Methodist Burial Rites: An Inquiry into the Inculturation of Christianity among Barolong of Mahikeng, South Africa

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METHODIST BURIAL RITES: AN INQUIRY INTO THE INCULTURATION OF CHRISTIANITY AMONG BAROLONG OF MAHIKENG, SOUTH AFRICA

By

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METHODIST BURIAL RITES: AN INQUIRY INTO THE
INCULTURATION OF CHRISTIANITY AMONG
BAROLONG OF MAHIKENG, SOUTH AFRICA

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Doctor of Theology
Boston University School of Theology, 2012

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an historical and missiological study of the burial rites of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa among Barolong Methodists of Mahikeng in South Africa. It examines how the burial rites of this Church reflect the informal adaptation of traditional cultural practices by Barolong Methodists of Mahikeng. The dissertation argues that the official rubrics of Barolong Methodism need to be aligned with informal contextualization already apparent in contemporary Barolong Methodist burial practices.

First, the project analyzes the historical genesis of Methodism among Barolong chiefdoms of South Africa through the work of the nineteenth century Wesleyan missionaries. It explores the social, political and cultural dynamics among Barolong at the time Methodism was introduced in the early 1800s. The study argues that these dynamics partly account for how the Wesleyan missionaries formed opinions about Barolong burial practices. Second, the study traces the historical developments of the origins of the burial rites of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa from the time of the rise of Methodism. Theological convictions that underpin
the burial rites of Methodism are described. The study argues that the aforementioned
denomination does not uphold a theology of life and death different from that espoused by John
Wesley, the founder of Methodism. The records of non-conformist missionaries, who came to
labor in Southern Africa are examined, to analyze their beliefs about life and death, and the
methods and rituals they used for burials. Barolong of Mahikeng’s affinity to funerals and how
this attraction interacts with the use of official Methodist burial liturgies also receives attention.
Third, Barolong burial practices are placed within the larger framework of the burial practices of
the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa. Fourth, the study describes and analyzes Methodist
burial rites as practiced by Barolong Methodists from their adoption of Christianity to the present
day. It also reveals how Barolong Methodists have informally contextualized the traditional
Methodist burial rites.

The study concludes that the Methodist Church of Southern Africa has not undertaken
formal contextualization of burial rites among Barolong Methodists. It recommends that the
Methodist Church of Southern Africa incorporate the already existing informal contextualization
of burial rites into its burial liturgy and take steps to consider formally what work remains to
inculturate appropriate Barolong burial practices into the official rubrics of Barolong Methodism.
Given the multicultural context of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, the study makes
further recommendations as to how the Church should embark on an intentional program of
equipping its ministers for contextualizing the Christian message in a multicultural context.
CHAPTER ONE

METHODIST BURIAL RITES: AN INQUIRY INTO THE INCULTURATION OF CHRISTIANITY AMONG BAROULONG OF MAHIKENG, SOUTH AFRICA

Statement of the Problem

The study explores the extent of the process of inculturation of Methodist burial rites of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa among Barolong Methodists of Mahikeng. It examines how the rites of burial of this church reflect the informal adaptation of traditional cultural practices by Barolong Methodists of Mahikeng. The focus of the project is to see how the Methodist Church of Southern Africa as an African Mission Church engages the African worldview and cultural milieu of its members. The inquiry is carried out through an analysis of burial rites of Barolong members of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. The geographic location of the study is Mahikeng, South Africa. ¹

Significance of the Study

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa was founded through the work of the 19th century Wesleyan missionaries. A number of scholars accuse so-called African Mission Churches of not taking the worldview of their members seriously. Therefore the objective of this project is to inquire whether or not a process of “creative and dynamic relationship” exists between the Christian message and practices of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, and the cultures of her African members, Barolong of Mahikeng. ² One of the core elements of the cultural world of the African is the interaction between the living and the living-dead. Burial rites

¹ The place name Mafikeng has recently been changed to Mahikeng, the correct Setswana spelling.

² The expression “creative and dynamic relationship” is borrowed from Aylward Shorter’s definition of inculturation. See his Toward A Theology of Inculturation (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988), 11.
are a place where this interaction is essentially expressed. From the perspective of the African worldview, burial rites are one of the important rites of passage “where through an often prolonged series of rituals a person is delivered safely into the world of the dead so that …the person may assume the roles assigned to the deceased.” Both in the Christian and African traditions burial rites are important and are therefore used as a means to conduct this inquiry.

A number of African scholars have shown that compared to African Independent Churches (AICs), Christianity in African Mission Churches (AMCs), like the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, does not engage the African cultural world. One of these scholars, G. C. Oosthuizen concedes that because AMCs have neglected to engage the African worldview “it is not surprising that many African Christians in the mainline churches attend healing sessions of the AICs, and are reappraising the traditional approaches.”

In an argument that seems to suggest that the prime focus of AMCs is to convert Africans from their religious and cultural worlds but have failed to do so, Oosthuizen warns that, “It is time the mainline churches recognized that the deep structures of African spirituality and worldview will not be destroyed; their influence will continue to be felt.”

Another scholar M. L. Daneel writes about AICs that:

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4 African Independent Churches will now be referred to as AICs and African Mission Churches as AMCs. The distinction between AICs and AMCs is based on studies of their respective historical origins. Although current scholarship increasingly downplays their differences in the interest of asserting the commonalities among African Christianities, I am retaining this nomenclature to help focus the problem identified in this dissertation.


6 Ibid., 37.
Their real attraction for members and growth derive from their original, creative attempts to relate the good news of the gospel in a meaningful and symbolically intelligible way to the innermost needs of Africa. In doing so they are in a process of and have to a large extent already succeeded in creating truly African havens of belonging.  

And A. Hastings concludes that AICs are “the avant garde of African Christian authenticity.”

Clearly the views of these scholars are not only an appreciation of the strides made by AICs in the area of inculturation. They are also illustrations of the weaknesses of AMCs in interacting with African worldviews. The “African Report” offers a more direct critique of the type of Christianity embraced by AMCs, and its failure to address the basic and fundamental concerns of the African person holistically. The report observes that:

The Christian faith, as transmitted by missionaries, is completely coated in its Western cultural straitjacket. Too intellectual, too judicial, too much of a stranger to day-to-day life problems, the revived doctrine becomes a Sunday dress worn to church. At home, at the farm, on the job, we put on once more our ordinary dress for current business. Those day-to-day problems are sickness, infertility of wife or cattle, a neighbor’s jealousy, scarce or abundant rainfall, the drought which burns farms, luck in hunting, success in business, a victory over an enemy, bad luck, all kinds of poisons, wizards, soothsayers, healers, etc. Now, regarding all that we find little or nothing in the Roman Ritual.

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10 Ibid., 38-39.
These findings raise questions about the relevance and ability of AMCs like the Methodist Church of Southern Africa to truly provide a ministry that caters for the bottom line needs and challenges of African members. The challenge that these churches must therefore face is to heed this call, as one that cries out for a ministry that takes seriously the total context of African existence and does not view as insignificant what to the African is the reality of daily experiences. To respond to this context, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, must take a closer look at herself, by continually reviewing her theologies and liturgies for purposes of facilitating a relevant ministry for the African context.

This study is a contribution towards the search for a Christian ministry that is truly responsive to a specific African context. Burial practices are chosen for this inquiry because of their centrality to African life, Barolong people and Christian ritual. In Africa, most families, communities and churches devote a considerable amount of time preparing for funeral ceremonies. Care is taken to ensure that observances and practices related to burials are respected and observed prior to, during and after the funeral. Churches conduct pre-funeral prayer services and ensure that proper Christian burial liturgies are followed. The manner in which these rites are observed and carried out illustrates the central position that burials occupy in African life and Christian ritual. Because of this centrality we can expect burials to be a point at which dialogue often takes place between African tradition and the Christian faith. Therefore burial rites could provide a lens through which an inquiry into the process of inculturation in African Christianity could be conducted.

A second major reason to study burial practices is to evaluate the effects of the gospel on the lives of people. Some of the important practices observed in Africa during a Christian burial
ceremony are the offering of prayers, the singing of Christian hymns and the preaching of the gospel. These elements of Christian proclamation make burials to be a point at which people are addressed and confronted with the message of the gospel and a point at which the deepest meaning of faith in God is exposed. Thus “they are powerful testimonies to the world of our fundamental beliefs about death, resurrection, eternal life, and heaven.”

Burial ceremonies are also used by the church as evangelistic opportunities to reach out to non-Christians and those who no longer maintain a strong attachment to the Church. This way of reaching out to non-Christians and those whose relationship to the church has grown weak requires the church to examine how it communicates the gospel meaningfully not only through preaching the word but also through the inculturation of burial rites. Arguably, Christian funerals are “one of the few occasions when many of those who are not part of the Christian church see Christian faith demonstrated.”

Therefore burial rites are a key to evaluating the effectiveness of the gospel the church proclaims and how this gospel is appropriated and inculturated.

The third reason for choosing the study of burial rites within an AMC is related to the importance of the location of the research. To date most studies on inculturation are presented from the perspective of AICs. Nevertheless the contributions of these studies have played a major role in identifying the character and significance of African Christian initiatives and forms of inculturation. They have also been major sources of constructive criticism of the lack of inculturation and Africanization of AMCs. However, more studies conducted within AMCs are needed to inform conclusions about the lack or absence of inculturated Christian faith and

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12 Ibid.
practices within these churches. Studies by L. Sanneh and K. Bediako are among the few that adopt a general perspective on the subject.\textsuperscript{13}

Conducting studies of inculturation within the Methodist Church as an AMC is important because the manner in which Africans in these churches express their Christian faith must receive attention. The “African Report” states that, in Africa today, religious phenomena still dominate the subconscious of persons of all classes. In the same vein, theologian M. B. G. Motlhabi argues that:

One may accept the fact that many Africans, particularly in the urban areas, might have outgrown some aspects of their past cultural heritage. However, to suggest that they have no vestige of African culture left in their system amounts to reducing them to creatures of western culture — born again in the latter’s image, as it were.\textsuperscript{14}

Members of AMCs are not an exception to the truth of these statements. It cannot be assumed that their membership in these churches takes them through a process of deculturation that leaves them without the ability to innovate African expressions of the Christian faith.

For T. S. Maluleke “Pockets of ‘Africanised’ Christianity even within the so-called ‘mission churches’ and the so-called ‘English-speaking churches’ must begin to be taken seriously.” He maintains that: “pre-funeral-day night vigils, the foot-stamping, the repetitive choruses, the ceremonies of ‘taking off the black mourning clothes’, the peculiarly African


preaching style, …the funeral ‘celebration’ etc. …must begin to be taken seriously as valid African appropriation of Christianity.”\(^{15}\)

The statement of the “African Report” and scholars like Motlhabi and Maluleke suggest that there should be no conclusive assumptions about the absence of inculturation in AMCs. However, these positions do not automatically refute credible research and reflection that reveals that compared to AICs, Christianity in AMCs is not inculturated. Rather the emphasis of these views is on the need to study processes of inculturation within AMCs like the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

An important missiological contribution of this research, therefore, is its empirical focus on AMCs. The study observes the manner in which an AMC in a Tswana Christian setting conducts burial rites and examines and analyzes the burial liturgies that are used. Observations include pre-burial rites, the cleansing rituals, sermons, and post-burial rituals such as the unveiling of tombstones, post funeral memorial services and the visits to the graveyards. These activities throw light on the extent to which Christian traditions within AMCs are open to dialogue with African customs and rituals. The study also provides an opportunity to explore

\(^{15}\) T. S. Maluleke, “Christ in Africa: The Influence of Multi-Culturity on the Experience of Christ,” *Journal of Black Theology* 8, no. 1 (May 1994): 54. Following the view that inculturation is present in AMCs, Maluleke has gone on to speak about African Christianity in an argument that attempts to spell out that Africanization or inculturation of the gospel in Africa is the responsibility of all Christians, irrespective of the historical organization. He says, “The very notion of ‘African Christianity’ is an attempt as much to forge some pattern of uniformity between and amongst African Christians as it is an attempt to describe an existent phenomenon. To speak of African Christianity is to theorise about the possibility of African Christians putting some unique spin on the phenomenon of Christianity in the world. Two phrases have emerged as the most popular names given to the phenomenon, namely ‘Christianity in Africa’ and ‘African Christianity’.” Although these two are often used interchangeably, perhaps they ought to be distinguished. The first seems to allude to the impact of Christianity on Africa and perhaps of Africa on Christianity as well. The second appears to go further and suggests that a peculiarly African form of Christianity has emerged and that such a form is both observable and describable as such. It is important that discussions of African Christianity keep both senses in view at all times. See his “Of Africanised bees and Africanised Churches: Ten Theses on African Christianity,” *Missionalia* 38, no. 3 (November 2010): 373.
how a particular Mission Church among an African people of a given socio-cultural and historical milieu wrestles with issues of Gospel and culture.

This study is also intended to be a resource for the Methodist Church of Southern Africa as well as a model for other churches in Africa that are equally concerned about issues of the relevance of the Gospel and its outward expression. In November 2004 the denomination held a Mission Congress from which emerged a *Mission Charter*. Among the elements of this charter, the church committed itself to “deepening our understanding of African and other Spiritualities” and “training ministers for the African context.” These aspirations will not bear fruit unless there are in-depth and field related studies that can inform and direct the church towards informed programs of action.

Since burials engage most ministers, they are well suited to be used as a vehicle for exploring ways in which the Church can evaluate its effectiveness and relevance. In the Mahikeng circuit alone there were 716 Methodist burials between January 2002 and December 2004.¹⁶ This figure represents an approximate average of 20 burials per month. It is hoped that this study will challenge the Methodist Church to an honest self-examination that will lead to innovative and qualitative growth. It is also hoped that, through these considerations, the study will facilitate dialogue among church leaders, missiologists, theologians and grassroots Christians on relevant expressions of African Christianity.

Last but not least, this is the first study of Barolong burial rites. Therefore it serves as a future resource not only for Methodists and other African Mission Churches, but also for

¹⁶ Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Mahikeng Circuit Burial Register. This was during the period when I served in Mahikeng as a minister.
Barolong people and Batswana in general. It also provides a basis for future research on Christianity and burial rites among Batswana and Barolong in particular.

Sources of the Study

As an African group, Batswana are extremely well documented with regard to their early encounters with Europeans. Among the primary sources for this study are the writings of the 19th century missionaries who labored among Batswana. Rev. Samuel Broadbent’s *A Narrative of the first Introduction of Christianity amongst Barolong Tribe of Bechuanas, South Africa: with a Brief Summary of the Subsequent History of the Wesleyan Mission to the Same People; The Journals of T. L. Hodgson: A Missionary to the Seleka-Rolong and the Griquas, 1821-1831*, edited by R. C. Cope; and *Reminiscences of the Early Life and Missionary Labours of the Rev. John Edwards: Fifty Years of a Wesleyan Mission in South Africa* edited by Clifford Holden are among the invaluable primary sources that provide historical information on the first Wesleyan missionary contact with Batswana. These sources also throw light on the early religious, cultural, social and political life of Batswana. The Wesleyan Missionary Society’s *Missionary Notices* and the manuscripts of the annual meetings of the Albany and Batswana Districts (as they were geographically demarcated at the time) provide information on synod debates relating to missions among Batswana. This archival material is available at the Cory Library, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.

Other Protestant missionary sources that are invaluable about Batswana are Robert Moffat’s *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa; The Gospel among The Bechuanas and other Tribes of Southern Africa* by American Sunday-School Union; *Apprenticeship at Kuruman: Being the Journals and Letters of Robert and Mary Moffat, 1820-1828*, edited by
Isaac Schapera; *The Life of a South African Tribe* by Henri A. Junod and Rev. E. Casalis’s *The Basutos: or, Twenty Three Years in South Africa*. Casalis’ work relates to his missionary work among Basotho of Lesotho but has valuable references to mission work among Batswana.

There are historical, anthropological and theological publications that serve as secondary sources for this study. The invaluable contribution of these fields of study relative to burial rites is also used to elucidate our understanding of the characteristics of burial rites in general and more particularly those found among Barolong,

Theologian Gabriel Setiloane’s *The Image of God among the Sotho-Tswana* is another valuable work. His work outlines the main elements of Sotho-Tswana beliefs and practices. As a Morolong and an ordained Methodist minister, Setiloane’s work provides a good background for this study. Another work of importance is the two-volume work of Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*; and Jean Comaroff’s *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People*. These works of historical anthropology analyze with some detail the interaction between nonconformist missionaries and Batswana. Historian Paul Landau’s *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender, and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom* also provides information that relates to Setswana cultural and social worlds. S. M. Molema’s *The Bantu Past and Present: An Ethnographical and Historical Study of the Native Races of South Africa; Montshiwa, 1815-1895: Barolong Chief and Patriot; and Chief Moroka: His Life, His Times, His Country and His People* give historical background on Barolong and their Christianity.

A number of historical sources on Methodism in Southern Africa are available. J. Whiteside, *History of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of South Africa*; and W. C. Holden, *A
Brief History of Methodism, and of Methodist Missions in South Africa are some of the works that provide historical information on the beginnings and work of Methodist missions in South Africa. The works of W. G. A. Mears, Wesleyan Barolong Mission in the Trans-Orangia, 1821-1884 and Methodism in the Transvaal; and The Wesleyan Mission in the Orange Free State, 1833-1854, As Described in Contemporary Accounts, edited by Karel Schoeman deal specifically with missions among Barolong.

Despite the well documented life and cultural practices of Batswana, comprehensive works on death and burial rites among them or specifically Barolong have not been extensively undertaken. However a number of publications containing significant information on earlier burial practices of Batswana and other neighboring tribes like Basotho and the Tsonga are available. These are E. Casalis’ The Basutos: or, Twenty-Three Years in South Africa; B. A Pauw’s Religion in a Tswana Chiefdom; The Life of a South African Tribe by H. A. Junod; The Gospel among the Bechuanas and other Tribes of Southern Africa by American Sunday-School Union, and R. Moffat’s Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa.

