which man the sinner is buried but also the mother's womb and the vivifying element in which man is generated anew".²⁵ This symbolism of rebirth was also expressed explicitly by the profession of faith which neophytes recited facing the East. The Creed was recited facing the East because the East was a symbol of the origin of life, as it was the origin of the sun. By the Creed, neophytes bound themselves to Jesus Christ to whom the symbol of light and life were applied.²⁶

Initiation rites of the pagan Basotho seem to have had rites corresponding to the entrance into the baptistry, to the undressing ceremonies and to the renunciation of the devil. The initiation hut was a place where the

24 M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, London-New York, Sheed and Ward, 1958, p. 136.

25 J. Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, p. 44, 47-48.

26 Idem, op. cit., p. 29.

transformation of neophytes took place. It was the place where candidates were formed, where they were supposed to leave their childish and evil dispositions. It is there that boys and girls were reborn and transformed into true men and women according to tribal beliefs and traditions.²⁷ The initiation hut, therefore, was a symbol of the womb in which neophytes were changed and formed. Eliade reports that in New Guinea the initiation hut was a symbol of the stomach of a monster and that of the mother.²⁸

The association of dragons with the initiation hut existed in another form in the initiation rites of the Basotho. Their boys, for instance, on their way to the initiation hut had to recite the following myth which was about subterranean beings, beasts and lions which devoured sterile persons.

Tlase, tlase koan,
 Down down below,
 Tau lia rora.
 Lions roar.
 Li rora li jang?
 They roar, what do they eat?
 Li rora li ja nyopa,
 They roar eating the sterile person,
 Nyopa ramosito,
 Sterile father of the fault [sin],
 Ramosito, Hlole,
 Father of fault, the Hare,
 Hlole maritsane,
 Hare crawling,

27 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 332.

28 M. Eliade, Naissances mystiques, Paris, Gallimard, 1959, p. 83-84.

O ritsa ka mpana,
 He crawls on his stomach,
 Ka mpana tšoana,
 On his dark stomach,
 E chele ke hlaha,
 Burnt by fire,

In this recitation boys were told of the punishment given to sterile people who were devoured by lions and burned by fire. At the same time, boys were told some of the activities of the mythical "wolf" in the hut. The association of devouring lions in subterranean regions, punishment of sterility, sin of sterility and the activities of the "wolf" suggested directly danger, death to the neophytes. Indirectly, it suggested opposite reactions of avoiding sterility and therefore its punishment. This seems to be a far-fetched parallel between Christian and pagan renunciation of the devil, but just the same we may not conclude that there was none at all. Stripping ceremonies took place after essential rites of initiation.

d. Circumcision. — We know that circumcision was one of the essential parts of masculine initiation rites of Basotho.²⁹ It was one of the first penitential rites. It also left a visible mark on the neophytes; by that mark they could be identified as adult members of the tribe. We know that circumcision existed in the eastern primitive tribes of

29 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 326.

Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Arabia and Mesopotamia. We know that Yahweh had ordered Abraham and his posterity to be circumcised as a sign of their pertaining to the Chosen People and a sign of the Covenant. The primitive Church of Jerusalem for a time understood Baptism side by side with circumcision. That close association brought problems concerning the conversion of non-Jewish people.

For we know, writes Fr. Daniélou, that at the beginning of the Christian era, the initiation of proselytes into the Jewish community included, besides circumcision, a baptism.³⁰

Circumcision as a condition for adherence to Christ and, therefore, for admittance into the Christian community, was abandoned on account of the decision of the first apostolic Synod of Jerusalem.³¹

To sum up, we may say that comparative study of Christian preparatory rites of Baptism and pagan Basotho initiation rites show some close similarities in so far as essential characteristics are concerned. Both initiations had entry ritual celebrations in which all the community participated. Neophytes were given some tests and trials before the official opening of initiation ceremonies. In both initiations neophytes formed new groups which were more or less separated from the profane common life of the

30 J. Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, p. 88.

31 Act. 15:1-29.

community. Neophytes were put under guardianship and guidance of either future godparents or directors of initiation. In both initiations neophytes were obliged to do daily activities consisting of instructions and exorcisms, renunciation of evil and adhesion to Christ, while the tribal initiations were rich in symbolic progressive suggestions and the psychological experimental method of learning. We do not intend to identify Christian initiation with pagan initiation rites. The main difference is that Christian initiation was centered on Christ and based on supernatural revelation of God in the History of Salvation, whereas the pagan Basotho initiation was centered on tribal traditions and based on the natural manifestation of the sacred and the holy. Nevertheless, similarities of some external rites show that Basotho initiation was more or less a prototype and prefiguration of Christian initiation or catechumenate.

B. Initiation as a Figure of the Baptism

a. Water Symbolism. — Baptismal rites of the early Church consisted of immersion and emergence of the catechumens in water. As we have explained, water was a symbol of tomb and womb; of death and resurrection. Its symbolism was furthermore enriched by the symbolism of the deluge and of Israel's crossing of the "Red Sea". In the deluge the aspect of the destruction of most of the human race was expressed more than the aspect of life. In the waters of the

"Red Sea" the Egyptian armies were destroyed while the children of Israel were saved. The deluge and the "Red Sea" waters are, in a way, types of Baptism.³² Baptismal water, like its prototypes, is a symbol of death as well as of rebirth. By analogy to the primordial waters of Genesis, baptismal water is a symbol of re-creation. Through Baptism the Church becomes the mother of the sons of God; it is in Baptism that she gives them life. The baptismal pool is a symbol of the maternal womb of the Church.³³ By immersion the catechumen dies to sin and rises anew by emersion.³⁴