Among other sources are Margaret Sheppard’s Protection and Healing in a Tswana Village: With Particular Reference to the Traditional and Zionist Beliefs and Practices. This work provides a helpful comparative study of Bangwaketse (a Batswana grouping) traditional burial rites with those of a Healing Church amongst Bangwaketse. Also there are research articles published on subjects related to death and burials. E. Sekgarametso’s “Aspects of death and ancestral rites among Barolong” and “Kgatla notions of ritual impurity” by I. Schapera and A. Senabye’s “Class manifestations in funeral systems” are some of the published articles with reference to Barolong and Batswana in general. General works on death and burial rites are
Funeral Customs: Their Origin and Development by Bertram Puckle; The Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion by James Frazer; The Christian and Funerals by Gyasi Nimako; Death Customs: An Analytic Study of Burial Rites by Alfred Bendann; and Death, Ritual and Belief: The Rhetoric of Funerary Rites by Douglas Davies.

Liturgical sources are also relevant to this study. The Works of John Wesley: Journal and Diaries edited by Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater are important in this regard. They make references to occasions where John Wesley counseled the sick and those facing death and conducted funeral services where death had occurred. These journal entries not only point to the form of liturgies employed during these funeral services, but they also provide insight into Wesley’s theology of death. John Wesley’s Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America, with other occasional Services, contains John Wesley’s first service book prepared for the people called Methodist. The document contains the liturgy for the burial of the dead which became the standard for burial services of Methodist people not only in Great Britain but also in Southern Africa and other parts of the world.

In 1933 and 1936 British Methodist Conference published the Book of Offices. These liturgies have also been used by the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and have been translated into Xhosa, Sesotho and Setswana namely, Incwadi Yombedeso Namaculo. AseSouth Africa, Buka ea Merapelo, Litsebeletso le Difela tsa Kereke ea Methodiste ea Southern Africa and Buka ya Merapelo, Ditirelo le Difela tsa Kereke ya Methodiste ya South Africa, respectively. There are slight variations among the three vernacular translations. In addition to the liturgical sources of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa cited above is The Methodist Service Book.
This is the latest service book published in 1975 in the English language. This liturgy, however, has not been translated into the vernaculars.

In addition to the sources named above, the author’s personal knowledge of Setswana ways of life, concepts of beliefs and language add to the pool of sources of this study. As an ordained minister in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa for twenty-eight years, the author brings to this study the experience of conducting funeral services.

Methodology

This study engages the interdisciplinary nature of missiology. This approach is necessary because the encounter between the 19th century Wesleyan missionaries and Batswana was multidimensional. It involved the encounter between gospel and culture, the encounter between the Wesleyan missionaries and a specific Southern Africa tribe during a specific historical era. Firstly, the study reflects on the historical encounter between gospel and culture. The reflection is on the nature of the encounter between the 19th century Wesleyan missionaries and the cultural worlds of Barolong. Particular attention is paid to how the African worldview shaped their understanding of the religion of the missionaries and how the outcome of this encounter continues to influence and express itself in the 21st century in a particular context in Southern Africa.

Secondly, the study analyzes the context of the encounter between the Wesleyans and Batswana. The study recognizes that the Christian faith “takes root and receives expression” in a given cultural context. This approach is necessary for two reasons. Firstly it helps avoid generalizations about missionary encounters and practices in Southern Africa. For example, it is important to acknowledge that Wesleyan missionaries had a different approach of establishing and extending their mission work as compared to that of the London Missionary Society among

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the Batlhaping. The traditional practices of Batswana continue to influence how they interpret, reinterpret and express their faith.

This study uses what Paul G. Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses have called “Critical Contextualization.” This is an approach that discards “Uncritical Contextualization.” While this approach takes seriously the cultural context of its subject, it avoids the temptation of cultural romanticism to the detriment of theologically sound and acceptable Christian beliefs and practices. As Schreiter has warned, failure to be critical in dealing with the interaction between gospel and culture results in the inability to “acknowledge the sin in our own historical experience.” Also this approach is important for this study because the “contradictions and denials” often encountered in AMCs when it comes to African beliefs, customs and practices, must receive uncompromising attention. “Critical Contextualization” is also used in order to give voice to bottled-up questions and allows for ways to seek an African liberating faith.

This study also employs an historical approach. Firstly, it locates the encounter between the Wesleyan missionaries and Barolong within the broader socio-historical context of the interiors of the 19th century South Africa. The study scrutinizes this context to see how it facilitated and sustained future relationships between the Wesleyan missionaries and the people called Barolong. Secondly, this approach is used to ensure that the historical records and oral histories that illustrate the worlds, lives, enchantments, everyday practices and interactions with

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19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., 14. Also see Motlhabi, “African Theology or Black Theology?” , 116.
the Wesleyan missionaries of the nineteenth century are scrutinized in order to throw light on the kind of Christianity that evolved from this encounter. 21

Grounded theory is used in this study through participant observation at pre-funeral, funeral and post funeral events such as visiting the grave yards and “removal” of the mourning clothes. 22 Sermons at funeral services and at unveiling of tombstones were recorded and analyzed. Unveiling of tombstones and Easter remembrance services were attended for observation and the recording of sermons. The general settings and contexts of burial rites observed are described in detail. On the basis of what was observed and described, explanations and conclusions were formulated relative to the focus of the study. 23

Further, the study conducted a set of oral and guided interviews. These interviews collected information on processes of inculturation, that is, how Barolong over the years dealt with questions of the relationship between their culture and the Christian faith, particularly in reference to burial rites. The snowball technique was used to select informants for interviews. 24 Men and women in the age group sixty and above were selected for these interviews. The selection of informants was by identifying one or more individuals, who are regarded as elders in


22 H. Russell Bernard in his Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches (London: Alta Mira Press, 1994), 136, describes “Participant Observation” as a process that “… involves getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information about them.” It requires establishing rapport and a measure of objectivity (Ibid., 137). Also see Isadore Newman and Carolyn R. Benz, Qualitative Research Methodology: Exploring the Interactive Continuum (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 17.


24 See Bernard, Research Methods in Anthropology, 97.
the villages identified below and are considered knowledgeable of Setswana traditions, the
history of Mahikeng and of Methodism in the area. The “seed” individuals were asked to identify
others whom they regard as knowledgeable of Setswana traditions, the history of Mahikeng and
of Methodism in the area. The same technique was used to conduct discussions with
representatives of younger generations on their views concerning traditional burials practices. In
this regard one or more people attending funeral services were identified and requested to name
others who become informants. All persons interviewed were treated as informants and not as
subjects of the study. The study interviewed fifty three informants. Twenty eight of these were
young people between the ages of 23 and 28. The researcher attended twenty funerals for
observation and to record the sermons, eulogies and messages.

The geographic scope of this research includes the Mahikeng areas of Montshiwa Stad,
Ramosadi, Tlhobologo, Motlhabeng and adjacent villages. The choice of these areas of greater
Mahikeng is not a matter of convenience but of importance. Firstly, they are unlike other areas of
greater Mahikeng, for example, Montshiwa Township and Mmabatho. The areas chosen for this
study are still under the influence and “partial” jurisdiction of the tribal chiefs. Secondly, the
selected areas are semi-urban and semi-rural, and therefore they are more influenced by
traditional perspectives and outlook than urban areas. These localities are largely under the
jurisdiction of the paramount chief and his sub-chiefs and headmen. They are also transitional
areas where both modern and traditional cultures overlap.
Definition of Terms

Accommodation refers to a process whereby the evangelizer or the receiving culture adapts the Christian message to the culture of the receiving community.

Acculturation. Shorter’s definition is adopted here namely that, acculturation is “the encounter between one culture and another, or the encounter between cultures.” In this encounter cultures interact “on a footing of mutual respect and tolerance.” The result is a “dynamic and diachronic phenomenon, and not a static, unchanging one.”  

According to Shorter, acculturation is a necessary condition of inculturation.

African Independent Churches. David A. Shank’s definition of these churches as those churches that are “Independent of the mission-planted churches issuing from the impact of western missionary Christianity”, is adopted in this study.

African Mission Churches refer to churches established through missions from Europe and North America. These missions took place mainly during the 19th century missionary era.

Africanization refers to a process that affirms that “the gospel is at home in the African context and that the African context is at home with the gospel.” In this study Africanization emphasizes the importance of appreciating African values and traditions as basis for informed acculturation and inculturation.

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25 Aylward Shorter, Toward a Theology of Inculturation, 7.

26 Ibid., 12.


Assimilation refers to when the customs or elements of the receiving culture are incorporated into Christianity by the missionary. It differs from accommodation in that the missionary determines which elements of the receiving culture can be incorporated into Christianity. Assimilation also differs from acculturation in that the latter involves mutual respect and tolerance.

Barolong are a Southern Tswana people. Barolong of Mahikeng and Barolong-boo-Ratshidi (Barolong of Tshidi) are terms used interchangeably throughout this study. The former term refers more to their geographic location – Mahikeng in the North West Province, South Africa. The latter refers to their genealogy, and differentiates them from the other Barolong groupings of Ratlou, Seleka and Rapulana. They also occupy separate geographic locations.29

Burial rites: Anthropologist Victor Turner defines “ritual” as “behaviour in which key values are expressed in symbols, symbols that are manipulated by the performer to achieve some benefit for individuals or society at large.”30 In this study, these symbols are understood in the context of practices and observances related to the process of burying deceased persons and are carried out by the community of faith, the bereaved family and members of the larger community.

Circuit refers to a group or collection of Methodist local churches under pastoral oversight of one or more ministers, and a Circuit Minister refers to a minister of the Methodist Church who has pastoral oversight of churches within a circuit and administers the sacraments.


Contextualization refers to a process that takes seriously the challenges and opportunities of the immediate context. “It represents the Church’s continuing concern to be relevant to the contemporary world.” 31 “Critical Contextualization” critiques an “uncritical rejection” of culture and “uncritical acceptance of it.” 32 For David Bosch contextualization has two dimensions: liberation and inculturation. 33 This study focuses more on the latter dimension but not to the exclusion of the former. 34

Inculturation is a creative and dynamic process in which there is “the on-going dialogue between faith and culture.” David Bosch clarifies this definition further to say that “inculturation does not mean that culture is to be destroyed and something new built upon its ruins; neither, however, does it suggest that a particular culture is merely to be endorsed in its present form.” 35 Therefore the dynamic nature of inculturation, expressed by Shorter, finds fulfillment when the Christian faith transforms culture from within and reciprocally when the Christian faith gets rooted in that culture. 36

31 Chupungco, Liturgical Inculturation, 21.

32 Hiebert and Meneses, Incarnational Ministry, 168.


34 Louis J. Luzbetak’s two dimensions of contextualization are: inculturation and incarnation. See his The Church and Cultures: Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 69. In the researcher’s view, this model is not in conflict with that of Bosch.

35 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 455.

36 Chupungco, Liturgical Inculturation, 29.
Local Preacher refers to a lay person accredited or commissioned by the Methodist Church to lead worship when called upon to do so. Their role includes conducting burial services.

Methodist Church of Southern Africa is a Protestant Denomination whose historic ties are with British Methodism. It grew out of the missionary labors of the missionaries of the Wesleyan Missionary Society. Its sphere of influence includes Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland.

Worldview in this study is used in terms of Hiebert and Meneses’ definition. It refers to “basic categories and assumptions people make about the nature of things and the logic that relates these to form a coherent understanding of reality.”

Limitations

This study has a number of limitations. The first is related to the lack of written accounts by Wesleyan missionaries on traditional burial rites of Barolong during the 19th century. The records mostly relate instances where Wesleyan missionaries had to bury members of their families, colleagues and converts. Even on these occasions there are no detailed descriptions of the manner in which the burials were conducted. The study therefore works on the assumption that the Methodist burial liturgy used in England during this time would have been used generally by the Wesleyan missionaries in the mission field. The assumption is premised on the

37 The Methodist Church of Southern Africa will henceforth be referred to as the MCSA.

38 Hiebert and Meneses, Incarnational Ministry, 41.

39 The Corey Library at Rhodes University where Methodist Archives are kept has also confirmed that there are no records relating specifically to burial practices of Wesleyan Missionaries.
fact that the current Setswana burial liturgy bears very close resemblance to that of the 19th century Methodist burial liturgy.\textsuperscript{40}

Despite the foregoing limitation, references made to occasions of death and ensuing burials by Wesleyan missionaries indicate the important place that burial rites played in missionary practice in the 19th century Southern Africa. Themes dominant in their “conversion sermons” and pastoral work are also useful sources for understanding their teaching on death and future life. These references also provide indications relative to the manner in which Batswana buried their dead and their beliefs about death.

For descriptions of beliefs about death and burials rites of Batswana in general and other Southern Africa tribes like BaSotho and the Tsonga, the study relies on accounts of missionaries of other denominations such as those of the London Missionary Society and the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society. Accounts of travelers during this period are also utilized. Further information on Batswana burial rites was collected from observation and from informants.

The geographic scope of the research is another limitation. The areas of Montshiwa Stad, Ramosadi, Tlhabologo, Motlhabeng and adjacent villages have been selected for the research at the exclusion of the Townships of Montshiwa and Mmabatho. The disadvantage of this choice precludes valuable information that could be obtained from knowledgeable persons resident in these townships on Batswana and Methodist burial practices. Further, township residents are likely to be more reflective about their views regarding Batswana and Methodist burial rites than residents of the selected villages. Missing out on objective feedback is therefore another limitation.

\textsuperscript{40} The Sesotho and IsiXhosa burial liturgies are identical to the Setswana burial liturgies.
drawback of the geographic scope of the study. However, the reasons stated earlier for the choice of the geographic scope of the study seem justified.

The exclusion of circuit ministers from the planned interviews is an additional limitation since they are always in charge of Methodist burials. Arguably their experiences and views on burial rites would be valuable to the study. However, this limitation will be overcome in part through the analysis of their sermons, use of the burial liturgy and the manner in which they conduct burials overall.

The history of Methodism in Mahikeng was not limited to Barolong people. White and mixed-race congregations also came into being in the early 1900s. This study, however, does not incorporate these two histories.

Lastly, this study recognizes that while Charismatic churches play a significant role in African Christianity today, they do not factor in this research project.

**Chapter Outline**

Chapter one is the *Introduction* and it discusses the problem of the study and why it is important. Methods of the study, definitions of terms used in this study, limitations of the study and chapter-by-chapter outline are also laid out in this introductory chapter.

Chapter two, *The Genesis of Methodist Missions amongst Barolong*, sketches the historical beginnings of the encounter of 19th century Wesleyan missionaries with Batswana and Barolong in particular. While it is important to highlight the events and their chronology, the chapter avoids merely repeating the already available chronologies of the events of the encounters as recorded in other writings. Therefore the chapter explores how the cultural, social and religious worlds of Barolong developed when they accepted Christian teachings and
Methodism in particular. The role of native agency in these encounters and developments also receives attention.

Chapter three, *The Origins of MCSA Burial Rites*, traces the historical origins of the burial rites of the MCSA. Theological tenets that inform Methodist beliefs about life and death are also explored. Further, the chapter scrutinizes the records of non-conformist missionaries, who came to labor in Southern Africa, to study their teachings on death, and the methods and rituals they employed for burials. The chapter includes a review of Barolong’s affinity to funerals and how this affinity interacts with the use of the official Methodist burial liturgy.

Chapter four, *Barolong Traditional Burial Practices*: This chapter surveys Barolong traditional burial rites. The survey reviews the records of the nineteenth and early twentieth century missionaries on Batswana burial practices, of whom Barolong are a part. The records of travellers and or independent European observers of the same people, during the same period, are also examined. In addition to the written records referred to above, information obtained from Barolong informants about burial practices is presented. It delineates the main elements of Barolong traditional burial rites within the ambit of burial rites within African culture and that of Batswana in particular. Notwithstanding the absence of witnessing burial rites by the first missionaries, there are, on the other hand, records that point to the existence of burial rites among the people of Southern Africa, especially among Batswana. For purposes of highlighting the evolution of burial practices and rites, written sources about the people of Southern Africa with regards to the interment of the dead, are divided into 19th century and early to mid 20th century accounts.
Information presented in this chapter is derived largely from available records of the periods indicated. The chapter presents the information gathered from informants about Batswana burial practices. Information gathered from informants of 70 years of age and older relates the burial practices of the 1920s to the present.

Chapter five, *Methodist Burial Rites Among Barolong* forms the core of this study. The chapter presents, describes and analyzes what was observed in the field. Information from informants of ages 20 years of age and older is also used in this chapter about burials practices as they are today. Special attention is devoted to dominant themes that have emerged at funeral and unveiling of tombstone sermons, speeches and during interviews with informants. The manner in which Methodist funeral liturgies are used by Methodists in Mahikeng is reviewed and evaluated in the light of Barolong burial practices.

Chapter six, *Conclusion*, summarizes the findings of the study and analyzes their missiological implications. On the basis of the findings and their analysis, the study makes suggestions for pastoral innovations, better inculturation and implementation. Suggestions for further research are also presented in this last chapter.
CHAPTER TWO

THE GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF
METHODISM AMONG BAROLONG OF
MAHIKENG, 1823-1896

Introduction

It is reported that Chief Montshiwa of Barolong-boora-Tshidi died on the evening of October 19th, 1896. The Wesleyan missionaries conducted the public burial ceremonies of this great Chief who had led his people for forty years. It is the contention of this study that the occasion of the burial of the Chief by the Wesleyans was not only a significant and decisive moment in the development and influence of Methodism among Barolong of Mahikeng but it was also the climax of missionary influence. The death of Chief Montshiwa should also be interpreted as representing the end of the first epoch of Methodist presence that began in 1823 among Barolong people in general, and those of Mahikeng in particular. Thus the study considers the first period of Methodism among Barolong-boora-Tshidi to have taken place from 1823 to 1896.

The assertion that the death and burial of Chief Montshiwa by the Wesleyans marked the end of the first epoch of Methodist presence and influence among Barolong-boora-Tshidi must be explicated. According to S. M. Molema, a few hours before his death, the chief requested to receive the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Until this time Chief Montshiwa had not become a member of the church, though he occasionally attended church gatherings, most

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42 Ibid.
likely for “strategic benefits.” In other words, during his lifetime he never became a confessing Christian. But at the same time it cannot be concluded that his request for the Christian sacraments was a testimony that he had now accepted the Christian faith. Nevertheless, the act in itself must have represented an affirmation and approval of the Christian faith and his indirect blessing of the presence of Methodism among Barolong of Mahikeng in the eyes of his people, especially the Christian community. This is more so if it is considered that among Batswana the words, wishes, and actions of a dying person have significant meaning. Further, the act of a missionary giving the chief a Christian burial must have added to the acknowledgment that Christianity had now become a recognized part of the life of Barolong, including the chieftainship.

The death of Chief Montshiwa and his request to be ministered to by a Christian minister just before his death represents the first generation of Barolong of Mahikeng who had witnessed the first collective experience of Barolong with Christianity. In particular, Chief Montshiwa as the primary custodian of the culture of his people had been critical in the evolution of that relationship. The manner in which he dealt with the Christian element among his people and the development of that relationship set the tone for the influence of Methodism among Barolong of Mahikeng. The continued influence of Methodism among Barolong-boo-Ratshidi after the death of Montshiwa might have been entrenched by his request for Christian rituals. Therefore an assessment of Montshiwa’s impact on the development of Methodism in Mahikeng must be carried out in the light of the events that took place at the end of his life.

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Molema, the first and principal Morolong Christian leader among Barolong of Mahikeng died in December 1881. It could be argued that Molema’s death in December 1881 should be regarded as representing the end of the first epoch of Methodist history among his people, and not the death of Chief Montshiwa. Notwithstanding the argument about the significance of Molema’s role in the genesis and growth of Methodism, the death of this great evangelist did not imply any new possibilities for the Christian community. If anything, his death must have raised fears about the survival and future of Methodism among the people. For this reason Montshiwa’s death still remains an important historical event to represent the end of the first epoch of the relationship between Methodism and Barolong of Mahikeng.

The burial of Montshiwa is an important historical event for another reason. It was a moment that facilitated the interaction between Barolong traditional burial rites and those of Methodism at the highest tribal level. It is inconceivable that the burial of the chief would have received anything less than an appropriate cultural burial befitting a tribal chief of Montshiwa’s status. Equally the Wesleyans would have used every opportunity to afford the chief an honorable Christian funeral to promote the influence of the church among the people. The result of the interaction at this level would subtly provide an impetus for the inculturation of the gospel among Barolong of Mahikeng at a broader tribal level.

So far an attempt has been made to explain why the year 1896 is chosen as the ending point of the first period of Methodist beginnings and development among the subject of this study. It is equally important to say why the year 1823 is chosen as the beginning of this period and not 1850.

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In 1995 the Methodist people in Mahikeng celebrated one hundred and forty-five years of Methodist presence in this area. The anniversary was premised on 1850 as the year that Methodism was established among Barolong of Mahikeng. The historic significance of this year is associated with Rev. Joseph Ludorf, the first resident missionary among Barolong-booth-RaTshidi as a chieftaincy independent from other Barolong chiefdoms. Given this important event, dating the genesis of Methodism among Barolong-booth-RaTshidi from 1850 is correct. However, it does not represent the beginning of the first encounter of Barolong of Mahikeng with a Wesleyan missionary or with the influence of Methodism. Rev. Ludorf’s residence among the people in 1850 was a continuation of a relationship that had started between the Wesleyans and Barolong earlier and not the beginning of a new association. As will be shown below, it was precisely on the basis of earlier encounters that Chief Montshiwa of Barolong-booth-RaTshidi invited Ludorf to come and live with them.

The first encounters of Barolong-booth-RaTshidi with the Wesleyan Missionaries took place in 1823. The year 1850, therefore, represents a deliberate and positive response on the part of Barolong of Mahikeng to the work and influence of Wesleyan missionaries that began in 1823. 1850 was one of the significant moments during which Methodism among the people achieved an important development. Therefore, this study contends that what is characteristic of inculturation among these people today is a continuation and development of a process that began when Batswana cultural milieu first encountered the world of Western Christianity in the 1820s. This point will be evident when Tswana concepts relating to God and death are discussed.
The Conception of “Bechuana Mission”

Wesleyan missions to Batswana commenced in 1822. Prior to this date Wesleyan missions to the northwestern interior of South Africa extended only as far as Namaqualand in the present Western Cape Province. The mission station in this area was at Liliefontein in Little Namaqualand. The only missionary agency that had begun work further north of Namaqualand at this time was the London Missionary Society. In 1821 Robert Moffat of the LMS came to work among the Batlhaping, a Tswana ethnic group further north from Namaqualand. He finally established a permanent mission station among them at Kuruman. Many other Tswana people in the interiors of South Africa were yet to be reached by missionaries.

There was, therefore, still an opportunity for the extension of missions into the interiors by those missionary agencies who could afford to do so. Barnabas Shaw, the first Wesleyan missionary in South Africa and the first superintendent of Wesleyan missions from 1820, seized the opportunity. James Archbell, one of the missionaries who labored among Batswana was convinced that the justification for the extension of this missionary endeavor was a theological one. He stated that, “The love of Christ is diffusive in its influence, and eagerly seizes every opportunity of extending its charities wherever suitable objects present themselves.” He believed “It was this which gave rise to the Bechuana Mission.”

Thus in 1818 Shaw conceived the idea to extend Wesleyan missions into Tswana territories that were not yet reached by other missionary agencies of the time such as the London

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Missionary Society. However the vision only remained a dream until 1821. A number of challenges prevented the immediate implementation of Shaw’s missionary dream. Among these obstacles was lack of reliable information regarding the whereabouts of Batswana. Shaw’s own record suggests that the information he had received until this time, probably from hunters and travelers about the geographic location of these people, was scanty and unreliable. Any efforts to pursue this dream without reasonably accurate information could have meant exorbitant financial costs, waste of time through prolonged wanderings in search of the people sought, and uncalculated risk to human life. It was only after informed knowledge from a Griqua convert, whose name Shaw does not mention, that reliable information about Batswana became available. To this effect Shaw wrote:

In the year 1818, some of our Namaequas of Lily Fountain went on a visit to their friends in Griqua-land, where they remained for about twelve months. On their return, several persons accompanied them, who sojourned at our station more than half a year. Two or three of these, before their departure, professed to have received spiritual good, and one was publicly baptized in the chapel. This individual had frequently travelled among the different tribes of the Bechuanas, and gave us more information respecting them, than we had received from any other quarter. In addition to this, he earnestly requested that a missionary might accompany him homewards, promising to render him every possible assistance, with wagon and oxen, and to become his guide and interpreter. Having no missionary at liberty, we could not, at that time, accede to his request, but engaged, when we obtained sufficient help, to exert ourselves in behalf of the multitudes of whom he spake.

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46 According to John Campbell, the Griquas originally called themselves ‘Bastard’ but at his persuasion adopted the name Griqua. They had had white antecedents and were therefore, according to him, more ‘civilized’ than Batswana. See his Journals of Travels in South Africa: Among the Hottentot and Other Tribes, in the Years 1812, 1813 and 1814 (London: Religious Tract Society, 1837), 349, 351. One of the reasons why the Griquas would want a missionary was that they, like other tribes, sought the political security that was often associated with the presence of a missionary.

The second obstacle was due to the shortage of missionaries. It was only in 1821 that Shaw was able to secure a missionary from England to undertake the venture. It was Rev. Kay. During his travels his wife accompanied him and Mr. Mevil, a representative of the Cape Colony government. Mr. Mevil had great sympathy for missionaries and their work and on several occasions accompanied them on their travels. But also as a government agent he must have had compelling influence in paving the way for the advance of missionaries in new areas. He resigned his position in 1826 and became a missionary of the LMS.

Thus Rev Kay and his company were the first to be commissioned for the Wesleyan “Bechuana mission.” However their venture into Tswana territory did not last for long. In December of the same year Rev. Kay decided to withdraw from this mission. As we shall see later, Rev. Kay appears to have been overwhelmed by the difficult and almost dangerous political and social conditions that prevailed among the ethnic groups in the interior at the time. The undertaking of the Bechuana mission was therefore interrupted temporarily. It was resumed in 1822 and was never to be interrupted again.

_The Search for Batswana_

The records of the Wesleyan missionaries who were mandated to find Batswana after Kay’s withdrawal demonstrate that they were persistent in pursuing the task they had set

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themselves. The Reverends Broadbent and Hodgson continued from where Kay left. They remained determined and undeterred from that undertaking, even when favorable conditions to start a mission elsewhere and without much labor presented themselves. The two missionaries came across the Koranas in their search for Batswana. Broadbent records indicate that like most tribes at this time, the Koranas wanted the presence of missionaries among them and had invited the Wesleyans to settle among them. However the two missionaries declined the request of the Koranas. In defense of this decision Broadbent said:

perhaps some persons may think that, with such a call, and made in so urgent a manner, we should have been justified in departing from our instructions, and have remained with this Korana Chief and his people. To which I would answer, that as our destination was to the Bechuanas, we saw it as our duty to proceed until we reached them. 51

The unwavering persistence of the Wesleyans to find Batswana should be understood as more than just the missionaries’ urge to evangelize the “heathen” Batswana. It also involved what must be interpreted as the politics of missions during this period. It was not the practice for mission agencies to start work in close proximity to each other. This was more evident in Robert Moffat’s dissatisfaction with Kay’s attempt to start Wesleyan mission work in areas close to where the LMS was operating. 52 It was critical, therefore, that Wesleyan work be started in a reasonably distant geographic location from that of the LMS. Secondly, the size of the community where missions were to be established seems to have been critical. Available information demonstrates that Batswana were greater in numbers than the Griquas and the

51 Broadbent, A Narrative, 26.

52 Schapera, Apprenticeship at Kuruman, 66-67.
Koranas. In addition, these communities appear to have lived in smaller communities when compared to Batswana. It thus makes sense that Broadbent and his colleagues would be less interested in settling among the Koranas than establishing work among Batswana who lived in large communities and where the potential for an influential and permanent mission would be greater.

However, another argument is plausible. If part of missionary work had do with “civilizing” African tribes, then the missionaries would be more interested in establishing work among those who were considered to be less or totally uncivilized. The Griquas and the Koranas, because of their early contacts, antecedent relationship and the influence of European ways of life on their culture at the time, would have been considered more “civilized” than Batswana. The necessity to “civilize” African tribes would have been another compelling reason to establish work among Batswana. This principle did not preclude future work among the Koranas and the Griquas. In 1833 the Wesleyans establish mission work among the Koranas, Griquas, and the Basters at Umpukane, Buchuaap and New Platberg respectively.

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53 Broadbent, A Narrative, 29.

54 Ibid., 27.

55 According to J. Du Plessis, the Koranas were a Hottentots tribe. See his A History of Christian Missions in South Africa (Cape Town: C. Struik, Reprint, 1965), 106.

56 Schapera, Apprenticeship at Kuruman, xxii.

57 Schoeman, The Wesleyan Mission, 45.
Bechuana Mission or Barolong Mission?

Evidence shows that the pursuit of Batswana by the Wesleyans did not culminate in bringing the majority of Batswana tribes under the influence of Methodism. The outcome of their search, however, resulted in Methodism becoming only predominant among one Tswana tribe – Barolong. This fact is evident within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa to this day. The influence of the denomination is greater among Barolong than it is among other Setswana speaking people in Southern Africa. The statistics of the denomination indicate that Mahikeng circuit is one of the areas within this Conference that has the greatest Methodist presence.\(^{58}\) The government statistics of 2003 also show that Methodists are highest in numbers compared to other historical churches in Mahikeng.\(^{59}\)

This enormous presence of Methodism among Barolong can be explained only in relation to the end result of what was called “Bechuana mission” — Barolong as the core of Methodist missions among Batswana people. On the other hand the designation “Bechuana Mission” makes sense given the fact that during the 1820s a distinction between Barolong and other Batswana tribes was perhaps not a priority. Further, it would not have been possible to make the distinction between Barolong and other Batswana groupings. At this stage outsiders like the missionaries would not have known who Barolong were and who other Batswana groupings were.

This being the case, however, the designation “Barolong Mission” is appropriate because no other Batswana people during the 19th century received the attention that the Wesleyans gave


\(^{59}\) Statistics South Africa, *Census 2001*. 
to Barolong people. There is also no evidence that they made any attempt to work among other Batswana people after their initial contact with Barolong. It is therefore appropriate that Mears entitled his historical piece on Wesleyan Missions “Wesleyan Barolong Mission in the Trans-Orangia, 1821-1884.” It was not very long after their missionary work had started that the Wesleyans realized that their work was in fact primarily among Barolong. However, there were other groups such as the Basotho, the Griquas and the Koranas, et cetera, who benefited from the establishment of missions among Barolong. This was a spontaneous process because these ethnic communities were neighbors of Barolong and interacted constantly with them during the 1820s. The LMS worked among BaTlhaping, another Batswana group, while the Paris Evangelical Society established its work among the Basotho in Lesotho from 1833.  

There could be another explanation for the designation of the “Bechuana Mission” that should be mentioned in passing. Until 1823 Wesleyan missions had been confined among the white settlers in Cape Town, the Namas, the Griquas and the Xhosas. Therefore the designation could have been a way of making a distinction between this particular mission and the others that were already in existence.

Having stated possible reasons for the designation “Barolong Mission” the important point to emphasize is that what was called “Bechuana Mission” was in all respects a “Barolong Mission.” Therefore the strong presence of Methodism among Barolong in general, and Barolong of Mahikeng in particular must be understood within the context of the beginnings and

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60 Broadbent, A Narrative, 75.
progression of Methodist Missions among this Tswana sub-group.⁶¹ The first encounter of Wesleyan Christianity with Tswana worldview took place within the Tswana sub-culture of Barolong people. The result has been that over the years Methodism among Batswana has been associated with Barolong people.

19th Century Social and Political contexts in the interiors of South Africa

The arrival of Wesleyan missionaries in Tswana territories in the 1820s coincided with a period of tensions among the different ethnic groups in South Africa. These tensions, which correctly could be called the civil wars of this period in South Africa, resulted in continuous migrations within the region. The main three causes of these conflicts and migrations were the Difaqane, the expansion of the Zulus under Shaka; and the intrusions and invasions of tribal territories by immigrant Dutch Boers from the Cape. The migration of the Dutch Boers from the Cape into the interiors is largely attributed to the takeover of the Cape by the British and their desire to govern “frontier” areas.⁶² A third factor which historians have not taken into account is the hostile climatic conditions that have always prevailed in the central parts of Southern Africa particularly in the areas occupied by Batswana.

The abundance of chronological and systematic historical studies constructed from the 19th century journals of missionaries, hunters, traders as well as from the records of conventions and treaties that relate to these tensions and migrations makes it unnecessary to replicate their

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⁶¹ The weakness of the historiography, however, is that the development of Methodism among the Barolong-boó-Ratshidi or in Mahikeng has not received enough attention from those who have written about Methodism among Barolong.

⁶² Theal, History of the Boers, 59. A detailed account of why the Emigrant Farmers left the Cape Colony is contained in a declaration by Piet Retief. See 60-61 of the source just cited.
details here. However, it is important to highlight those events that had immediate effect on missionary activities and relationships, because the acceptance of Wesleyan missionaries and their work among Barolong were influenced and to a great deal impacted upon by the political and social milieu of this period. Highlighting these events is necessary for guiding the interpretation that accompanies this study relative to the social and cultural changes that ensued among Barolong. The brief outline of these events will also demonstrate that the process of changes that ensued coincided with the influence of Wesleyan Christian missions, which introduced further social and cultural changes. This last point will be evident when changes related to burial practices among Batswana and Barolong in particular, are discussed later in this study.

*The Difaqane*

A primary source of the tensions and heightened migrations in the 1820s was the *Difaqane*. Cope has succinctly defined *Difaqane* as that “time of troubles which resulted from the invasion of the highveld by bands of refugees from the disturbances in Natal which were to culminate in the formation of the Zulu kingdom”

This period of inter-tribal conflicts began in 1822 and lasted for fifteen years. The details of the geographic origins and political causes of these conflicts are discussed with details by historians like George McCall Theal, George W. Stow, D. F. Ellenberger, Leonard M. Thompson and J. D. Omer-Cooper, and do not need to be repeated. Fundamentally these historians are agreed that the causes of these conflicts were the

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64 Schapera, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, xxiii.
internal frictions that developed between the Nguni tribes of Zululand along the frontiers of the eastern coast of the present day KwaZulu Natal.

However, Julian Cobbing holds a different view to most historians on the source of these conflicts. He argues that the real cause of the South African conflicts during the 19th century was not mainly due to the differences between the various groups. According to him the conflicts must be primarily ascribed to European interference in African affairs. He concludes that the demand to acquire more slaves by the Portuguese along the southern coast of Zululand and the capturing of Sotho-Tswana communities by the Griquas and Bergenaars to supply the labor demands of the Cape Colony led to the Zulu wars and the Difaqane.

Regardless of the apparent differing opinions about the historical causes of the beginnings of the wars, the end results were detrimental to BaSotho, Batswana and Barolong in particular. The Nguni groups that fled west from the east fell upon and unleashed attacks on the Batlokwa of Mantatisi who had until this time lived in the regions west of the Drakensburg Mountains, probably in the areas around present day Harrismith and Warden in the Free State Province. These attacks gave rise to a chain reaction of wars and counter wars. The Batlokwa were forced to flee in a northwesterly direction into territories occupied by Batswana tribes. Here they came across Batswana chiefdoms of the Bangwaketse, Bahurutshe and Barolong-boo-Rathsidi. The Bangwaketse under the leadership of Chief Makaba defeated the Batlokwa. In their flight from the country of Bangwaketse, the Batlokwa fell upon the Barolo-boo-Ratshdi under Chief Tawana at Phitshane in June 1823. Once Mantatisi had ravaged Barolong, she proceeded

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towards Kuruman where her warriors were defeated by the combined efforts of the BaTlhaping and the fighting skills of the Griquas in the use of guns and riding horses. This defeat is accredited to the organizing skills of Robert Moffat who was a missionary among the Batlhaping.

The devastation caused by Mantatisi upon Barolong-boo-Ratshidi was a decisive event that eventually forced them to migrate south from the Molopo area in search of allies and safety. This migration ultimately brought them to join other Barolong chiefdoms at Platberg in the south. It was here at Platberg and resulting from the consequences of the Difaqane that Barolong-boo-Ratshidi came into contact with the Wesleyan missionaries. Herein began a relationship that was never to be severed. This relationship is a demonstration that the Difaqane, though a devastating experience for all those affected, had an element of advantage for the missionaries. The work of making converts was made easier because of the interdependence that existed between the two parties.