This symbolic death and life, destruction and re-creation is not as explicit in the initiation rites of the Basotho as it is in Christian Baptism. Observers are struck, however, by the numerous bathing ceremonies during the feminine initiation of the Basotho. Fr. Lebreton mentions seven occasions and describes them in detail.³⁵ The willed coincidence and association of these purification rites with the moon and mythical persons whose role was to destroy and regenerate neophytes show that the Basotho looked upon water as a destructive and creating element. We cannot affirm

32 J. Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, p. 42-44, 75, 88.

33 Idem, op. cit., p. 48.

34 Idem, op. cit., p. 44.

35 H. Lebreton, "La fille chez les Basutos", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1929, p. 332.

with much emphasis that this symbolism was as explicit as in Christian baptismal rites, because similar rites seem not to have existed for boys. Of course, this can be justified by the very reason why such rites existed for girls. The main reason was the biological phenomenon of their menstrual cycle.

b. Invocation of Divine Persons. — The immersion and emersion rites were accompanied by the invocation of divine persons in Christian Baptism. This simultaneous application of water and the invocation of the baptismal formula constituted the essence of Baptism. It is not our intention to explain the well known role of the Three Persons in the spiritual regeneration of adopted sons of God, the production of grace and the indelible sacramental character.

We would like to draw attention to the analogous function of mythical personages, namely, motanyane, "serpent", and the "wolf" which were supposed to initiate neophytes in the Basotho rites. Their role was specifically to destroy and regenerate the candidates.³⁶ They were super-human beings, according to the belief of the Basotho, which produced the desired transformation in the neophytes.

³⁶ H. Lebreton, "La fille chez les Basutos", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1929, p. 239-240; A. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 334.

By this parallel it is not our aim to put mythical persons on the same level as the Divine Persons. Far from it. That cannot be done. Creatures cannot be put on the same degree as their Creator. Natural entities cannot be equal to the Subsisting Supernatural. Spiritual effects produced in the soul of the baptized cannot be of equal value with the effects of initiation.

Nevertheless, the role of mythical persons in pagan initiation is by analogy the same as that of the Divine Persons, in so far as they were considered and believed to realize a transformation in neophytes. In their respective ritual context Divine Persons and mythical persons are efficient causes of respective initiations. They are causes of desired changes.

c. Symbolic Change of Clothes. — Before Christian Baptism the catechumens, as we have seen, laid aside their clothing and took off their sandals.³⁷ This stripping was an image of their taking off the old man and his works. It was a symbol of the separation of catechumens from their sinful habits and unchristian life. It was also a symbol of a return to the primitive innocence of Adam and Eve, to the state in which no sin nor shame existed.³⁸ In other words

37 J. Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, p. 35-39.

38 Gen. 2:25.

the stripping was a symbol of the domination of neophytes over evil and their lower senses. It also marked the beginning of the Christian triumph by the grace of God.

"After the rite of Baptism itself, writes Fr. Daniélou, there is still one final ceremony: the clothing with the white garment."³⁹ In the beginning of Christianity these garments replaced old garments worn until Baptism.⁴⁰ The white clothes were a symbol of spiritual innocence and purity. They were a symbol of the adhesion of the neo-baptized to Christ. St. Paul says: "You who have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ."⁴¹ Later on this symbolism was also expressed by names of saints and martyrs which were given to neo-Christians.

Similar stripping rites existed in initiation rites of the Basotho. Towards the end of the last month, boys were anointed with a red ochre. They put away old clothes and blankets which they had used during their initiation. These clothes were burned together with the initiation hut on the closing day as a symbol of separation and detachment of the initiated from the old, past evil habits and dispositions of infancy.⁴²

39 J. Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, p. 49.

40 Idem, op. cit., p. 35.

41 Gal. 3:27.

42 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 332.

Boys changed their names and put on new, or at least clean, decent clothing.⁴³ Girls changed their clothing twice. After the apparition of motanyane and the regenerating rites, official symbolic garments were assumed. At that time also girls changed their names by adding the masculine prefix ra- to their feminine names.⁴⁴ To express this transformation, girls had to behave more or less like men, by being rough, by carrying objects on their shoulders like men. For the Basotho the change of clothes and of names was a symbol of an internal change that had taken place.

To summarize this comparative study, we may simply quote Eliade who said:

Il est évident que le baptême chrétien équivalait, dès le commencement, à une initiation: le baptême introduisait le converti dans une nouvelle communauté religieuse et le rendait digne de la vie éternelle.⁴⁵

The initiation of the Basotho introduced neophytes to tribal traditions, mode of life, the duties and responsibilities of adults.

In both initiations we find themes of change, passage and rebirth, although the change was realized on

43 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 334.

44 H. Lebreton, "La fille chez les Basutos", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1929, p. 240; cf. F. Laydevant, O.M.I., "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Basutos". in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 318.