While a group of Batlokwa under Mantatisi attacked Barolong-boo-Ratshidi, another group of Batlokwa – the Bataung under Moletsane, moved south. The effects of the wars that created Zululand were also the cause of this movement. Barolong-boo-Seleka under chief Sefunelo who were resident at Makwasi fell victim to this Batlokwa group in January of 1823.66

Below, under the section, First Phase of Wesleyan Missions among Barolong, we shall observe that Barolong-boo-Seleka under their chief Sefunelo were the first Barolong chiefdom during their flight from Bataung to make contacts with the Wesleyan missionaries.

Another devastating force that came out of the disturbances of 1822 in Zululand was the rise of the powerful Mzilikazi of the AmaNdebele people. He was Shaka’s former lieutenant and had dissented and broke away with a group of Zulu people. He pushed north and northwest from the kingdom of the Zulu. He entered the Sotho - Tswana territories from 1830 and launched devastating attacks on the Bangwaketsi, Bahurutshe, Bakwena and Barolong. Some groups of the Barolo people, probably among them those of Barolong-boo-Ratshdi under Tawana, are said to have taken flight west from the Molopo area into the eastern parts of the Kgalagadi desert. The majority of Tawana’s people and those of chief Gontse migrated south where they ultimately joined the chiefdom of the Seleka who were already with the Wesleyan missionaries at Platberg since July 22, 1826.67

The Barolong chiefdom of Rapulana under Matlabe accepted the authority of Mzilikazi after the MaNdebele chief rescued them from the domination of the Bataung of Moletsane.68 However, the people of Matlabe escaped from Mzilikazi and joined the other three Barolong chiefdoms in Thaba Nchu in 1835.69 These Barolong chiefdoms now found themselves living together under the influence of Methodism in Thaba Nchu. Prior to the Difaqane these chiefdoms seemed to have lived independently from each other. Barolong-boo-Ratshidi occupied the areas of the Molopo river basin to which they returned after the defeat of Mzikazi in 1836, an event that historically marked the end of Difaqane.


The Emigrant Boers

Another development that was to have consequences for Barolong people was the migration of the white settlers from the Cape colony into the interior of South Africa. Evidence shows that these emigrants from the Cape Colony in the South, to the northern interior areas occupied by Batswana and Basotho among others, happened independently from but concurrently with the Difaqane. The advance of white emigrants from the Cape Colony into the interior and the infiltration of white hunters on African territory also added to the already existing friction and uncertainty among African tribes. The pressure of the Koranas and later the Griquas all advancing eastward from the west, also added to the factors that increased the conflicts. This development was to have lasting effects on Barolong-boo-Ratshidi as the Boers embarked on a political and military program of appropriating land that belonged to the people of chief Montshiwa.

The historian Theal has approached the question of the rivalry between African tribes and immigrant Boers over the ownership of land in favor of the latter. He maintains that the land that the immigrant Boers occupied did not belong to any of the African tribes. Some missionaries who were sympathetic towards the immigrants also held this view. Among them was the Wesleyan missionary Rev. John Edwards. He wrote concerning the influx of the emigrants from the Cape into what would become the Orange Free State, now the Free State, that “I would here repeat that when the Dutch emigrated to the Free State it was one vast extent of uncultivated waste land, not inhabited by any civilized being, nor owned by any people, and which was lawful

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for anyone to possess.” For him, it would seem “wild Bushmen, who were numerous” did not warrant to be legitimate occupants of the land. Notwithstanding opinions like those held by Rev. Edwards, however, it must be remembered that the Difaqane forced numerous tribes to flee their ancestral lands, leaving it to the risk of being appropriated by the more powerful invaders. On the other hand the “waste land” was always a bone of contention between immigrant Boers and the missionaries. The immigrants contended that the land they occupied belonged to no one. This attitude became the source of constant conflicts between the white immigrants and Barolong of Mahikeng.

The development of Methodism among Barolong people particularly from 1849 took place, therefore, in the heat of bitter relationships between Barolong of Mahikeng and immigrant Boers. Rev. Joseph Ludorf, the first resident missionary among Barolong of Mahikeng after their return from Thaba Nchu to the Molopo basin, spent most of his time engaged in the conflicts between Barolong and the Boers. After the time of Ludorf, the Methodist community in Mahikeng through its native leadership and Wesleyan resident missionaries, and side by side with the chieftain, stood together in solidarity to combat Boer domination.

So far the review of the effects of the political and social hostilities in the interiors of South Africa has demonstrated that these conditions gave rise to a constant atmosphere of war, conflict and suspicions. Anxiety about the possibility of being attacked and the urgency with which a tribe would want to either maintain a superior status over one other or to settle down

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72 Ibid., 83.
without the fear of being attacked by some another African group, or a fear that their land might be taken by Europeans would understandably become a major preoccupation. This period, during which the Wesleyan missionaries began their work among Barolong could be correctly described as a period of heightened alertness, mistrust and readiness to protect one’s territory at all costs. It was a time of vulnerability but also of openness to change and innovation.

The “scramble” for missionaries by African chiefs in this region during this period must be understood within the context of these wars. The presence of missionaries among any group served as a deterrent against impending enemies in a number of instances. The defeat of the people of Mantatasi by the BaTlhaping with the assistance of the Griquas and the coordinating skills of Robert Moffat on June 26, 1823, is a typical example. Further, it was also Moffat who found favor with Mzilikazi and this relationship deterred the Ndebele chief from attacking communities that had missionaries residing with them. The presence of the Wesleyans among Barolong at Platberg and the move to Thaba Nchu was largely successful because of the security that prevailed there. Therefore in most cases, chiefs allowed missionaries within their communities more for political reasons than the desire for their subjects to accept the religion of the missionaries. This applied also to Barolong-boo-Ratshidi as it will be shown below.

*Climatic Conditions*

Droughts are seldom cited as one of the causes of confrontation and migrations during 19th century Southern Africa in the writings of missionaries and historians. Even S. M. Molema,

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74 Schapera, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 91-95.
Barolong historian, appears to have failed to recognize the part drought played in the political and social events of this time. It is surprising that the effects that climatic conditions had on the work of missionaries appear to have been pushed to the periphery in the historical and mission accounts of this time given the fact that rainmaking, which was a major religious and cultural activity among Batswana, was one of the practices that missionaries working among them sought to eradicate.

Regardless of the marginalization of the effects of drought on cultural, social and religious lives of Batswana during this time, there is evidence that suggests that severe droughts that prevailed during this period were among the factors that threatened the lives of both humans and animals alike. It is therefore important to bring into the equation the effects that climatic conditions had on the missionaries when assessing the challenges that they had to face.

The severe climatic conditions were experienced especially in the northwestern interior of South African and in what was to become Bechuanaland, now Botswana. Available missionary records show that while it rained occasionally, the rains did not alter significantly the effects of recurring and prolonged droughts. In February 1822 Robert Moffat described in graphic terms the effects of drought on Batlhaping and his station:

The extreme heat and drought of this season, together with the two former, carries along with it all the horror of famine, from the entire failure of the crops. Last year many died of hunger, and were carried out to a distance from the town to satiate the hungry wolf. This year its effects will doubtless be more destructive.

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75 See his comment regarding the flight of Barolong from Lotlhakane in 1852 in Molema, *Montshiwa*, 46.

In addition to the lack of sufficient and sustained rainfalls there were occasional devastations caused by swarms of locusts. The occurrences of these locust plagues worsened the situation by depleting the already fragile vegetation and crops. These unfavorable conditions contributed towards migrations and inter-ethnic clashes.

Equally these droughts also brought negative effects on the work and success of the missionaries. At other occasions people believed that the presence of missionaries among them was responsible for the absence of rain and the resulting droughts, and these perceptions had direct bearing on the success and effects of missions. Moffat complained that Batswana among whom he worked accused them (missionaries) of “hindering the rain.” The Wesleyan missionaries encountered the same challenge with Chief Sefunelo at Platberg. In their own defense the missionaries responded by uttering that God withheld the rain because of the sins of the people. From the perspective of Batswana the defense of the missionaries could have implied that the missionaries were withholding the rain on behalf of God. These accusations and counter accusations between the missionaries and Batswana chiefs are evidence that while the droughts brought misery to the lives of many people and had impact on the stability of missionary work, they also provided an opportunity for debate between the religion of Batswana and that of the missionaries.

77 Schapera, Apprenticeship at Kuruman, 218-219.


The records of missionaries and travelers of this era often describe the unbearable dry weather conditions in this region that would have undoubtedly contributed to the causes of tribal movements.\textsuperscript{80} The need to find water and better agricultural and grazing lands for livestock meant that groups of people were often forced to migrate from one place to another.\textsuperscript{81} This factor was also critical in determining the location of most mission stations. John Edwards wrote:

Already I have mentioned the barrenness of the country where our stations were, owing to the frequent droughts and locusts, which destroyed everything, so that the people could scarcely obtain food enough to sustain life. It was known to some of them that there were tracts of beautiful and unoccupied country near the source of the Caledon River, belonging to Seconyela and Moshesh, .... It was resolved by the chief men of the stations to form an expedition, …to see this country.\textsuperscript{82}

The result of this expedition was the birth of Thaba Nchu.

These migrations had negative political and social effects. Communities encroached on the territories of others on the one hand, while on the other, the need to protect their own territory gave rise to some of the conflicts.\textsuperscript{83} The search for rare commodities caused conflict between the inhabitants and the intruders. The most critical commodity was water and therefore the most frequently contested. The availability of water was also the principal factor that determined the location where the missionaries or tribes would decide to establish a settlement. Decisions to make permanent settlements at places that had prospects for reliable sources of water appear to

\textsuperscript{80} Schapera, \textit{Apprenticeship at Kuruman}, 55. Also see Bain’s remarks about Tawana in Theal, \textit{History of the Boers}, 49-50; Becker, \textit{Path of Blood}, 135.

\textsuperscript{81} Schapera, \textit{Apprenticeship at Kuruman}, 12-13.

\textsuperscript{82} Holden, \textit{Reminiscences}, 53; Schapera, \textit{Apprenticeship at Kuruman}, 12-13, 26.

\textsuperscript{83} Becker, \textit{Path of Blood}, 37.
have taken precedence over places that offered safety from attacks. Examples of this phenomenon are numerous. The decision of the Wesleyan missionaries to move from Platberg to Thaba Nchu, which became the hub of Wesleyan missions among Batswana and the Free State was based on this factor.\textsuperscript{84} The key to Barolong of Mahikeng settling along the Molopo area was in greater part due to the availability of water along the Molopo river basin. The same applied to Platberg and Kuruman. The location of these settlements, perhaps with the exception of Thaba Nchu, does not suggest that safety from attacks took precedence over greater access to water. In the case of Barolong of Mahikeng, Jean Comaroff has argued that one of the conflicts that arose between Barolong and their adversaries, the Boers, centered on the question of who had the right of access to sources of water.\textsuperscript{85}

That drought was a negative common factor in the lives of communities in the interiors is reflected in the religious conflicts that often engaged missionaries with rainmakers of Batswana communities. On numerous occasions missionaries like Robert Moffat clashed with traditional doctors for their rainmaking ceremonies. And it was on the prevalence of rainmaking that missionaries often designed their preaching in a manner that would point people away from this practice. Missionaries often saw and interpreted rainmaking ceremonies to be representing the core religious life of Batswana. It is doubtful that the missionaries saw these ceremonies to be

\textsuperscript{84} Holden, \textit{Reminiscences}, 53.

expressions of the quest for divine intervention during times of great need. The failure of rainmaking ceremonies to produce rain often presented the missionaries with an opportunity to present the Christian God as the only true power able to deal with natural dilemmas such as drought. On one occasion after a rainmaking ceremony had failed to produce rain, the rainmakers turned to Moffat to intercede to God on their behalf. To that effect Moffat was glad that:

They therefore agreed that we missionaries, who possessed accurate views of God’s works, should pray to God to have pity on them and give them more rain. I enlarged on the subject, and exhibited to them how ridiculous such conduct was, to look to man, and a very ignorant one too, as the source of valuable a blessing as rain. They assented to all I said, and Munnimeets remarked that their conduct in that respect originated in their ignorance, and he had no doubt that but that when it pleased God to take away their stony hearts they would unite with us in making known that Gospel, which we had brought to them, to the nations which were in the Interior. I assured them that next morning we should appropriate to pray to God for rain.

Unquestionably unfavorable climatic conditions had negative impact on the lives of Batswana communities and the initial work of the missionaries. And they also had influence on the religious outlook of the religion of Batswana people, shown through their attachment to rainmaking ceremonies and water. Becker has summarized eloquently how the people of Southern Africa have a special attachment to rain and therefore to water. He says:

So important has rain always been to the survival of the tribes of Southern Africa that one cannot but notice how frequently it is mentioned in the course of conversation. The people delight in either describing the phenomenal growth of their crops or the excellent condition of their cattle since the recent showers. On

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86 To this day, prayers for rain are usually held in most Batswana communities around the months of December. In Mahikeng both Christian leaders and the tribal authority usually organize these services. It is also important to note that the Methodist Setswana Service Book has prayers for rain.

87 Schapera, Apprenticeship at Kuruman, 42.
the other hand, when drought invades the land their first words of greeting are invariably followed by ‘Pula ha lieo — There is no rain.’ Pula — rain.⁸⁸

To this day the expression Pula! — rain is invoked at the end of every traditional gathering and of every funeral proceeding of the people of Mahikeng and elsewhere among Batswana. The desperate need for rain and its significance for the existence of the people, and their means of livelihood gave birth to an attachment that came to be incorporated into the daily experiences and wishes of the people. This is a testimony to the harsh historical and climatic experiences of Southern Africa. And it also emphasizes the critical place of rainmaking ceremonies practiced among Batswana to which in most cases the missionaries remained resolutely and insensitively opposed. These climatic conditions also help to explain why Batswana people in general and Barolong in particular forbid burials to proceed beyond noontime when the scorching heat of the sun begins to reach its critical point. This point will be discussed fully in reference to funerals in chapter four.

*Effects of Hostile Political and Climatic conditions on Batswana ways of life*

Information provided by Lichtenstein, who traveled through the areas occupied by Batswana tribes, shows that prior to the upheavals of the 1820s Batswana commonly had a settled communal lifestyle. Agar-Hamilton also records that they lived in villages with relatively large numbers of inhabitants. He observes that:

The greater part of the tribe lived at the central village with the chief, but the cattle were distributed over the neighbourhood for water and pasture. Boundaries in the European sense did not exist, and each village was surrounded

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⁸⁸ Ibid., 34. ‘Pula ha lieo’ should be correctly ‘Pula ha eo’ (Southern Sotho) and ‘Pula ga eo’ (Setswana).
by an uncertain extent of pasture land and hunting territory which fell within its "sphere of influence." 89

Here their culture and traditional ways of live must have continued relatively peacefully. Cattle rearing and the production of agricultural crops was very much part of their daily lives. But all this changed during of the events of the Difaqane, the advance of immigrant whites and the attacks of Mzilikazi. Agar-Hamilton succinctly describes the effects of these events on the social fabric of African tribes. He writes:

The fifteen years of confusion, …gave the death-blow to the old Bantu system, for they broke down the tribal order at the moment when the Europeans were preparing their advance, wide areas were left vacant, whose dispossessed inhabitants actually welcomed the whites as rescuers from the tyranny of Mzilikazi. 90

The events of the Difaqane and the encroachment of the white immigrants would have altered the ways of life of most communities without compromise. But cultural borrowing also would have taken place among the different Southern African ethnic groups.

Conflicts, Droughts and Cannibalism

Another consequence of these times was cannibalism. The records of missionaries of this time constantly refer to acts of cannibalism among the people of the interior during the 1820s. Constant reference to it almost obscures any relevant information about burial practices. In fact the scarcity of references to burial activities by Batswana that were observed by the missionaries raises the question whether these African communities had burial practices that they observed regularly? An impression seems to have prevailed among some missionaries that

89 Agar-Hamilton, The Road to the North, 4.

90 Ibid., 12.
cannibalism was the norm rather than the exception amongst Batswana.\footnote{Schapera, \textit{Apprenticeship at Kuruman}, 109; Broadbent, \textit{A Narrative}, 70.} Thus it is important to highlight the nature of this phenomenon in the context of the political and social contexts of the time.

The climatic conditions and the wars that ravaged and made the region volatile also contributed towards cannibalism. Lack of rain and unsettled life made sustainable agricultural life hardly possible. Because of severe hunger and starvation, arising out of lack of food, communities that previously relied on crops such as millet, pumpkin, beans and livestock, resorted to cannibalism. Describing how this practice developed among Sotho warriors Becker says, “No longer did Sotho warriors regard the corpses of their enemies as possible signs of success in battle, but as their only source of meat supply.”\footnote{Becker, \textit{Path of Blood}, 59.} The situation extended itself to ordinary people. They would now turn on their own weak members of the community and family to alleviate starvation.\footnote{Ibid, 55, 67.} Other missionaries were more open-minded in observing the reasons for this practice. They observed that:

War is generally accompanied with its kindred calamities, famine and pestilence; these were felt in an awful manner at Umpukani and the adjacent parts. The remaining few were driven to desperation by the pressing wants of hunger, till, at length, the man ate his fellow and the mother became satisfied with the flesh of her offspring.\footnote{Schoeman, \textit{The Wesleyan Mission}, 49-50.}

It is under these historic circumstances that the cultural and religious life of Batswana during this period should be understood and interpreted. The apparent lack of documented
information on Batswana burial practices during this period can be due to the generally unstable living conditions that prevailed at this time. There is an impression created by records of this period that a normal and stable way of life was rare. More often missionaries refer to numerous locations with human skulls. One looks without success for reference to places that could have resembled places of burial. Thus due to the conditions of the time, burial ceremonies were rare if not totally absent.

There is another possibility however. Burial ceremonies could have been concealed from the notice of the missionaries, or that they did not take an interest in activities that they labeled heathen practices. The lack of interest in rituals that were labeled heathen was more evident in the case of the rainmaking ceremonies. The lack of detailed description of these ceremonies is indicative of the lack of observation of burial practices by the missionaries. One of the great chiefs of Barolong, Sefunelo, died when his people already had intimate relationships with the Wesleyans at Makwasi and Platberg. Even though he had a significant relationship with them, it is surprising that much is not said about how he was buried. The journal of Hodgson only describes how the missionaries were sad when their friend died. But as to how this chief was buried, the record is silent.

*Effects on Wesleyan Missions*

Unfavorable political, social and climatic conditions had direct impact on the launch of the “Bechuana Mission” and its continuation. This is demonstrated in the case of Rev. Kay. At the very first attempt to establish mission work among Batswana, he was discouraged by the

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harsh and challenging political and social landscapes, despite the embarrassment he expressed strongly at the absence of missionary presence among Batswana. He lamented that it was deplorable “that tribes, numerous as they are have neither a Bible nor a missionary.” He was convinced that among the people was “heathenism indeed, without the least mixture.”

Kay abandoned attempts to establish the envisioned “Bechuana Mission” despite his conviction about the “unacceptable” religious state of these people. This could have been because unlike other Wesleyan missionaries of his time, he was less convinced of the necessity of a missionary undertaking under these conditions. For him the challenges and dangers inherent in this mission field outweighed the rationale to pursue it. He concluded “wisdom does not at present dictate that it would be prudent to devote more time, thought and expense, to the Bootchuanas, until the prospect is more clear and the state of things more settled amongst them.” Kay then left the task to others to pursue because he “saw no hope of a successful mission among Bechuana.” It was Broadbent and Hodgson who took Wesleyan missions into Batswana territory.

History might judge Rev Kay harshly for his failure to carry on with the envisioned mission to Batswana and leaving it to others to pursue. However, and most important for our purpose here is that his views and assessment of the situation then and the decision not to continue as part of this missionary undertaking help throw light on the state of the social and

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political conditions of that time. These difficult situations are further attested to by the fact that any form of effective and structured preaching and instruction by the Wesleyans only began in 1828 six years after work among Batswana had started.\textsuperscript{100} This is a testimony that though Broadbent and Hodgson were courageous to pursue this mission, the conditions were equally trying.

The disintegration of many Batswana chiefdoms during this time also bears witness to the “stress of this time of trouble.”\textsuperscript{101} This was more evident in the various divisions and their migrations that occurred amongst Barolong and other Batswana people. And therefore, in chapter four it will be demonstrated how the settling and unsettling of Barolong and other Batswana groupings could have temporarily affected and altered their cultural life and subsequently the manner they dealt with death and the way they buried their dead. This observation will be important for understanding the views and comments of missionaries about the attitudes of Batswana towards their dead at the time they encountered them.

There appears to be no evidence to suggest that the employment of Wesleyan missionaries in Southern Africa in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century or the employment of other agencies for that matter was done so with any knowledge or the least suspicion of the impending challenging circumstances that would coincide with their arrival. Rev. Kay’s decision to withdraw suggests that he had no prior knowledge of what lay ahead. The missionaries were in all respects catalysts and frontiersmen and women. But it must be borne in mind that it must have been the norm

\textsuperscript{100} Cope, \textit{The Journals}, 21.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 16.
rather than the exception that a missionary undertaking would not be easily abandoned regardless of the difficult conditions it presented.

The persistence of missionaries under these conditions can be explained only by the zealousness that seems to have characterized many of them. The passion to conquer heathen lands for Christ gave them the courage to venture into the unknown. This spirit of persistence is demonstrated by Broadbent’s remarks concerning the situation among Batswana. He remarked that:

Indeed, so general was the disorder among them, that one person expressed an opinion, that they would not be in a state fit for us to go among them in fifty years to come. Such remarks had no effect on our minds, except to strengthen our purpose that, God willing, we would set up the banner of the Prince of Peace, and call the contending tribes to repose around it. …we hesitated not for a moment respecting the path of duty. 102

It was this spirit of determination that made it possible from the beginning that the Wesleyan missionaries would not rest until they made contact with Barolong. This was even so when the exact location of the people whom they were seeking was unknown. To that effect Broadbent wrote that:

Having no specific direction, either respecting the route we should take, or in what locality we should commence our Missionary operations, but only in general terms that we must go to the Bechuana Country, we determined, from information previously referred to, and in accordance with the counsels of the Rev. Messrs. Helm and Sass, and as our way seemed open, to go to the eastward of Campbell, into a region where no Missionary had preceded us, nor any European or Colonist. 103

Broadbent’s remark also represents the beginning of a missionary enterprise that would eventually give birth to Methodism in the area known today as Mahikeng.

102 Broadbent, A Narrative, 17. The person that Broadbent refers to here must be Rev. Kay.
103 Ibid., 20.
Phases of Missions

The work of the Wesleyan missionaries amongst Barolong during the 19th century can be subdivided into three phases: The first phase was from 1823 to 1832. This period consisted mainly of two activities. Firstly, the missionaries traveled long distances primarily in pursuit of Batswana, the whereabouts of the people among whom they intended to start missions. Secondly, the task was to find suitable locations to establish permanent missions. The second phase, 1833 to 1841, saw the establishment and development of the first permanent mission station among Barolong at Thaba Nchu. Other smaller mission stations around Thaba Nchu were also developed during this time. This phase also represents the first introduction of Barolong-boo-Ratshidi to Methodism. During this period Barolong of Mahikeng converted to Christianity for the first time. The third phase represents the migration of some Barolong chiefdoms from Thaba Nchu, and among them were Barolong of Mahikeng. This period gave birth to the establishment of Methodism in Mahikeng. The seed of evangelization that was first planted in Platberg and Thaba Nchu came to fruition in Mahikeng.

Barolong of Mahikeng were present during the first two phases of Barolong encounters with the Wesleyan missionaries. The encounter of the first two phases laid the foundation for a long lasting foundation of Methodist witness among Barolong of Mahikeng.

The First Phase: 1823 to 1833

The initial phase of Wesleyan missions among Barolong took place squarely in the context of the repercussions and continuing ravages of the Difaqane. The attack of Barolong-boo-Seleka by the Bataung at Makwasi did not spare them the decisive move that Barolong-boo-
Ratshidi resorted to when Mantatisi fell upon them at Phitshane. In the same manner the people of Sefunelo were forced to take flight from Makwasi and avoid further destruction.

From Makwasi they moved southward. It was during the course of this journey that Barolong-boo-Seleka were met by the Wesleyans, Broadbent and Hodgson. The two missionaries were moving northward along the same path as Barolong, when they finally came into contact with this first group of the people for whom they had been searching. Concerning this first meeting Broadbent wrote:

We saw clouds of dust ascend into the air, then heard the lowing of hundreds of cattle, bleating of flocks of sheep and goats, driven by a mixed multitude of men, women, and children, accompanied by a host of armed warriors.  

This description paints a vivid picture of the prevailing mood caused by the Difaqane in the areas mostly occupied by Tswana ethnic groups at the time. For the missionaries who had searched for this people with an unwavering determination, the encounter proved to be a major relief and a remarkable success of an accomplished mission. To that effect Broadbent recorded that:

It was remarkable that the people of whom we were in search should, by calamities of war, have been driven in such a direction that they actually met us; in such numbers as I had never seen natives together in Africa. Of course there was a great noise and confusion; each party which arrived attending to their special charge.

The description paints a picture of the mood of this encounter. The people that Broadbent described here were Barolong-boo-Seleka under chief Sefunelo, who were fleeing the Difaqane.

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104 Ibid., 28.
105 Ibid., 29.
The immediate challenge that presented itself to the community of Barolong and the missionaries was to find a location that would ensure a measure of safety from further attacks and be relatively habitable by both humans and animals. The place that was secured was Platberg or Motlanawapitse.\textsuperscript{106} The availability of enough water to sustain the settling community and their livestock for at least a few years influenced Barolong of Sefunelo and the missionaries to put up a mission station here. This was an area near the present day Warrenton along the Vaal River.

Platberg was significant for a number of reasons relative to Wesleyan missions among Barolong. It was the first successful mission station among Barolong. Previous attempts at Makwasi had failed. Not only that, but it also became an “experimental” mission station that in many ways tested the methods and skills of the missionaries to communicate their religion to the target community. From Platberg, Hodgson reported that they preached the first regular sermons. The first recorded inter-action between the missionaries and chief Sefunelo on the teachings of the Wesleyans was also recorded at Platberg.

Another important event that took place at Platberg was the arrival of the other Barolong chiefdoms – Barolong-boo-Ratshidi under Tawana and Barolong-boo-Rapulana under Gontse. The three Barolong chiefdoms of Seleka, Ratshidi and Rapulana now converged at Platberg. Later in Thaba Nchu they were joined by Barolong-boo-Rapulana, thereby bringing the four Barolong chiefdoms under the influence of the Wesleyan missionaries. As pointed out earlier, it was here at Platberg that our unit of study came into contact with Methodism for the first time. During the same year Platberg became a mission station.

\textsuperscript{106} Molema, \textit{Montshiwa}, 28.
The end result of this first phase was that the majority of Barolong chieftains were brought together and resided in one place. The work of the Wesleyans was therefore made much easier. It was here at Platberg that they attempted to introduce a formal and systematic mission program.\(^{107}\) There seems to have been very little success in evangelizing the people until then. At Platberg a long lasting bond between the Wesleyans and Barolong chieftains was set in motion.

The convergence of Barolong chieftains at Platberg and the long lasting relationship that ensued between them and the Wesleyans raise the important question of the tribe’s corporate identity. Did Barolong chieftains understand themselves as a tribal unit before the encounter with the Wesleyans? The answer to the question is in the affirmative, and only a brief word can be offered here. According to Z. K. Matthews Barolong people existed as one chiefdom under the rule of Tau. Later on the population expanded and due to the development of negative internal political and social factors, Barolong people experienced fragmentation. It was further exacerbated by the attacks from the Koranas, Qriquas and the Basters who used more advanced weapons than Barolong, around 1760.\(^{108}\) In the long run the divisions gave birth to four chieftains namely, Ratlou, Tshidi, Seleka and Rapulana. Subsequently the chieftains scattered, occupying the areas between the Vaal and Molopo rivers. The fragmentations of Barolong people reached its zenith during the *Difaqane*, a period that coincided with the advent of the Wesleyans and their contact with Barolong people. There is no evidence that suggests that, notwithstanding their independent chiefdoms, Barolong people ever lost the sense of being a


tribal unit with relative peace existing among them. The entry of the Wesleyans upon the volatile social and political landscape of which Barolong people were entangled provided an impetus for a corporate identity. Thus the Wesleyans did not create a corporate identity for Barolong but an opportunity for its reinforcement ahead of a new social and political context.

The Second Phase: 1833 to 1841

One of the effects of Difaqane on Barolong history was that the different Barolong chiefdoms that had lived independently from one another for decades were forced to converge at a common place in pursuit of safety away from their invaders, albeit for a short time. One of the critical factors influencing this convergence was the presence of Wesleyan missionaries that offered security from their enemies.

The move to Thaba Nchu was in the company of Wesleyan missionaries,\textsuperscript{109} and it was here that the first permanent Wesleyan mission station was established among Barolong.\textsuperscript{110} Later in 1841, the chiefdoms of Barolong-booratlou, Barolo-booratsidi and Barolong-boorapulana would return to their former territories, leaving Moroka and his people remaining permanently with the missionaries at Thaba Nchu.\textsuperscript{111}

When the four Barolong chieftains stayed together in Thaba Nchu with the missionaries, the work of the Wesleyans began to show measurable growth. The first Wesleyan printing press, translation of the Bible into Setswana and the building of the first church structure among


\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 69. It was also from Thaba Nchu that missions among the Koranas, Griquas and Basters described above were established.

\textsuperscript{111} Molema, \textit{Montshiwa}, 30.
Barolong all occurred during this period. Barolong-boo-Ratshidi were part of this experience. S. M. Molema reports that a number of the people of Barolong-boo-Ratshidi converted to Christianity at this first permanent mission station among Barolong.\(^\text{112}\) It is also possible that by the time they left, lay agency in the form of local preachers had already developed. This is evident from the Bechuana District report, quoted at length below. While the missionaries at Thaba Nchu were saddened by the departure of the three Barolong chiefdoms of Gontse, Tawana and Matlabe, they were confident that they would nevertheless take with them the flame of the Gospel. Referring to this state of affairs the missionaries averred:

They have heard the Word of God, and they take the knowledge they have gained into the wilderness with them and prepare the way for their further extension of the Gospel. When some eight years since, two thousand people left our Station at Thaba Nchu, we regretted it, and thought that, with regard to them, we had laboured almost in vain. But we have since learnt that events, apparently untoward, are not always unfavourable to our missions. That tribe removed into the wilderness — through the exertions of a pious young man the small Church among them has been kept together, and unharmed, the public services have been kept up, and the Chief, who has lately died, sent to us, as his last words, a request for a missionary. Thus, at a considerable distance of time and a considerable distance also in point of space, we are about to commence, under very favourable circumstances, a new mission, which in its future influence on the tribe in that far-off land may, by and by, demonstrate to us that the removal of the Batuane tribe had nothing in it fortuitous or to be regretted, but was one of those onward steps in the march of God’s providence by which the world is to be evangelized.\(^\text{113}\)

Indeed when Barolong of Mahikeng left Thaba Nchu in 1841 to return to the land of their ancestors,\(^\text{114}\) they carried with them the zeal to continue Christian work started among them at

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\(^{112}\) Ibid., 27, 53.


\(^{114}\) Barolong-boo-Ratshidi, Barolong-boo-Rapulana and those of Matlabe left Thaba Nchu in 1841. Barolong-boo-Seleka under Moroka decided to make Thaba Nchu their permanent abode. Ibid., 108.
Thaba Nchu. The seed of Methodism in Mahikeng was thus first planted in Thaba Nchu and never to perish.

The coexistence of Barolong and the Wesleyans at Platberg and the joint removal to Thaba Nchu was evidence of the bonded relationship that had evolved between the two groups. The establishment of Thaba Nchu as a permanent mission station and the programs that ensued thereof was a testimony that Barolong had finally accepted the Christian faith. And Methodism became the tradition through which they would express this faith. This bond ultimately extended itself to Mahikeng where Chief Montshiwa, the son of Chief Tawana ultimately settled with his people, BaRolong-boo-Ratshidi. This bond also gave stability to and assured the success of Wesleyan missions among Batswana.

Thaba Nchu therefore served as a central point at which Barolong chiefdoms converged and developed a relationship with the missionaries. Methodist missions and Wesleyan missionaries therefore became to Barolong as the LMS and Robert Moffat to the BaTlhaping and Lutheran missions and Cassalis to the BaSotho. Methodism became the “the western religion” of Barolong. The idea of a mission to the Bechuana conceived in 1818 by Barnabas Shaw was finally realized and Methodism entrenched itself among Barolong to the present day.

The Third Phase: 1848 – 1896

The years from 1848 can, from the perspective of the growth of Methodism among Barolong of Mahikeng, be said to be representative of the fulfillment of the “prophecy” of the Wesleyan missionaries concerning the future of the Gospel and of Methodism among the people they had come to evangelize. When Barolong-boo-Ratshidi and those of Rapulana and Gontse
returned to the lands of their ancestors, which they had been forced to flee because of the
Difaqane, they did so without being accompanied by a missionary. It can only be assumed that
the work at the Thaba Nchu mission station and other adjacent stations among Sotho and Korana
communities was growing and therefore putting strain on the already understaffed missionary
personnel there.\textsuperscript{115} Despite this and other constraints that might have existed, the third phase of
Methodist missions among Barolong bears witness to a vibrant growth of Methodism among
Barolong of Mahikeng to the extent that its influence expanded into the present day Botswana.
The initiators were Barolong themselves.

Before giving a further explanation of the growth of Methodism during the years 1848 to
1896, a word must be said here about the years from the summer of 1842 to the spring of
1847,\textsuperscript{116} and the new political atmosphere that confronted Barolong-boo-Ratshidi.

From sources that this study has consulted there are no accounts by Wesleyan
missionaries of their activities among these people during the years of sojourn, 1842-1847. As
pointed out earlier it can only be assumed that the activities of the missionaries among Barolong
were primarily confined to the people of Moroka at Thaba Nchu, and among communities in
nearby stations in the Free State. Given the seeming absence of missionary activity among the
Barolo-boo-Ratshidi, during the stated period, it can only be speculated therefore, that their
relationship with the missionaries at Thaba Nchu continued albeit casually. These relationships
would have been made necessary by the conflicts that were brooding between the three
chiefdoms that left Thaba Nchu and the immigrant Boers. Another link that must have helped

\textsuperscript{115} Whiteside, \textit{History of the Wesleyan Methodist Church}, 338-339.

\textsuperscript{116} Molema, \textit{Montshiwa}, 30-31.
sustain a measure of contact between the missionaries and Barolong chiefdoms that left Thaba Nchu were the regular kinship family ties, and royal contacts between the chiefdoms, and that of Moroka at Thaba Nchu.

The sum total of these contacts and ties would have helped maintain contacts between Barolong-boo-Ratshidi Christians and the missionaries, making it possible for the sustenance and nourishment of the Christian spirit and influence they had contracted in Platberg and Thaba Nchu. It would have also been in the interest of Chief Tawana and other Barolong chiefs beyond Thaba Nchu to maintain contact with the missionaries amidst the threats and a new political context wrought by the ever-expanding presence of white immigrants.