45 M. Eliade, Naissances mystiques, p. 242.

different planes. Similar symbolism are found in both. The symbolism of changing clothes and of taking new names is found in both. In both initiations the passage was effected by beings endowed with super-human power. In Christian initiation, Supernatural Divine Persons were the efficient causes of the spiritual intrinsic change; in pagan initiation the desired change was effected by the mythical persons. With Fr. Luykx, therefore, we may say that "les rites de l'initiation clanique en Afrique noire sont très proches de l'initiation chrétienne primitive".⁴⁶ Initiation of the Basotho, on that account, can be looked upon as a figure of Baptism. Of course, we do not identify them. As we have said, there is always a difference between a figure and the thing figured. Keeping in mind these distinctions in doctrine, effects produced, primary efficient causes and other accidental differences, we are in agreement with Mgr. P. Kimbondo who said: "la préparation au baptême — par conséquent le catéchuménat — pourrait être revalorisée par les éléments repris à l'initiation bantou."⁴⁷ In that way adaptation of Basotho religious symbols of initiation is

⁴⁶ B. Luykx, O.Fraem., "Adaptation de la liturgie en pays de missions", in Missions et Liturgie, 1960, p. 71.

⁴⁷ Mgr P. Kimbondo, "Le visage africain de la liturgie", in Semaine Religieuse de Québec, 17 (1962), p. 264; cf. X. Seumois, P.B., Adaptation dans le culte, fasc. II, Roma, Tipografia Operaria Romana, 1957-1958, p. 274-279 (printed pro manuscripto).

possible in order to make the catechumenate and Baptism better understood.

C. Initiation as a Figure of the Confirmation

The sacrament of Confirmation, in the early period of the history of the Church, was administered after Baptism during the Easter Vigil. This custom is still kept in Oriental rites. Through Baptism, catechumens were reborn, made adopted sons of God and members of the Mystical Body of Christ. Confirmation also had its proper effects. Oils used in its rites were full of symbolism. As Fr. Daniélou says: "So the anointing with oil is meant to strengthen the initiate for his struggle with the demon."⁴⁸ Oils prepared neo-Christians for the future holy contest and struggle. Besides this preparation for the battle with devil, Confirmation had its essential primary effect. "What remains peculiar to Confirmation alone is the idea of perfecting the powers given in Baptism."⁴⁹ In other words Confirmation is the sacrament of spiritual growth and progress.

Parallels between Confirmation and the initiation rites of the Basotho are not very easy to see because of the absence of oils in their rites. In spite of this, essential points similar to those of Confirmation are found. The

⁴⁸ J. Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, p. 41.

⁴⁹ Idem, op. cit., p. 121.

essential point in Christian Confirmation is to strengthen neo-Christians in order to fight difficulties in their spiritual life. Confirmation was a preparation for life. Initiation rites of the Basotho had this intention of strengthening boys and girls for the struggle against difficulties in life. Initiation prepared neophytes for life. Frequent scourgings during bathing rites were demanded in order to give girls occasions of suffering and enduring pain with patience and womanly courage.⁵⁰ Likewise flogging rites in masculine rites were performed in order to give boys practice in enduring suffering without complaints. In these rites the Basotho prepared and strengthened their youth for hardships in life.

The important and essential aim of initiation rites was to make true men and women out of boys and girls. Initiation was a period of progress and transition from infancy to adulthood. It was the time of promoting psychological and biological growth of neophytes. It was the period of making them aware of their responsibilities and duties as members of a particular tribe or people.⁵¹ In order to give them an experimental realization of their new condition,

⁵⁰ H. Lebreton, "La fille chez les Basutos", in Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1929, p. 216.

⁵¹ E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 327.

their names were changed. After the initiation, neophytes were no more considered as boys or girls but as men or women.⁵²

Initiation rites of the Basotho, therefore, can be considered as a prototype or figure of Confirmation because in both rites the essential element was spiritual progress. There are differences, of course, between the two. In Confirmation the advance was supernatural; in the initiation rites of the Basotho it was biological, psychological and natural at the same time. In Christian Confirmation oils were used to express the symbolism of strengthening, whereas in the initiation rites of the Basotho physical tests and scourgings were used to prepare neophytes for future physical and moral difficulties. This similarity is admitted by Fr. Humphreys who said: "From this it follows that Native life had something corresponding to the Catholic doctrine of confirmation..."⁵³

2. Adaptable Figures of Sacramentals

A. Rites of Incense

In the Roman Ritual incensation is restricted to High Masses, sung Vespers, Benediction of the Blessed

52 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 332.

53 N. Humphreys, Missionary in South Africa, p. 76. The author does not admit that Basotho had something resembling Christian Baptism.

Sacrament, blessing of candles, palms, baptismal water on Holy Saturday, and so on. The use of incense, indeed, is found throughout the Bible. According to the Levitical Law incense was burned twice a day, in the morning and in the evening by a priest.⁵⁴ The priest Zacharias was burning incense in accordance with this law when he received Gabriel's message.⁵⁵ Its purpose and motive was closely connected with the intention of the sacrifice which followed or preceded it. Accordingly, incense was burned as an offering for thanksgiving or expiation or for other motives.⁵⁶ Fr. De Vaux says that the burning of incense was common to all Oriental religions.⁵⁷ Therefore, incense has a pagan origin. That is why we find some Arabic and Canaanite characteristics in the Jewish offering of incense. The Hebrew word qetoret signifies the person who makes some smoke; as a result, it probably signifies whoever burned a sacrifice.⁵⁸ Hebrews burned incense on an altar called the altar of Perfumes or the altar of Gold which was probably placed in front of the Holy of Holies.

54 Exodus 30:7-8.

55 Luke 1:8-11.

56 Lev. 2:1,16; 6:8.

57 R. de Vaux, O.P., Les institutions de l'Ancien Testament, vol. II, Paris, Ed. du Cerf, 1960, p. 286.

58 1 Samuel 2:28.

L'archéologie palestinienne permet de suivre l'évolution de ce genre d'autel. A l'époque cananéenne, pour brûler les parfums, on se servait de supports en terre cuite, cylindriques ou rectangulaires.⁵⁹

Later on, during the Israelite monarchy, some quadrangular pillars were used for incense. This was the case in the sanctuaries of Sichen and Meggiddo.⁶⁰ To burn incense, burning coals were taken from the altar of holocausts by a spatula and then placed on the Altar of Perfumes. On these coals vegetal offerings, cakes made of flour and oil, were burned together with some perfumes and aromata.⁶¹

The ancient Basotho had rites similar to the incense of the Canaanites, Hebrews and Arabians. We have called these rites fumigations, which is a translation of the suto word mokubetso. It goes without saying that the Basotho fumigations were not ordered by Yahweh as was the case with the Hebrews. The Basotho burned incense to their ancestors in order to purify localities such as fields and homes, and in order to ask for protection from evil powers, for instance, during the storm. Instead of cakes made of flour and oil together with aromata used by the Hebrews and Canaanites, the Basotho burned some odorous herbs and the

⁵⁹ R. de Vaux, Les institutions de l'Ancien Testament, p. 286.

⁶⁰ Idem, op. cit., p. 110-111.

⁶¹ Idem, op. cit., p. 302.

symbolic contents of the ritual horn. Instead of the altar of Gold or of Perfumes, Basotho burned their incense either on the floor or on a piece of broken earthenware vase or pot. Whereas Levites and priests were in charge of burning incense among the Hebrews, anybody could perform rites of fumigation among the Basotho. For instance, fumigation in the fields was done by the person in charge of the field, that is, the guardian. This means that anybody who was taking care of the field could burn the "incense". At home, however, such fumigations were performed by older people, usually by the parents. The Basotho, from the month of Mesa (April) to the beginning of the month of Motšeanong (May), fumigated their fields in the morning and in the evening.

Les blés, dès qu'ils montent en épi, subissent, chaque soir, un traitement du même genre. Les personnes qui en ont la charge allument, avant de se retirer, un petit feu au milieu du champ et y jettent des drogues dont la combustion est destinée à écarter toute influence fâcheuse.⁶²

These rites of mokubetso-fumigation can be adapted just as Yahweh adapted incense rites of pagan Canaanites. There are some advantages for such an adaptation. First of all, these fumigations were performed in opportune circumstances of place and time. Fumigations in the fields could be kept without change of their exterior ritual. Proper

62 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 323.

motives could be introduced in order to give Christian orientations to them. As a result, such rites could be offerings to God in thanksgiving, in petition and in expiation for the successful harvest and evil actions done in the fields respectively. Fumigation rites done when people were menaced by danger could be kept and modified in the fashion. This would be the Christian method of elevating pagan ceremonies which are not intrinsically evil.

B. Rites of Aspersions

We all know numerous occasions of aspersions or water lustrations in the Christian Roman rites. To mention but a few, there are aspersions with Holy water during the blessing of palms, candles, and during the consecration of sacred objects. Every Sunday at the beginning of High Mass the celebrant sprinkles the congregation. Likewise on the vigil of Easter, after the renovation of baptismal promises, the celebrant sprinkles the congregation with blessed water.

These rites of asperation have been adapted from Jewish rites which had a pagan magic origin. Fr. De Vaux says that:

Les origines païennes et magiques de ce rite sont certaines: le rouge est, chez beaucoup de peuples, une couleur protectrice qui détourne le mal et met en fuite les démons, les cendres d'animaux servent ailleurs pour des lustrations, l'eau courante porte la souillure.⁶³

⁶³ R. de Vaux, Les institutions de l'Ancien Testament, p. 355.

For this reason lustral water was used to purify people who had touched corpses, tombs and the objects of the dead.

The ancient Basotho had aspersion rites which resemble those of the Jews. For example, at the outbreak of an epidemic, public purification was made. Similar purifications were necessary when the nation was menaced with a public danger such as famine or war. The chief of the village assisted by the medicine-man retired to prepare the lustral water. Some of the ingredients of the lustral horn together with the ashes of medical symbolic plants, herbs and drugs were dissolved in water. The mixture was stirred till lather was produced. The chief sprinkled himself with the water and then, as Casalis says, "on repand cette espèce d'eau bénite non seulement sur les hommes, mais encore sur les habitations, sur les bestiaux et sur les blés".⁶⁴

This rite resembles that of the Jews from which some of the Roman rites of aspersion took their inspiration. There is no doubt that the Basotho were prepared to receive Christian aspersion rites on account of that similarity. One advantage of these pagan aspersion rites is their circumstances of place and time. The Basotho had their rites in the proper situation — when they felt a need of asking for help. We do not mean that prayer should be said only when

⁶⁴ E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 322.

one is in need. We do not mean that the prayer of petition is the only kind of prayer. We would like to point out the time when the Basotho performed their aspersion rites. We would like to mention that their motive was good. Catholic aspersion rites could be rendered more expressive and symbolic for the Basotho if they were put in similar circumstances. To avoid the danger of superstition the symbolism of the rite would have to be explained.

3. Adaptable Feast

Rites of Thanksgiving

We have seen that the ancient Basotho had particular rites of thanksgiving. These rites took place immediately after harvesting and threshing. What is striking in them is that they were done in the fields. We are also struck by the simplicity of the rite. A little hole was dug in the center of the threshing ground. Naturally, the hole was filled with some grains of the harvest. Those grains were not collected but left therein as an offering of thanksgiving to the ancestors-balimo to whom the success of the harvest was attributed.⁶⁵ This offering was also expressed by a suto phrase: pha-balimo re ja le bona, which means, "we eat the gift from ancestors with them". This rite may be

65 E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 315.

adapted as it is without any difficulty. The role of balimo would have to be given a Christian interpretation in order to avoid false belief and imprecise recognition of the giver of the harvest.