An important question relative to the casual relationship between Barolong-boo-Ratshidi and the missionaries at Thaba Nchu is: How did Methodism continue to grow among the people during the years 1842 to 1847? The response to this question is provided by the accounts of Molema who appears to have gathered his information from oral accounts. According to this information there was a group of Christian converts among Tawana’s people who continued to meet in prayer and worship as well as bringing others into their fold during their sojourn and return to the Molopo area. Molema records that:

During the twelve years of the Barolong migrations these men had faithfully carried on with their preaching, their class meetings and their worship, and had attracted many into the circle of Christian light so that at Matlwang in 1841 to 1847, and at Lotlhakane in 1849 to 1852, their numbers had steadily increased.⁹⁷

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⁹⁷ Ibid., 54.
It is possible that some of these Christians had become local preachers or exhorters in Thaba Nchu.\textsuperscript{118} Though there is no clear evidence to confirm this assertion, it should be considered that by 1848 the Bechuana District report indicated that Thaba Nchu already had 8 local preachers, 147 members and 41 members on trial. These statistics are an indication that there could have existed in the previous years lay agency in the form of local preachers. Further, it must be taken into account that at this stage the Christian community among Barolong of Mahikeng, regardless of their numbers, could not have been regarded as a society or a preaching place. They were only conferred the status of a society during their sojourn in Moshaneng. Therefore, Barolong of Mahikeng Christians would have initially been counted a part of Thaba Nchu society or circuit.

The work of the early Barolong Christians, regardless of whether they were local preachers or not, serves to illustrate the critical role that native agency played in the process of evangelization. It also attests to the Wesleyan mission methods of equipping native agency to be in the frontier of missions. In this regard the Comaroffs are correct to assert that, “Methodist evangelical technique – its stress upon a self-propagating African leadership, for example, and its organizational genius – ensured that its cultural forms made a deep impression on black consciousness at a time of unprecedented social upheaval.”\textsuperscript{119} Over and above these factors, the work of Methodist native agency in the sustenance and growth of Methodism could not have

\textsuperscript{118} It is rather unfortunate that Molema has left out from the list of the first Barolong-boo-Ratshidi Christian convert women who would have been part of the households of this early Christian community.

\textsuperscript{119} Comaroff and Comaroff, \textit{Of Revelation and Revolution}, vol. 1, 47.
happened without an undercurrent of inculturation. In their preaching and teaching Barolong Christians would have expressed the Christian faith in terms that made sense to their people.

Having reviewed the activities of Methodism during the years 1841 to 1847 we now return to the period that has been designated as the third phase of Methodism among Barolong-boo-Ratshidi. This phase represents a period that gave hope to a beginning of a settled life among the people of Tawana after fifteen years of troubles and migrations. However, for Barolong of Mahikeng, the troubles caused by the *Difaqane* were to be replaced by conflicts with the Boers.

The third phase of Methodist missions among Barolong was also a period in which emerged figures who further entrenched the influence of Methodism among Barolong of Mahikeng. The majority of the people seem to have come from royal circles and this phenomenon may help to explain why Methodism in Mahikeng was for a long time considered a tribal denomination. Traces of this attitude are still present today.

*Molema Tawana: The First Evangelist of Barolong of Mahikeng*

Barolong-boo-Ratshidi would have remembered the years of sojourn in Platberg and Thaba Nchu not only as a period of flight from the destruction of the *Difaqane*, the reunion of Barolong chiefdoms and a bond of relationship with the Wesleyan missionaries, but also as a period that introduced them to a new religious landscape that began to influence and alter their social and cultural outlook for ever. The agents of this trend were Barolong men who became
Christians in Platberg and Thaba Nchu and then became missionaries among their own people.120 Most of them were from circles of the chieftainship.

At the very early stage of Wesleyan Christian missions among Barolong were also young people who became the torch bearers of the religion of the missionaries. Molema Tawana was one of the young people nurtured in Platberg and Thaba Nchu and later became the driving force behind the success of Methodism among Barolong-boo-Ratshidi. Leslie Hewson refers to him as “The Apostle of the Molopo River.”121 He was among other young African men at the time such as David Magata at Potchefstroom, Hans Aapje of Makapani’s tribe, Samuel Mathabathe in Sekhukhuniland, May Loti and Robert Mashaba at Delgoa Bay. He declares of Molema and those who went beyond the Vaal River: “North of the Vaal several remarkable men appointed by no Church, sustained by no Missionary Society, unnourished by the sacramental means of grace, without the inspiration of incorporation in the Church, hampered by ignorance and tried by persecution, nevertheless gathered, and nurtured, and preserved for Methodism, Christian societies which our missionaries discovered with no less delight than the prospecting discoveries of a rich reef.”122

Molema was the son of Chief Tawana, and the brother to Chief Montshiwa who succeeded his father as chief of Barolong-boo-Ratshidi in 1849. Molema Tawana was among the first generation of Methodist Christians among Barolong and particularly among those of Mahikeng, and became a leading Christian figure who was responsible for Mahikeng not only

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120 Molema, Monshiwa, 53-54.
122 Ibid., 67.
becoming a Wesleyan settlement, but also responsible for making it the last settlement of all Barolong-boo-Ratshidi in 1857. His role in the continuation of Christian influence among his people after leaving Thaba Nchu, and the political struggles and successes of Barolong-boo-Ratshidi in Mahikeng alongside his brother Chief Montshiwa, earned him the respect of his people and the missionaries.

S. M. Molema records a rare gesture in the evangelization of the people of Southern Africa concerning the conversion of Molema Tawana. The latter is said to have informed his father, Chief Tawana, of his intention to become a Christian. This was in Thaba Nchu during the years of sojourn. That Molema consulted his parents and sought their permission to become a Christian must be seen as an indication of Molema’s respect and attitude towards his parents, people and culture. It was in line with a typical Batswana traditional expectation that was expected from a respectful child. He must also have wished for a measure of blessing from his elders as he chose a course that largely departed from the religion of his elders and ancestors. On the other hand, for Chief Tawana, who was not a Christian, to allow his son to become a Christian, without rejecting the wishes of his son, was a signal of the possibility of a harmonious relationship that characterized the co-existence of Barolong people with the new religion of the missionaries at the initial stage. Further there is a possibility that Chief Tawana’s approval of his son’s new association with the new religion represents the manner in which chiefs sought to establish some influence over the new religion by encouraging their sons to take that route.


Therefore, the attitude of Chief Tawana was of strategic significance in cementing the relationship between the chieftain and the Wesleyans.

The attitude of Tawana and his son towards each other signified an important dynamic in the history of the encounter between Barolong culture and Christianity. Intentionally or unintentionally this accommodating interaction in the long run ensured a reasonable co-existence between the two. This view is in contrast to Whiteside’s interpretation of Molema’s role in the development of Methodism among his people. Whiteside gives the impression that Molema negated all that was symbolic of the tradition of his people.\textsuperscript{125} Similarly the Comaroffs have arrived at the conclusion that Molema was responsible for influencing the Christians to reject the cultural practices such as initiation and rainmaking ceremonies. These arguments granted, however, it must be remembered that these ceremonies as central to Batswana self and communal identity as they were, did not represent the sum total of Barolong culture. There were other aspects of Batswana culture and tradition to which Molema and his Christian community would still adhere. Recognizing and respecting other Batswana foundational customary practices would have ensured that Christian influence among Barolong of Mahikeng would be maintained. If Molema had advocated a complete rift between all the customary practice of his people culture and the missionary religion, he himself would not have played a visible and prominent role in the politics and cultural life of Barolong people alongside his brother Chief Montshiwa.

Molema’s attitude towards his parents and culture paid dividends for his status within the chiefdom and the Christian community. His influence within the social and political life of his

\textsuperscript{125} Whiteside, \textit{History of the Wesleyan Methodist Church}, 429.
people remained unimpaired. Chief Montshiwa, upon his enthronement as the chief of Barolong-boo-Ratshidi, included among his councilors his Christian brother, Molema. For his part, Molema maintained close and healthy relationships with his people and stood along side his brother Chief Montshiwa in all matters that ensured the safety and dignity of their people under the threat of Boer Emigrants. It is said that it is was Molema who influenced Chief Montshiwa to request the missionaries at Thaba Nchu to send him a missionary who would serve as his advisor in political matters.\textsuperscript{126}

In Molema was the seed that would give birth to a strong presence and witness of Methodism in Mahikeng. But also his place as a member of the royal family had advantage for the growth of Methodism among Barolong. He was not only a Christian but also a son of a chief. “By reason of his birth Molema was a natural leader of this sect of alien faith.”\textsuperscript{127} However, his relationship to the royal family did not serve as a guarantee against conflicts between the chief and the Christian community, for indeed when the Christian community grew and was conscious of its own unique identity conflicts arose. However the cordial relations that existed between the chief and Molema, and the advantages that these relations had for the welfare and political survival of Barolong people seems to have outweighed the conflicts that from time to time characterized the relationship between Montshiwa and his Christian subjects.

Throughout his life, Molema did not ignore his responsibilities as a member of the royal family. In the long run his position and attitude towards the cultural and political affairs of his people must have strengthened the ties between Methodism and Barolong people and culture.

\textsuperscript{126} Molema, \textit{Montshiwa}, 35.

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 54.
His role in the political conflicts with the Boers and their resolutions left a legacy after his death that was important for the perpetual influence of Methodism on Chief Montshiwa and his people. Those who succeeded him as leaders of the Christian community were equally committed to the political course of their people.

From the perspective of the growth of Methodism in Mahikeng, Molema stands out as an example of the role that native agency played in the propagation of the Gospel in Southern Africa, and in particular among Batswana. The role of missionaries was limited in the growth of Methodism in Mahikeng at least between 1849 and 1885 when Rev. R. F. Appelbe came as the first resident Wesleyan missionary in Mahikeng. The growth of the denomination was largely dependent on indigenous commitment and enthusiasm. The building of the first chapel in 1870, and later a school by Molema and his congregation are examples of a self-propagating and self-motivated indigenous church that was already showing signs of significant growth. By 1890 their membership was close to nine hundred.

Ludorf: The first Resident Missionary at Lotlhakane

Another result of the relationships that continued to exist between the Wesleyan missionaries in Thaba Nchu and the people of Montshiwa in Lotlhakane was that the Wesleyan District Missionary Society agreed to send a missionary to them at the request of Chief Montshiwa. Rev. Joseph Ludorf was appointed to Lotlhakane in 1850. Ludorf’s missionary work began with the Paris Missionary Society. He transferred to the Wesleyan Missionary Society in

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129 Ibid., 433.
1847. While stationed as a Wesleyan missionary at Lishuani (Lesowane), between the present day Excelsior and Marquad in the present Free State Province, Lurdof gained some experience in settling disputes between Mantatisi and Barolong at Thaba Nchu as well as disputes that erupted between the African tribes and the Emigrant Boers. Lurdof’s exposure to political and social conflicts and their resolutions made him a good candidate in response to Chief Montshiwa’s request for a political advisor in 1850. Theal and Agar-Hamilton’s accounts of Lurdof’s devotion to the task assigned him suggests that his political engagements exceeded those of his engagement with Barolong Christian flock.

So the primary purpose of Montshiwa’s request was to have a missionary as his advisor on matters pertaining to dealings with the immigrant whites and Lurdof’s involvement must be critiqued against this background and its context. And why did Montshiwa, like most chiefs during this time, prefer to have a missionary as his political advisor? Bertram Hutchinson provides a succinct response to the question:

It was a time in which conflict between European and African was continual and bitter. There was treachery on both sides, and negotiation between black and white was not made easier by their ignorance of each other’s beliefs and habits of thought. The political value of missionaries soon became clear to many tribal chiefs who sought them because they could be useful as diplomatic agents or intermediaries between themselves and the Europeans.

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131 Whiteside, History of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, 337, 420.

According to Theal, Montshiwa sent his brother Molema to the missionaries in Thaba Nchu. The slight difference in these two versions of the originator of Molema’s visit to Thaba Nchu is not necessarily contradictory. The common element in these reports is that it was Molema the Christian leader, who went to Thaba Nchu to present the chief’s request to be assigned a missionary. It is not surprising, however, that the chief sent Molema as his representative. It would make sense that as a Christian, Molema would present a convincing case to the missionaries in Thaba Nchu not only on behalf of the chief and his people but also for the Christian folk at Lotlhakane. Molema’s role in this important diplomatic mission can only serve to illustrate the extent to which Barolong Christians were already influential in the political and social life of their people at this time, and the extent to which the chief recognized their influence. But it also illustrates the trust and mutual cooperation that existed between Molema, the missionaries and the chief.

But it is also true that Chief Montshiwa’s request to be assigned a missionary was not simply dependent on the persuasion of Molema and the influence of the Christian element among his people. The chief was also well acquainted with the intervention strategies of the missionaries that safeguarded the establishment of Thaba Nchu and the political resolutions among the Basotho, the Boers and Barolong. As Molema succinctly put it, Montshiwa:

Himself had been a witness of the incalculable benefits of the enlightened services rendered by Rev. James Archbell and James Cameron to chief Moroka in his external affairs. He had for himself seen how the French missionaries …

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133 Theal, History of the Boers, 306.
134 Molema, Montshiwa, 35.
guided and piloted Moshoeshoe through labyrinthine intricacies of European
diplomacy which sought and threatened to entangle him.\textsuperscript{135}

Molema correctly concludes that, “All these things required, not only a thorough
knowledge of the Dutch and Tswana languages, but also a skill in argument and negotiation in
the European manner — matters which neither Montshiwa nor the ablest of his counselors had
any experience of.”\textsuperscript{136} Omer-Cooper arrives at the same conclusion by observing that the
missionary’s “ability to serve as a diplomatic adviser on problems involving whites was also
valued. Because of his relationship to the Cape authorities his presence often provided protection
against other African groups or encroaching white settlers.”\textsuperscript{137} The point made earlier that the
African chiefs in Southern Africa during this time accepted missionaries for political reasons is
well illustrated here. Missionaries were often seen by African chiefs as possessing “magical
powers” to broker peace between enemies. For Tswana chiefs this was demonstrated by Robert
Moffat’s negotiation for peace with Mzilikazi, and the Wesleyans with the immigrant whites in
Thaba Nchu. But also Bertram Hutchinson’s conclusion is valid that even though the
involvement of the missionaries in the political activities of the day was “outside their religious
task,” nevertheless “many of them accepted it as a means of establishing confident and friendly
relations with those whom they wished to convert.”\textsuperscript{138}

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 35-36.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 36.


\textsuperscript{138} Hutchinson, “Some Social Consequences…,” 162.
Ludorf’s engagement with the Christians at Lotlhakane was overshadowed by his involvement as the chief’s advisor in the intricate and fragile political tensions between Chief Montshiwa and the immigrant Boers. Theal has emphasized that Ludorf was the political correspondent of Chief Montshiwa and that the missionary was present at all the meetings that the chief had with leaders of white immigrants. The extent to which the Wesleyan missionary was involved in the affairs of Barolong-boo-Ratshidi and later other Barolong chieftains, and the difficult situations he found himself in, and some misjudgments that he at times ran into has led Agar-Hamilton to question his credibility and honesty in his quest to stand alongside Barolong chieftains. But for the Christians at Lotlhakane and the missionaries in Thaba Nchu, Ludorf’s assignment was more than the chief’s advisor. It was also a continuation of the legacy of Methodism amongst Barolong-boo-Ratshidi, and the building up of that Christian community. His premature departure from Lotlhakane at the pressure of the immigrant Boers was for chief Montshiwa and the Christians a great loss.

The Sand River Convention

The political role of Rev. Ludorf and his departure from the people of Montshiwa must be interpreted within the context of the politics of the time. There were a number of events characteristic of the political climate of this time between African tribes and the immigrant

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139 Theal, History of the Boers, 306.

Boers. One of these events was the Sand River Convention, and represents the context of Montshiwa’s struggles with the Immigrant Boers.\textsuperscript{141}

The defeat of Mzilikazi at Mosega and Madikwe in 1837 brought prospects of relative peace to the region and facilitated the return of Barolong of Mahikeng to their former lands. This time brought about relative calmness to the region, something that must have been long awaited for by all the parties concerned, especially the people of Montshiwa. This state of relative peace was not long lived. The Boers launched a more aggressive strategy to occupy more land that belonged to Barolong and other tribes. The historian Theal, who clearly favored the actions of the instigators, best describes this problem. He writes:

After the flight of Moselekatse, Commandant Potgieter proclaimed the whole of the territory which that chief had overrun and now abandoned, forfeited to the Emigrants. It included the greater part of the present South African Republic, fully half of the present Orange Free State, and the whole of Southern Betshuanaland to the Kalahari Desert, except the district occupied by the Batlapin.\textsuperscript{142}

The occupation of tracks of land that belonged to various African groups in this region by the emigrants would have lasting negative consequences that are still felt to this day. But for Barolong of Mahikeng the actions of the emigrants were felt immediately.

A historical landmark that changed the course of events in what became the Transvaal, and would have serious consequences for the stability of Barolong at Lotlhakane took place in January of 1852. This was the Sand River Convention by which the British Government gave independence to the Dutch Boers occupying areas of land north of the Vaal River. The Convention also bound the British Government “not to make any alliances with African tribes

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{141} Cf. Theal, \textit{History of the Boers}, 306.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 85.
\end{footnotesize}
nor to sell them firearms or ammunition.” The tragedy of this Convention was the non-recognition of African presence and rightful ownership of the land now unquestionably made available to the Dutch Boers.

Until this Convention there was mutual recognition of the boundaries that defined Barolong land from the areas that were occupied by the Boers. This mutual recognition had prevailed since the collaboration of the Boers and Barolong towards the defeat of Mzilikazi in 1837. Montshiwa and his people had therefore until the Sand River Convention enjoyed relative peace and calmness at Lotlhakane.

The Sand River Convention also caused tension between the Dutch Boers and the missionaries. The people among whom the missionaries labored continued to be frequently displaced and treated like slaves. David Livingstone was among the missionaries who vehemently opposed the treatment of Africans by the Boers. The constant clashes that became a pattern of relationships between the Dutch Boers and Chief Montshiwa’s people forced the latter to take flight from Lotlhakane. Montshiwa and his people fled to Moshaneng and sought exile among the Bangwaketse.