The history of our Catholic liturgy does not only show the possibility of assuming pagan institutions without modification of external rites, but also gives facts and examples of such assumptions. The feast of Tabernacles which Yahweh ordered his Chosen People to celebrate in his honour was a pagan rite.⁶⁶ It was a rural feast celebrated after the period of harvest when the produce was already stored. Fr. De Vaux is of the opinion that the feast of tabernacles or tents was borrowed from the Canaanites.⁶⁷ Analogous celebrations existed in Alexandria, in Egypt, during the time of Greek domination. Such celebrations were in honour of Satyr.

Another example of unchanged assumption of pagan celebrations is the present feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The feast of purification was originally a pagan celebration. It was celebrated by ancient Romans in honour of their god Pluto. At that time candles and

⁶⁶ A. Dumois, La papauté et les missions au cours des six premiers siècles, p. 103; cf. Lev. 17:1-17.

⁶⁷ R. de Vaux, Les institutions de l'Ancien Testament, p. 405.

lamps were blessed and distributed, and then a procession was made through the streets of ancient Rome. In order to Christianize this celebration, the god Pluto was replaced by the Blessed Virgin.⁶⁸ Besides this mutation of the person to whom the feast was dedicated no other change was made concerning the ceremonial and the idea of purification. These adaptations prove that

le catholicisme ne s'était pas conduit de façon aussi cavalière, ou du moins, militaire, vis-à-vis des païens de l'ancienne Rome ou de l'Italie, mais qu'il avait adopté une partie importante de leurs institutions sociales, juridiques, folkloriques, culturelles, philosophiques et rituelles; qu'on n'avait pas toujours détruit les temples païens, mais que souvent on les avait tout simplement convertis en églises.⁶⁹

Since the Church has not yet abandoned this spirit of Christianizing authentic religious values of neo-Christians, there would seem to be no difficulty in similar adaptation of the rites of thanksgiving of the ancient Basotho, provided Christian interpretations and motives are given.

4. Adaptable Myths

A. Myth of Litaolans

Human psychological structure is created by God in such a way that man learns not only in stages but also by

⁶⁸ A. Seumois, La papauté et les missions au cours des six premiers siècles, p. 152.

⁶⁹ Idem, op. cit., p. 102-103.

passing from the known to the unknown. The more a thing is explained by means of known images and known analogies, the more quickly and easily is it understood. The existence of suggestive images in pagan myths is an uncontested reality. Their use and adaptation in the explanation of supernatural realities and mysteries, however, is not easily admitted by all.

Studies of Christian art and images used to express mysteries reveal the pagan origin of some of the frequently used religious illustrations. Some of them were taken from pagan myths. The halo or ring of light surrounding heads of saints was a mark of honour given to Venus. Rays of light around the head of Christ in paintings were formerly signs of the sun-god Helios. Symbolism of wine was transferred from the cult of Dionysus to Christian art. Representations of some idols such as Mercury were used to represent saints.⁷⁰

70 "On y voit un nimbe ovale le buste d'un adolescent imberbe de la tête duquel partent deux faisceaux de rayons. L'emprunt au type classique d'Hélios est évident, mais déjà on reconnaît l'altération, intentionnelle peut-être, par les artistes chrétiens qui ont ajouté le bras droit au buste [...]. L'apparition de rayons et plus tard du nimbe autour de la tête sont encore des traces de l'influence classique [...]. Une statuette de Vénus en terre venant de la Campagne (fig. 55) et une peinture de la Casa-di Apollo, à Pompei (fig. 56), nous montrent l'emploi du nimbe comme marque d'honneur. L'auréole de la statuette est pleine et ne sert donc plus de préservatif, les auréoles des personnages peints sont pleines également et de couleur bleue. C'est un nouveau point à considérer comme acquis pour l'histoire des emprunts de l'art chrétien à l'art profane." Dom H. Leclercq, O.S.B., Manuel d'archéologie chrétienne, vol. I, Paris, Letouzey, 1907, p. 172-173.

These examples show that adaptation of myths and images found in pagan mythologies has been made in the past. Therefore, similar adaptation could be made of mythological images of the Basotho. The myth of Litaolane, for instance, is rich in images which suggest Christian mysteries. The mother of Litaolane could be taken as a type of the Blessed Virgin. In the first place this mythical person had escaped the devouring fangs of the monster Kholuno-luno. By her unique escape from death, Litaolane's mother resembles the Blessed Virgin Mary who had the unique privilege of being preserved from original sin. The mythical figure had escaped submission to the ferocious monster. For this reason she could be taken as a figure of the Mother of God.

Litaolane's mother can be used as a figure of Mary because she gave birth to a child without marital relations. In this virginal conception, the mythical mother resembles the historic Mother of Jesus Christ. The advantage of adapting this myth is that the Basotho are prepared to accept the true virginal conception and the mystery of the virginal birth of Jesus Christ.

Consequently, Litaolane may be taken as a prototype of Jesus Christ. His miraculous conception, his birth from a virgin and his remarkably fast growth showed that Litaolane was not like other children, that he was not an ordinary child but a divine son. The fact that he was born having

teeth, wearing bones used by diviners and medicine-men who were pagan ministers of cult enveloped him with mystery and symbolized his function as a priest and medicine-man. Those divining bones made him "sacred" because in the primitive mentality of the Basotho contact with such bones is sacred. On account of these characteristics of a grown-up-infant, Litaolane is a good image of Jesus Christ who being God humbled himself by taking our human nature, he who was a child and yet God at the same time.

The victory of Litaolane over the giant animal gives us more reasons to look at him as a pre-figure of Jesus Christ. He fought against the monster alone, and won the battle. By killing the monster he saved the people and the animals devoured by it. Litaolane was crowned king on account of his courageous act. Jesus Christ was given a name that is above all names, Jesus, he was made the Kurios for the act of redemption by which he has saved us. Ultimately, Litaolane was killed by the people he had saved, as Jesus Christ was killed by the people he had come to redeem. Undoubtedly, Litaolane is a figure of Christ, whereas Kholumolumo is an image of the devil. Casalis and Fr. Laydevant both admit this resemblance.⁷¹

⁷¹ E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 322-323; cf. F. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Basutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 323.

This myth reveals that pagans were not completely alien to Christian doctrinal typology, as nature is not altogether alien to the supernatural. They show that God does not only reveal himself naturally by means of His creatures but that He can use creatures to reveal in figures and images His plan of salvation of the human race.

B. The Myth of the Lizard and the Chameleon

According to the ancient Basotho there was a king who had two servants named Leobu (Lizard) and Khatooane (Chameleon). One day the king sent the Lizard to tell the people that they would die and rise again. While he was preparing to deliver the royal message, Chameleon, who had overheard the message, hastened to tell the people that there would be no resurrection after death. The people became sad and ill-disposed to receive the true message announced later by the true messenger, Lizard.⁷² Myths of this kind are common in Africa. They are also found in the Fiji Islands, among the Ainus of Australia.⁷³ This myth or legend can be adapted and used to illustrate Christ the true messenger, prophet and servant of Yahweh whose message was not received as it should have been, for "He was in the world, and the

⁷² F. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Basutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 324.

⁷³ M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, p. 175.

world was made through him, and the world knew him not. He came into his own, and they that were his own received him not."⁷⁴ Chameleon may be interpreted as the figure of the devil, whom Christ called "liar" for "When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father thereof."⁷⁵ The advantage of this legend is the psychological preparation by which the Basotho were disposed to accept the possibility of the mystery of the resurrection of men. In assuming the doctrine and imagery of this myth we would have to enrich it by giving it Christian eschatological value. We would have to put it in a Christian context and give it a supernatural meaning.

This kind of adaptation of pagan myths will be a simple imitation of Pope Clement I who used the Arabian myth of the Phoenix in order to illustrate the possibility of resurrection.⁷⁶ The Phoenix was the fabulous Arabian bird which had lived for a long time without giving birth to young ones of its kind. It was burned. From its corpse another bird of the same kind was formed. Some say that it was the same bird which had risen. Others say that it was

74 Jn. 1:10-11; 8:43-45.

75 Jn. 8:44.

76 A. Seumois, La papauté et les missions au cours des six premiers siècles, p. 49; cf. Clement I, Epistola ad Corinthios, cap. 25.

another bird which had the same fate. This bird collected the bones of the corpse, put them in a coffin and then carried them from Arabia, to Egypt and Heliopolis. This legend was known by the Greeks, Roman and Egyptians. Pope Clement the First used it for pastoral purposes, in order to explain the mystery of the resurrection. He used the legendary images found in that myth. Mutatis mutandis, we can do the same thing with the legend of Leobu (Lizard) and Khatocane (Chameleon).

5. Points of Doctrinal Purification

A. Notion of the Divinity

Since adaptation implies certain risks and dangers of recalling pagan ideas, a certain purification and rectification of doctrine is necessary. This purification and Christianization will facilitate adaptation and will also remove the danger of making pagan associations. In the purification process, authentic religious values will be preserved, explained and used correctly.

In view of this Christianization, the notion which the Basotho had of the Sky-Divinity should be purified. His existence should be clarified and made more explicit. The nature of that divinity should be well explained in function of the nature of God as revealed in the History of Salvation. For instance, the exaggerated distance which the Basotho attributed to Molimo in order to express his transcendence

should be well explained and interpreted in such way as to show the transcendence of God and His omnipresence. The divine transcendence should be explained not in terms of place and distance but as an attribute describing the perfect nature of God and His divine essence which is not opposed to the divine omnipresence.

Once divine transcendence and omnipresence are well explained, it will be easy to explain how God cannot be indifferent, how He is not the deus otiosus as the Basotho considered Molimo to be. In order to show that God is interested in our affairs, that He is active, divine intervention would have to be shown by historical facts taken from the History of Salvation: Heilgeschichte. Its beginning, its typological progress, its accomplishment in Jesus Christ and its continuation in and through the Mystical Body of Christ and sacraments should be shown. This explanation of divine transcendence, omnipresence and divine intervention in history will certainly lead to the purification of the nature and role of the Balimo, who will necessarily have to be put in their proper position. Their dependence on God and their limited constitution will be better clarified by a proper explanation of the divine power. Once this role of mediation of ancestors is well purified there will be no danger of over-emphasizing the sacrifices offered to them. As a result, the cult of the saints and prayers for the dead

would be practiced not only with rectified knowledge and right motives but also with due manner and attitude.