The flight of Montshiwa and his people to Moshaneng had immediate implications for Ludorf. Circumstances necessitated that he return to Thaba Nchu that year after having stayed with Montshiwa uninterrupted for two years. Ludorf’s role as Montshiwa’s advisor, and as a

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144 Already at this time Bangwaketse were under the great influence of the LMS missionaries. Rev. J. Mackenzie was a regular visitor at Moshaneng during Montshiwa’s temporary refuge there. See John Mackenzie, *Ten Years North of the Orange River: A Story of Everyday Life and Work among the South African Tribe from 1859-1869* (Edinburg: Edmonston and Douglas, 1871), 228.
representative of the presence of Methodist work among Montshiwa’s people continued, although Moshaneng is over five hundred kilometers from Thaba Nchu. Ludorf visited the Methodist congregation there once a year and stayed with them for two months during each visit.145

**Methodists at Moshaneng**

It would have been expected that without the presence of Ludorf the work of the church in Moshaneng would be affected negatively. This was not the case, and subsequently Moshaneng became significant in the development of Methodism among Barolong of Mahikeng. It was at Moshaneng that the Christians began to refuse participating in the national initiation and rainmaking ceremonies. By so doing they visibly distinguished themselves as a community with its own distinctive identity among Barolong people.

Rev. John Mackenzie of the LMS keenly observed the events at Moshaneng during his visit in 1860. He describes the conflicts that began to arise between Chief Montshiwa and his brother Molema, the Christian leader, and the refusal of Christian young people to take part in traditional ceremonies, and “the chief assumed an attitude of open hostility to his Christian subjects”,146 and “the chief forbade church gatherings and services, and dispersed any people so minded.”147 These conflicts did not persist and a compromise was reached between the chief and

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146 Mackenzie, *Ten Years North of the Orange River*, 103, 228, 229.

his Christian subjects. Young Barolong Christians were exempted from taking part in circumcision rites.

However, while Chief Montshiwa continued to be dissatisfied with the position of the Christians he seemed to have had no intention to part with the assistance of the missionaries. According to Whiteside, “Montshiwa, the chief, was anxious to have a missionary; but, unfortunately, no one could be sent.”\textsuperscript{148} The result was that Rev. Ludorf got scheduled to visit Moshaneng once a year for two months.\textsuperscript{149}

Mackenzie and Holub, the primary sources on the events at Moshaneng, do not give the reasons for the behavior of the Christian community. Similarly, Whiteside and Molema do not explain why it was particularly at Moshaneng that Christians began to adopt an attitude of rebellion against the national ceremonies. It can only be speculated therefore that Christians were beginning to grow in numbers and this gave them the confidence to stand in solidarity against what they conceived to be in opposition to their faith. They were becoming “an organized society whose way of life stood out in sharp contrast to many heathen practices and tribal customs demanded by their national religion.”\textsuperscript{150} The families of these individuals would have increased, thereby swelling the numbers of Christian adherents. There were among these Christians close relatives of the chief. And a reasonable membership within the Christian community from the ranks of the chieftainship was an immediate advantage for the growth and survival of the church.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{148} Whiteside, \textit{History of the Wesleyan Methodist Church}, 340.}\textsuperscript{148}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{149} Ibid.}\textsuperscript{149}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{150} Molema, \textit{Montshiwa}, 54.}\textsuperscript{150}
Being deprived the privileges of a resident missionary did not have had any significant adverse impact on the life of Barolong of Mahikeng Methodists. After all, they were used to relying on the spiritual and mental resources of their faith amid social and political pressures and instability. The events at Moshaneng added a new dynamic to the life of Methodism. For S. M. Molema the relationship of Methodism to traditional leadership at Moshaneng “resembled the period of the rise of Christianity when the Roman emperors viewed it as a divisive force and considered it their duty to oppose and crush it and to persecute its leaders and followers.”\textsuperscript{151}

The conflicts at Moshaneng between the Methodists and the chief around traditional and cultural practices and the negotiations and settlements of these tensions are an indication that already at this stage a process of internal negotiation between Barolong traditional customs and the new religion embraced by members of Barolong was beginning to take place. By and large this happened within the limited influence of a resident missionary. The source of this revolutionary spirit was however inherent within the missionary teachings and, Omer-Cooper’s conclusion is correct in this regard. He concludes that:

\begin{quote}
Missionaries initially found it to their advantage to seek support of, and work with and through chiefs. Their teaching, however, inevitably involved an attack on existing customs and institutions which could result in missionary converts coming into conflict with their own political authorities. Sometimes for this very reason it was groups within indigenous societies that felt already disadvantaged who turned to missionaries for a new order and formed the majority of their converts.\textsuperscript{152}
\end{quote}

However throughout the history of the interaction of Christianity with Tswana cultures this negotiation was largely related to questions of circumcision and rainmaking. This would

\begin{footnotes}
\item[151] Ibid., 55.
\item[152] Omer-Cooper, \textit{History of Southern Africa}, 40.
\end{footnotes}
mean that a large part of the culture of the people was not a major concern in the relationship between Christianity and Tswana culture. Primarily inculturation would have been a spontaneous process.

Settlement at Mahikeng

A year after Montshiwa and his people left Lotlhakane because of conflicts with the emigrants, the Boer Commando, under Commandant General Marthinus Pretorius negotiated a Peace Treaty with Montshiwa on October 14th, 1853. With this treaty the people of Montshiwa could return to Lotlhakane. However Montshiwa did not return immediately. He stayed in Moshaneng until 1870. S. M. Molema’s account suggests Montshiwa implemented an interim response and strategy to the terms of the treaty. According to this account the chief gave the oversight of Lotlhakane and other areas granted to him by the treaty to the oversight of his sub-chiefs, Molema being one of them. On the other hand, Agar-Hamilton suggests that Molema, and probably other sub-chiefs, stayed behind in the Molopo area and did not go with Montshiwa to Moshaneng.

On the basis of S. M. Molema and Agar-Hamilton’s accounts, which are not contradictory but complementary, it must be postulated that if Molema was among those who were given oversight of Lotlhakane and the surrounding areas on behalf of the chief, this Christian leader did not reside permanently in Moshaneng with other Christians. The events between Chief

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153 Theal, History of the Boers, 343.
154 Whiteside, History of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, 430.
155 Molema, Montshiwa, 51.
156 Agar-Hamilton, The Road to the North, 82.
Montshiwa and the Christians in Moshaneng therefore took place largely in the absence of their principal leader. The treatment of the Christians by the chief in Moshaneng also strongly suggests the absence of his brother, Molema, the Christian, whom the chief appears seem to have respected and trusted. The presence of Methodists at Moshaneng and their opposition to some of the traditional practices was an indication that already at this point there was able leadership that continued with the work in the absence of Molema.\footnote{157}

The year 1857 must be remembered as the year that marked the beginning of the establishment of a principal permanent home for Barolong-booratshidi and Methodism among them.\footnote{158} Molema’s assignment as one of those given the responsibility to ensure that the ruins at Lotlhakane remained the territory of the chief paved the way for this significant historical event. During that year Molema established a permanent settlement in Mahikeng with about twelve families.\footnote{159} While there is nothing to suggest that all those with him ascribed to the Christian faith, it is equally compelling to believe that the majority were Christians. This is demonstrated by the progress that soon took place at the new settlement, when Molema and his people built a church in 1870.

This is how Mahikeng became the principal home of Barolong of Mahikeng and of Methodism among them. Later Molema’s church was used as a school where his son Silas

\footnote{157} Cf. Molema, \textit{Montshiwa}, 54.

\footnote{158} Whiteside, \textit{History of the Wesleyan Methodist Church}, 430.

\footnote{159} Molema, \textit{Montshiwa}, 52.
Molema, educated at Healdtown, became the head teacher.\textsuperscript{160} In its place a new church building was erected with the combined efforts of Chief Montshiwa, Sir Charles Warren — the British Special Commissioner, and the community. It was completed in 1885, the same year that Rev. R. F. Appelbe, the first resident Methodist minister, took appointment in Mahikeng.

The year 1870 also marked the return of Chief Montshiwa and the rest of his people from Moshaneng. They joined Molema in Mahikeng. Chief Montshiwa’s return to his native area took place four years after the 1853 treaty. What could have been the reason for this delay? One explanation could be that Chief Montshiwa waited to establish the earnestness of the Commando in keeping and honoring the terms of the treaty before returning to the Molopo area. On the other hand Molema’s hastiness to establish a settlement at Mahikeng for himself and his followers could have been motivated by the desire to create a Christian community village away from Montshiwa and thereby acquire their own religious independence. Here the chief would have less influence and Barolong traditional practices such as initiation and rainmaking ceremonies would not be adhered to.

The political pressures that persisted at the ever-increasing encroachment of the emigrant Boers on Barolong lands would have made any such intentions impossible. The small group of Christians would easily fall prey to the invasion of Boers. Molema and his company were therefore wise enough to calculate the repercussions that could befall them at the hands of the emigrant Boers. But Molema’s gesture towards Montshiwa cannot simply be reduced to political pressure. He must have also had an allegiance to his brother though the chief was not a Christian.

\textsuperscript{160} Healdtown was the leading Methodist training institution for teachers and preachers, see W. C. Holden, \textit{A Brief History of Methodism and of Methodist Mission in South Africa} (London: Wesleyan Conference House, 1877), 343.
The unity of his tribe amidst all the pressures from the Boers would have been important to him also.

Had Molema succeed in establishing an independent settlement from his brother Chief Montshiwa, how far would this settlement have disconnected itself from other Barolong customary practices? The answer to this question is not obvious, but Whiteside’s comment suggests that a complete break with Barolong belief systems was not possible. He cites Rev. Mr. Sharpe’s comments about Barolong in 1898, sixty-five years after Barolong were introduced to Christianity in Platberg and Thaba Nchu in 1833: “Again, what may be said of the religious condition of those who have embraced Christianity? Their faith is influenced by their old beliefs.”

**Summary**

The chapter has demonstrated that the genesis and development of Methodism among Barolong of Mahikeng from 1823 to 1896 cannot be understood comprehensively without the broader historical context of the work of the 19th century Wesleyan missionaries among Barolong people in general. The social and historical contexts of the people of the interior of South Africa during this period have also shown to be critical elements of the history. The social and historical events of this period to a great extent influenced the acceptance of the Wesleyans by Barolong and the lasting cordial relationships that developed between them.

The beginnings and the development of Methodism in Mahikeng did not enjoy the privileges of intense Wesleyan missionary presence, as did Thaba Nchu. Yet Methodism in

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Mahikeng became a vibrant Christian movement that developed in the midst of threatening political developments at the advance of Boer immigrants. Methodism in Mahikeng became a movement that continued into other parts of Southern Africa through native agency. It was from Mahikeng that Methodism moved into the present day Botswana. Also Mahikeng became the “headquarters” of Methodism in the western areas of South Africa.

From the time Chief Montshiwa ascended the throne of the Tshidi Rolong, Methodism had enjoyed relative tolerance by the chief among the chief’s people. For the forty-six years of Montshiwa’s reign Methodism established itself as the church of Barolong-boo-Ratshidi. The chief’s Christian burial played a significant role towards this influence. It was only in 1897 that Chief Besele the successor of Chief Montshiwa became a Roman Catholic. Even with Chief Besele’s affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church, and the presence of other denominations, Methodism in Mahikeng remained largely dominant.

The historical closeness between Methodism and Barolong people that has been demonstrated in this chapter can be expected to have informed the nature of Christianity among Barolong of Mahikeng. Further, the conspicuous role of indigenous leadership in the extension of the church would not have escaped the possibility of a church that was appropriating indigenous elements albeit unconsciously. The manner in which these elements manifest themselves through burial rites is the focus of the chapters that follow.
CHAPTER THREE  
THE ORIGINS OF MCSA BURIAL RITES

Introduction

John Wesley’s 1784 *Order of the Burial of the Dead* can be regarded as the “mother” of the MCSA’s burial liturgy. The relationships between Wesley’s liturgy and that of the MCSA today are historical, and theological as well as liturgical. This chapter presents an overview of the origins of these relationships from the time of the founder of Methodism, John Wesley; feeding into the 19th century Wesleyan missionaries in Southern Africa and ultimately into the current burial rites of the MCSA as found in its Setswana Service Book.

John Wesley’s *Order for the Burial of The Dead* was among the special services contained in his *Sunday Service of The Methodists in North America*. He produced this work after his short missionary labors in Savannah, Georgia in North America which he undertook in 1735 at the invitation of Rev. John Burton.\(^{162}\) According to James F. White, the *Sunday Service* was published in 1784 in England and shipped to North America for use by Methodists there.\(^{163}\) White believes Wesley’s liturgical work for American Methodists was “in a sense, the last will and testament of the octogenarian patriarch of Methodism to his American followers.”\(^{164}\) Further, he observes that Wesley’s liturgical work “is the foundation stone for subsequent Methodist

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\(^{164}\) Ibid., 7.
work” in America.\textsuperscript{165} It is also true that this piece of Wesley’s work has been the liturgical foundation for the MCSA through its historical origins in the British Methodism of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century that sent missionaries into Southern Africa.

It is equally important to acknowledge that John Wesley’s liturgical work, as represented in his work cited above, especially the \textit{Order for the Burial of the Dead}, was not founded on a clean slate. It was based on the burial liturgy of the \textit{Book of Common Prayer} of the Church of England. The influence of the \textit{Book of Common Prayer} on Wesley’s liturgical work is stated by Frank Whaling. He believes that “Through his life, Wesley nourished his devotion by means of the \textit{Book of Common Prayer} of the Church of England. This provided the liturgical framework for his spirituality.”\textsuperscript{166} The development of the \textit{Book of Common Prayer} was therefore a milestone which ultimately gave birth to the development and growth of modern Methodist liturgies, including burials. An insight into the historical, and to an extent, theological nature of the \textit{Book of Common Prayer} is therefore prudent before examining John Wesley’s theology behind the \textit{Order of the Burial of the Dead}.

The influence of the \textit{Book of Common Prayer} on John Wesley and his recognition of its theological importance led him to adopt and modify some of its sections for worship purposes by people called Methodists. One such section was \textit{The Order for the Burial of the Dead}. Wesley’s decision to develop an abridged liturgy was fundamentally based on his theological convictions. These convictions were not isolated from those of other Methodists of his time, such as his brother Charles Wesley.

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{166} Frank Whaling, \textit{John and Charles Wesley}, 14.
In this study, the theological ideas of John and Charles Wesley are the principal sources for understanding Methodist views on life and death. In particular, John Wesley’s theological views are regarded as the primary source that formed the basis on which he adopted and modified the burial liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer for use by Methodists. Charles Wesley’s theological perspective — especially as expressed in his hymns and which was harmonious to that of his brother John — is also regarded as key to understanding his contribution to Methodist theology on life and death.

This chapter also highlights the influence of the Puritans on the theological thinking of the Wesleyans regarding life and death. For purposes of this study, the chapter features a synopsis of the theology of life and death that served as a rationale behind Methodist burial rites, highlighting the Puritan ideal of “holy” or “good death” and its apparent influence on the Wesleyans.

This study presupposes that the Wesleyan missionaries who came to labor in Southern Africa and especially those who worked among Barolong, were influenced by the 18th century nonconformist theology of life and death, especially as it was espoused by early Methodists of John and Charles Wesley’s time and the Puritan ideal of a “good death.” To that effect this chapter further analyses the teachings of the Wesleyan missionaries on life and death in the context of their primary objective of converting the unconverted. Their practices related to burials in Southern Africa are also examined.

The chapter considers also the MCSA’s theology of life and death against the backdrop of its Methodist theological heritage. Lastly, the chapter delineates Barolong’s affinity for
funerals and highlights the socio-ecclesial context in which the MCSA carries out the ministry of comforting the bereaved and “sending off” the departed.

*The Book of Common Prayer*\(^\text{167}\)

To give a detailed historical description of the *Book of Common Prayer* is a complex exercise beyond the limits of the present study.\(^\text{168}\) What follows instead is a brief sketch of the historical background, theological and liturgical developments of the *Book of Common Prayer*, especially as they relate to burial rites and its subsequent influence on Wesley’s *Order for the Burial of the Dead*.

Thomas Cranmer, the archbishop of Canterbury, born 1489 and lived until 1556, is regarded by scholars as the mastermind behind the BCP.\(^\text{169}\) Richard H. Schmidt has referred to him as “The Father of the Prayer Book.”\(^\text{170}\) The historical genesis of Cranmer’s work is related to the English Reformation. David E. Stannard maintains the BCP came into being because of three major reasons — political, personal and ecclesiastical.\(^\text{171}\) The fourth reason should be added here namely, indigenizing the church and its liturgy.

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169 *The Book of Common Prayer* will be referred to as BCP from here on.


The political context in which the BCP came into being is associated with the dawn of the English Revolution which reached its zenith during the reign of Henry VIII. John Brown summarizes the political and ecclesial relationship of the Pope to the church in England:

At Henry’s accession the Church in England was an organic portion of the Western Church, an extension into England of the one great Catholic Church of the West. Within this extension the Pope was supreme in all ecclesiastical causes; the highest Court of Appeal was at Rome; the highest officers of the Church were appointed by the Pope; and as far back as the long reign of Henry III the Pope appointed Italian ecclesiastics not only to English bishoprics, but also to the ordinary livings of the Church. John Brown, *The English Puritans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 5-6.

It is clear that, until the English Reformation, the Church in England was to a large extent Roman in character, and there must have been a growing desire in England for the church to become independent from Rome. In the opinion of Henry VIII, the Pope had no legitimate right to control the affairs of England, and as J. H. Merle d’Aubigue points out, Henry VIII “believed that neither pope nor foreign monarch had a right to exercise the smallest jurisdiction in England.” J. H. Merle d’Aubigue, *The Reformation in England*, vol. 2, edited by S. M. Houghton (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1963), 304.

Until the time of Henry VIII, the Pope had the power to grant permission to English kings to obtain a divorce. When the Pope refused to annul Henry VIII’s marriage to Catherine of Aragon in order to marry Anne Boleyn, the King sought the English church, which had hitherto remained part of the Roman Catholic Church, to secede from the authority of the Pope. Here the personal reasons of the King are evident. They had far reaching political and ecclesiological consequences. With the political events around Henry VIII and subsequent breakdown of the relationship between Rome and England, the Church in the English jurisdiction came to be


known as the Ecclesia Anglican (The English Church) and subsequently became the Anglican Church or the Church of England in 1534.\(^{174}\)

It was Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who granted the divorce of Henry VIII and blessed his new marriage. Schmidt argues that Cranmer not only supported the King in seeking annulment but he was supportive of the political status of the King of England. “Cranmer” argues Schmidt, “believed the King was the rightful head not only of the state, but of the church.”\(^ {175}\) Cranmer based these ideas on his understanding and interpretation of biblical injunction on the role of Kings, and used them to counter the role and status of the pope, particularly as it related to England. “Cranmer found no reference to a pope in the Bible and little reference to bishops, but he noted that kingship was held in high regard. He made little distinction between the Church of England and the English nation, and believed the King was God’s appointed servant to manage both on God’s behalf.”\(^ {176}\) Historians believe that the Church of England got its distinctive identity from the reign of Queen Elizabeth in 1558.