B. Notion of Death

We have seen how burial rites and ceremonies of the Basotho revealed their understanding of death. For them death was a kind of voyage. It was a passage from this life to another. Death was a passage by which the dead joined the community of ancestors-balimo. Seen in this light, death was not the end of the departed person but a beginning of another existence and life. The nature of the remaining person was not described with precision. They believed in the survival of something of the dead person. The dead continued to live in more or less the same way as they did here below; this is expressed by the objects placed near dead man's body. Furthermore, the dead continued to have influence over their relatives and the members of their families.

This notion of death as a passage is religious and therefore should be kept. It needs further explanation and integration in the Christian eschatology. The Christian notion of eschatology can easily enrich it. As a result, many of its defective points would be corrected and clarified.

C. The Use of Relics and Medals

We have seen how the ancient Basotho used the lustral horn, amulets, likhoetsa, lithakhisa, and how they used

parts of the human body, living or dead as the case might be, for magic purposes.⁷⁷ This perversion of a religious sentiment by which man psychologically tends to use creatures as instruments and means of attaining protection and of contacting superior realities should be corrected. This done, holy objects, sacramentals like candles, palms, medals and holy water can be used with the proper intention. A stress should be placed on the psychological help for which these objects are used. We should clearly explain to the people that the help we ask for does not come from these objects but from God. This will get rid of the former attitude of taking the object as the giver and origin of the favour asked for.

Conclusion

In conclusion we may say that adaptation of the religious symbols of the ancient Basotho is possible. The close resemblance of initiation rites make their adaptation possible. On account of the similarity, they may be considered as figures and types of the catechumenate and of Baptism and Confirmation. Of course, the distinction between these divinely instituted sacraments and natural initiation rites

⁷⁷ E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, p. 322; cf. F. Laydevant, "Idée de Dieu chez les Anciens Basutos", in Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1935, p. 325.

still holds. The adaptation of these rites would promote a better understanding of the signification and symbolism of the Christian sacraments.

Rites of incensation and aspersion can be given new life by adapting similar rites of the Basotho, namely, rites of fumigation and aspersions. As a result, the symbolism of aspersion would be clearer and rendered more explicit by being placed in favourable circumstance of place and time.

Offerings of thanksgiving which the Basotho used to offer after harvest can be adapted without difficulty. If Yahweh could adapt the feast of Tabernacles which was originally celebrated in honor of pagan idols, why can the rites of thanksgiving of the Basotho not be adapted? Evidently, the said rites would have to be offered to God or the saints, not to idols.

The myth of Kholumo-lumo can be adapted in catechesis, by using it as an image and illustration of our Redemption. Litaolane could be the figure of Christ while his mother could be an illustration of the Blessed Mother. The myth of Leobu and Khatookane could be adapted and used to show the possibility of the resurrection. Leobu could serve to illustrate Jesus Christ while Khatookane could be an image of the devil. These myths would be enriched and given historic, Christian interpretation.

By adapting these types of sacraments, sacramentals, prayers of thanksgiving and myths we would be truly

Christianizing them. As Mgr. Van Cauwelaert said, we would be elevating local customs to the level of the Gospel by keeping valuable structures and correcting their erroneous elements.⁷⁸

Of course, the work of adaptation is a hard and dangerous undertaking. Unless it is done with the proper motives, cautiously, with required information and understanding of the customs at the proper time it can be a way back to paganism, to superstition and magic. That is why the necessary purification of adaptable rites, together with the proper orientation to the true God, must be made by precise necessary explanations and correction. This may be done by insisting on the nature of God, his omnipresence, and intervention in the history of salvation, and by giving the true and correct use of relics and other sacramentals.

To conclude we may say with Fr. Hofinger:

Without some adaptation in these aspects of liturgy, a truly "popular" worship can hardly be attained. A genuinely Catholic (universal) form of worship must not only manifest the striking unity of the *Una Sancta*; it must also allow for individuality of the diversity among the many who are to find in the Church their true home.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Mgr J. van Cauwelaert, C.I.C.M., "Coutumes locales et liturgie", in Missions et Liturgie, 1960, p. 170.

⁷⁹ H. Hofinger, S.J., and J. Kellner, S.J., Worship: The Life of the Missions, Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1958, p. 296.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion to this research, we may say the ancient Basotho had religious symbols. For them the lustral horn was a symbol of power, fecundity and confidence. By its polyvalence it was a symbol of fear and confidence, withdrawal and attraction, destruction of enemies and protection of its possessor. Water was the symbol of purification. Its ambivalence made it a symbol of visible and invisible ablutions from impurities and from the misfortune of being haunted by spirits. On account of its dual ritual of immersion and emersion it was a symbol of death and the consequent restoration and regeneration. It was a symbol of reintegration of the immersed object into the formlessness of pre-existence and the re-creation and regeneration of a renewed being. For the Basotho, darkness was a symbol of transition. Its symbolism is manifested in the context of initiation rites. The moon, likewise, was a symbol of the rhythmic cycle of life and death. This symbolism was based on its nature with its universal law of periodic becoming and its coincidence with the phenomenon of the menstrual cycle. Its symbolism is further manifested by the names of months which in auto signify various stages between infancy and maturity: between the state of lack of knowledge of the responsibilities and duties in the community and the period of acquiring that knowledge. Initiation was, therefore,

a symbol of becoming an adult, of an introduction to tribal traditions and religious institutions and traditions as well.

Above all, these symbols were not the object of magic but of religious activity. Their religious characteristics were not very clear because there were some elements of magic in them. The context in which these symbols were found made the line of demarcation between the limits of magic and religion difficult to distinguish. Nevertheless, there are some indications which show some predominance of religious aspects over those of magic. One of those indications is the object of cult for the ancient Basotho. We know that the Basotho celebrated their rites to Molimo — sky-divinity, and to balimo — ancestors, who were considered as persons. This is one of the differentiating points of religion from magic. The Basotho had some dispositions of the soul which inclined them to render due cult to this molimo and balimo in a sensible manner by using visible rites and symbols. Furthermore, their dispositions and attitudes towards their object of worship was religious because it was more persuasive than coercive and automatic. For instance, this attitude of prayer and petition is manifested in many of the prayers which accompanied some of their sacrifices. In their sacrifices of petition for protection against public calamity, for the cure of a sick person and for a happy death of an elderly person, the Basotho not only manifested their persuasive attitude by using words like "we pray you",

"oh, gods", "ancestors help us to pray", but also asked their ancestors to pray for them to the sky-divinity. Prayers of thanksgiving for a successful delivery and harvest manifested similar attitude and dispositions. As we have said, some symbols cannot be classified as religious because they were found in rites which were celebrated in silence. In this case it is hard to find out whether the predominant aspect was magic or religion.

Other symbols were religious because of the attitude and consciousness of the holy which the people had towards them. Indeed, these people, like other primitives, did not know their divinities and the holy through a metaphysical process but through their experience of the numen in daily cosmical phenomena of fecundity, birth, life, sickness and death. Natural objects and events for them revealed something other than the objects themselves. Silence, change of seasons and even suffering manifested not only their weakness but also the Over-Powerful-Other which stimulated in them reactions of fear, reverence, subjection and self-surrender. The object stimulated in them reactions of reserve, respect and separation lest their unprepared touch or contact with the sacred bring them misfortune. This is why the ancient Basotho feared and respected the lustral horn and the medicine-man. That is why initiation rites, objects, activities and places were separated. Such activities were performed in secluded circumstances. This does not exclude

magic totally. For these reasons we may say that the ancient Basotho had religious symbols whose polyvalence was the basis of the feeling of the sacred and the cause of subsequent reactions of fear, reverence and subjection. Thus some symbols were religious on account of the attitude of persuasion which was expressed in the accompanying prayers. Others were religious because the Basotho had the feeling of dependence through them. Some others were religious because they were objects connected with the ancestral religion of the Basotho.

Some of those symbols had some similarity with Christian rites and symbols. They were figures and prototypes of some Christian mysteries. For reasons of similarity, adaptation to Christian use is possible. This resemblance shows that the pagan Basotho religion had much that was bad. On the other hand, it had much that was good, on which Christianity can build just as grace builds on nature.

The task of a missionary in this case is, mutatis mutandis, to eliminate bad elements, confirm and enrich poor ones and to supply missing religious characters. This undertaking, of course, calls for attention, caution, foresight and enlightened choice, otherwise adaptation might be an easy way to return to past unchristian practices and beliefs.

Adaptation of this kind may be useful not only in liturgy but also in the understanding of divine mysteries

because known symbols are better means of contact between man and transcendent realities, because such symbols are more suggestive of the mysterious and enable man to touch the invisible with the sensitive spirit. Basing ourselves on this law and principle of analogy, images taken from Basotho mythologies may likewise be given a Christian interpretation and as a result rendered useful in Christian rites, arts and catechetical instruction.

By adapting religious archetypes, symbols, rites and images of the Basotho we would be applying centuries-old apostolic methods by which the Church christianized authentic religious values of pagan institutions and customs. Indeed, as Cardinal Newman said,

the rulers of the Church from early times were prepared, should the occasion arise, to adopt, or imitate, or sanction the existing rites and customs of the populace, as well as the philosophy of the educated class.¹

By adapting these customs we would be making praiseworthy efforts to answer encouragements and exhortations given by the great popes of the missions, namely, Benedict XV in Maximum Illud, Pius XI in Rerum Ecclesiae, Pius XII in Evangelii Praecones. We would be manifesting the spirit of liturgical movement of the Council of Vatican II.

¹ J.H. Cardinal Newman, An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine, 17th impression, London-New York, Longmans, 1927, p. 372.

To conclude let us recall what Pius XII said:

The Church from the beginning down to our own time has always followed this wise practice: let not the Gospel, on being introduced into any new land, destroy or extinguish whatever its people possess that is naturally good, just or beautiful. For the Church, when she calls people to a higher culture and a better way of life under the inspiration of the Christian religion, does not act like one who recklessly cuts down and uproots a thriving forest. No, she grafts a good scion upon the wild stock that it may bear a crop of more delicious fruit.

Human nature, though owing to Adam's fall it is tainted with original sin, has in itself something that is naturally Christian; and this, if illumined by divine light and nourished by God's grace, can eventually be changed into true and supernatural virtue.

This is the reason why the Catholic Church has neither scorned nor rejected the pagan philosophies. Instead, after freeing them from error and all contamination she has perfected and completed them Christian revelation. So likewise the Church has graciously made her own the native art and culture which in some countries is so highly developed. She has carefully encouraged them and has brought them to a point of aesthetic perfection that of themselves they probably would never have attained. By no means has she repressed native customs and traditions but has given them a certain religious significance: she has even transformed their feast days and made them serve to commemorate the martyrs and to celebrate mysteries of the faith.²

² Pius XII, "Evangelii Praecones", in A.A.S., 43 (1951), p. 521-522. The translation used here is taken from The Popes and the Missions, London, A Sword of the Spirit Pamphlet, p. 66-67.

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