However, the autonomy of the Church of England had to reach beyond the politics of nationhood and the quest for indigenous ecclesiastical autonomy. A contextual liturgy that embraced all forms of the worship life and the ministry of the church was necessary. While there were various forms of liturgy that were used by the Roman church, hitherto the predominant liturgy was in Latin. The Church of England produced the BCP as a liturgical resource which was accessible to the English people.

\(^ {174}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^ {175}\) Schmidt, *Glorious Companions*, 2.

\(^ {176}\) Ibid.
Commenting on the contextual relevance of the BCP, David M. Chapman writes:

Although some had hoped for a more radical approach, the finished product achieved a notable objective: in place of regional liturgical books, mainly Latin, there was now a single Prayer Book in English containing all the rites needed by priest and people in the course of common worship.\footnote{177} 

Subsequent English rulers such as Queen Mary were not in favor of the BCP and sought to return to the authority of the Pope and the liturgy of the Roman church.\footnote{178} The political and ecclesiological disputes that characterized that evolution of the English church were at times marred by personal tastes and preferences for the BCP or the Roman Rites. In that process, clerics lost their lives and at other times the rulers themselves.

The coming into being of the BCP could be regarded as the second important step in effecting translation as a critical step towards indigenization. The first was by John Wycliffe when, in the 1380s, he translated the first of the Gospels from Latin into English. There were those — including monks — who were dissatisfied with this effort, calling it a heresy. They objected, claiming that the translation of the Scriptures into English “has rendered it more acceptable and more intelligible to the layman and even women, than it has been hitherto been learned.” They went on to complain that “The gospel pearl is everywhere cast out and trodden underfoot of swine.”\footnote{179} Nevertheless, the compilation of this liturgical resource was a historical landmark in the history of the development of Christian liturgy, including burial rites, for the


English church. The BCP went through three stages before the birth of John Wesley in 1703. The first BCP appeared in 1549, two years after the death of Henry VIII. Scholars maintain that, in putting the together the BCP, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer “skillfully included in one book an abbreviated form of almost all the principal ‘common prayers’ which had been used before the Reformation.”

One of the primary theological concerns of the BCP was to do away with the doctrine of Purgatory. This doctrine taught that the souls of the departed went through “a half way stage between earth and Heaven, where the sinful but repentant soul could, through purgatorial or cleansing punishment, complete the process of making satisfaction for sin and so be rendered fit for Heaven.” The doctrine of purgatory seemed to have been premised on two theological tenets. Firstly, the doctrine was intended to deal with the question of the salvation of the immortal soul of the human being. Because the soul of the human being is immortal, its salvation was considered of utter importance. Secondly, the sinful departed needed to put right their relationship with God before the day of judgment and the resurrection. Ninian Smart offers a summary of the reasoning behind the doctrine of Purgatory:

Belief in purgatory represented a mitigation of the doctrine of eternal damnation, since a person in this life who had not shown great saintliness or goodness might nevertheless be regarded as destined for salvation, if penitent. The idea of purgatory also provided a partial explanation of the state of many souls between the particular judgment and the final resurrection. In their final state of beatitude and salvation souls would have had their

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180 Ibid., viii. Though Cranmer is regarded as “The Father of the Prayer Book”, he produced the BCP with the assistance of other scholars. The BCP was therefore in all earnest a product of mutual influence. See Richard H. Schmidt, Glorious Companions, 1.

sins and defects purged away and could then be united to bodily existence through the creation by God of resurrection bodies.\textsuperscript{182}

Liturgically this doctrine resulted in protracted prayers for the souls of the departed with the view to lessen their punishment and for their resurrection.

With reference to burial rites, the first BCP provided “a service which still retains a celebration of the Eucharist as one of its elements, and makes use of the traditional material in a fourfold scheme: a procession to the church or grave; the burial proper; a brief office of the dead; and a funeral eucharist.”\textsuperscript{183} The theological significance of the BCP was that, unlike the burial rites of the Roman church, it provided a less protracted liturgy for burials and moved away from the theology of purgatory.\textsuperscript{184} The BCP placed “emphasis on confidence in Christ’s welcome to


\textsuperscript{184} Colin O. Buchan identifies main characteristics of medieval burial rites. They were long, complicated and emphasized purgatory. The theology of purgatory meant that burial rites had to focus on “seeking deliverance from suffering for the departed.” See “Funerals: Anglican,” in \textit{The New SCM Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship}, ed. Paul Shaw (London: SCM Press, 2002), 218. During the Middle Ages burial rites progressed from three theological motifs namely, life, fear, and refusal to think about death. See White, 1980, 263; Phillips, “Funerals: Early Christianity,” in \textit{The New SCM Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship}, ed. Paul Shaw (London: SCM Press, 2002), 217. Burial rites associated with these themes were not merely for the purpose of disposing of the body. More importantly they were expressions of what people believed about life and death in the light of the Christ event and their cultural milieus. While the Early Church developed burial rituals that focused on the celebrated victorious life in Christ, the Mediæval church developed rituals that emphasized fear and judgment. It is not clear where these theologies originated. The possibility is that as the church grew and was susceptible to becoming a social phenomenon, it was necessary to emphasize the consequence of lukewarm Christianity with no real essence.
the departed and the assurance of the resurrection of life.”\textsuperscript{185} Its main theological focus was to give “hope to the living.”\textsuperscript{186}

The cutting edge of the theology of the BCP was the doctrine of Justification by faith alone. This doctrine was at the heart of the breakaway of the Church of England from Roman Catholicism. Speaking of this fundamental theological position of the Church of England, Horton Davies states that, “It is clear that the Church of England, in separating from the great and historic Roman Catholic church, would have to articulate its own ecclesiology and provide its own definitions of the scope and authority of the ministry and the nature of the sacraments.” And he continues to argue that “it was in their understanding of soteriology and, in particular, the mode of appropriation of salvation that Anglicans differed the most from Catholics. It was the doctrine of Justification by Faith, especially in its Lutheran form of sola fide (by faith alone) that challenged the entire Catholic system.”\textsuperscript{187} It is also evident that this doctrine gave shape to the liturgy of burials of the BCP and subsequently that of Methodism.

The second stage in the development of the BCP came in 1552. This stage saw the development and refinement of the 1549 Common liturgy. The 1552 BCP reflected a more Protestant emphasis than its predecessor. Relative to the burial liturgy, this edition omitted direct prayers for the dead. The 1552 revision of the BCP is likely to have contributed to Cranmer’s death in 1553 during the reign of Queen Mary. Those who disliked the 1552 changes in the BCP

\textsuperscript{185} Colin O. Buchanan, “Funerals: Anglican”, 218.

\textsuperscript{186} Ibid.

are said to have accused him and others who were like-minded, of heresy and indecisiveness.\textsuperscript{188} He was burnt to death by his opponents.\textsuperscript{189} Cranmer was instrumental in bringing into effect the political and ecclesiastical autonomy of England and the English church. It is ironic however that it was through political and ecclesiastical disagreements that Cranmer lost his life.

While there were other developments after 1552, the third most significant revision took place in 1662. It was this revision that John Wesley abridged for the people called Methodists. David M. Chapman correctly observes that “Methodist worship is rooted historically, liturgically and theologically in the 1662 \textit{Book of Common Prayer} of the Church of England.”\textsuperscript{190} The 1662 BCP was preceded by intense debates, approvals and disapprovals of the previous revision. The significance of the 1662 BCP lay in the robust theological discussions that witnessed the intentions of the Puritans of Calvinistic persuasion to alter some of the contents of the Prayer Book. At the Savoy Conference of 1661, the Puritans of Calvinistic persuasion and Anglican Bishops met to find a middle course for a liturgy that took into account the theological perspectives of Puritan thinking. Mainly at the center of these debates was the Puritans’ dissatisfaction and disapproval of some of the elements of the BCP.\textsuperscript{191} Regarding matters relating to the liturgy of the burial of the dead, the Puritans objected to any reference that implied that the prayers of the living can cause the dead to enter into heaven.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{188} Pullan, \textit{The History of the Book of Common Prayer}, xi.
\textsuperscript{190} David M. Chapman, \textit{Born in Song}, 10.
\end{flushright}
As far as the theology of life and death and the liturgy for the burial of the dead were concerned, the Puritans rejected any prayer in the liturgy that “expressed any assurance of the deceased party's happiness, which they did not think proper to be said indifferently over all that died.” Their views took a divergent position and differed greatly from those contained and represented in the BCP. In their Directory of Public Worship they had abandoned all burial services. Burials took place without any formal ceremony. Puritan burials were dominated by complete silence and absence of any rituals. However, in 1662 the Puritans accepted the use of the BCP with the necessary changes.

Their views are summarized by John Canne:

Concerning burials, this they say: all prayers either over or for the dead, are not only superstitious and vain, but also are idolatry, and against the plain scriptures of God. …as for the white or black cross, set upon the dead corpse, and ringing of a three-fold peal, the practice is popish: mourning in black garments for the dead if it not be hypocritical, yet it is superstitious and heathenish: funeral sermons, they also utterly condemn, because they are put in the place of tretants, and many other superstitious abuses follow thereby. To be brief …the nonconformists will have the dead to be buried in this sort, (holding no other way lawful,) namely, that it be conveyed to the place of burial, with some honest company of the Church, without either singing or reading, yea, without all kinds of ceremony heretofore used, other than that the dead be committed to the grave, with such gravity and sobriety as those that be present may seem to fear the judgment of God, and to hate sin, which is the cause of death; and thus to do the best and right reformed churches bury their dead, without any ceremonies of praying or preaching at them.

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It is not incorrect to conclude that as far as the theology of life and death was concerned, the major debate during the development of the BCP was the future of the soul of the deceased person. The pertinent question was whether the living could decide on the future relationship of the deceased with God. For Protestants the doctrine of the Justification by Faith provided the answer — only God justifies on the basis of one’s faith in the crucified and resurrected Christ in the present life or in the life after. It is not by any works or actions of the living or the deceased that one is granted eternal life. As it will be seen, Wesley went further to speak about Prevenient Grace.

*The Puritans’ “Holy Dying”*

One of the views that markedly influenced John Wesley, and was also dominant during the 19th century rise of evangelical theology, and subsequently in the mission field in Southern Africa was the Puritan emphasis on the value of “holy dying” or “good death.” Jeremy Taylor was one of the 17th century poetical writers on the subject. His chief concern in one of his writings which became popular, was to discourage the fear of death. He wrote a book entitled, *Holy Dying*. Addressing his readers on the fear of death Taylor wrote:

> Christian prudence is a great security against the fear of death. For if we be afraid of death, it is but reasonable to use all spiritual arts to take off the apprehension of the evil; but therefore we ought to remove our fear, because fear gives to death wings, and spurs, and darts. Death hastens to a fearful man; if therefore you would make death harmless and slow, to throw off fear is the way to do it; and prayer is the way to do that. If therefore you be afraid of death, consider you will have less need to fear it by how much the less you do fear it; and so cure your direct fear by a reflex act of prudence and consideration.196

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Taylor did not only speak about defecting from the fear of death by the art of not fearing it, he also spoke of a conviction of a better life beyond death:

If thou wilt be fearless of death, endeavor to be in love with the felicities of saints and angels, and be once persuaded to believe that there is a condition of living better that this; that there are creatures more noble than we; that above there is a country better than ours; that the inhabitants know more and know better, and are in places of rest and desire; and first learn to value it, and then learn to purchase it, and death cannot be a formidable thing, which lets us into so much joy and so much felicity.197

While Jeremy Taylor was an Anglican Loyalist, his discourse on “holy dying” is an indication of the presence of robust Puritanism within the Church of England. While the Calvinistic brand of Puritanism was consonant with the idea of dying a good death, the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination would have instilled an element of doubt about one’s acceptance into heaven. As David E. Stannard correctly observes, “the Puritans’ Calvinistic heritage also clearly included the impossibility of ever fully recognizing oneself as a member of God’s small body of the elect or large body of the demand.”198 Thus within Calvinism the concept of “good death” commended to all believers would be limited to those predestined to enter heaven.199

Instructions on “good death” were not restricted to adults. In the 1850’s the ideal of “good death” was still adhered to and taught to the youth and children. Education material on death for their age groups sought to “frighten the young reader or listener into good

197 Ibid., 452.

198 Ibid., 72.

199 The doctrine of Predestination was somewhat down played by the advent of 19th century missions. During this missionary era, it became obvious that the vast majority of “unreached” people could not be condemned to hell because they were not among those predestined for eternal life. See Geoffrey Rowell, Hell and the Victorians: A study of the Nineteenth-Century Theological Controversies concerning Eternal Punishment and the Future Life (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 16.
behaviour.”\textsuperscript{200} Pious deaths that were recorded aimed at encouraging youngsters to follow good examples of those who died well.\textsuperscript{201}

Jalland maintains that “These stories taught children that since death was omnipresent and could wipe out families, they must always be prepared for it.”\textsuperscript{202} The stories also served another purpose — to minimize the fear of death by children “by their emphasis on death as the entry into a happier life in Heaven where they might join beloved siblings ‘gone before’.”\textsuperscript{203} Clearly children were also introduced to the belief in the existence of life after death.

Henry Venn went as far as to encourage that every endeavor be made to bring children to the bedside of a dying pious person:

If an opportunity could be found of bringing your child to the bedside of a departing saint, this object would infinitely exceed the force of simple instruction. Your child would never forget the composure and fortitude, the lively hope and consolation painted on the very countenance of the Christian; nor his warm expressions of love, and gratitude to the Saviour, for a heaven of peace within, and assurance of pardon, instead of gloomy thoughts and foreboding apprehensions, or stupid insensibility to any future existence, the general case of dying men.\textsuperscript{204}

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\item \textsuperscript{201} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{202} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{203} Ibid.
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In one sense the communication to children on the importance of “dying well” and not fearing death demonstrates the seriousness with which the Puritans and their belief in piety valued “good death.”

The importance of “good death” for the Puritans and the Evangelicals of the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries in contrast to the modern-day attitudes toward death is stated by John A. Newton. He asserts that:

The Puritan would have been appalled at the modern tendency to surround a dying man with a conspiracy of silence, until, drugged and insensible, he is able to shuffle off his mortal coil without ever really facing death. If for the Puritan life was real, life earnest, then so was death. As he addressed himself to his ‘dying work’, he maintained his attitude of high seriousness to the end. His response to dying, as to everything else in life, was active and positive. For him, it was the final deed to be done, the ultimate battle to be fought, and in this strenuous spirit he squared up to the last enemy.\textsuperscript{205}

Death was for the Puritan, however, more than a personal test, the final conflict of faith. It was also an opportunity to give glory to God and build up others in the faith.

The Puritan emphasis on holy dying was carried into the Evangelical movement of the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries Britain with its emphasis on “seriousness, piety, discipline and duty.”\textsuperscript{206}

These elements of piety also influenced emphasis on “good death” or “holy death.”

The good death required piety and lifelong preparation, as well as fortitude in the face of physical suffering. It should take place in a good Christian home, surrounded by loving and supportive family, with the dying person making explicit farewells to family members, comforted by the assurance of future family reunion in Heaven. There should be time, and physical and mental capacity, for the completion of temporal and spiritual business. The dying person should be


conscious and lucid until the end, resigned to God’s will, able to beg forgiveness for past sins and to prove worthy of salvation.\textsuperscript{207} 

John Wesley’s belief in the ideal of “holy dying” was clearly demonstrated during the last moments of his life when he declared, “I’ll die praising thee, and rejoice that others can praise thee better.”\textsuperscript{208} His deathbed utterance, “The Best of All is God is with Us” and the depiction of him surrounded by family and friends are a classical example of a good death. “Holy dying” was so important that one suspects that the number of those who were around John Wesley at the time of his death, depicted by the artist of these last moments, is exaggerated when one takes into account the size of John Wesley’s bedroom in which he died. As it will be shown below, the 19th century Wesleyan missionaries also had traits of the influence of this tradition. They were constantly looking for moments when those who were about to depart from this world would testify to their relationship with God or burst out with words of praise.

All considered, “Taylor’s work and the counter-cultural effort to simplify the funeral extravagances served as a foundation for the Methodist attitude toward death and burial practices.”\textsuperscript{209} This simplicity is attested to by John Wesley’s abridgment of the BCP.

\textit{The Wesleyan Theological Tradition}

It has been noted that John Wesley produced the \textit{Order for The Burial of the Dead} in 1784. He was 81 years old, seven years before his death in 1791. It is my view that Wesley’s production of this Liturgy was underpinned by his theological maturity, immense pastoral

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{207} Ib\textsuperscript{id.}, 233.
  \item \textsuperscript{208} Ib\textsuperscript{id.}, 202.
\end{itemize}
}
experience as well as extensive knowledge gained from reading liturgical works that had emerged before, during and after the three stages of the BCP. It is therefore important to highlight some of Wesley’s theological precursors that informed his *Order for the Burial of the Dead*.²¹⁰

To start with, John Wesley’s *Order of the Burial of the Dead* should be understood in the context of his high regard for the BCP. He believed: “there is no Liturgy in the world, either in ancient or modern language, which breathes more of a solid, Scriptural, rational piety, than that of the Common Prayer of the Church of England.”²¹¹ Wesley’s position was not surprising given that he and his brother Charles were born, bred and died Anglicans. Their father Samuel Wesley was an Anglican priest committed to Christian piety. His high regard for piety is evident in commending others:

First to pray to God; secondly, to read the Holy Scriptures and discourse upon religious matters for their mutual edification; and thirdly, to deliberate about edification of our neighbor and the promoting of it.²¹²

The Wesley brothers also received Puritan influence from their mother Susanna. She was born of Puritan parents, became an Anglican in her teenage years but remained loyal to her Puritan ideals, especially in the raising of her children. This was evident in her love of Richard Baxter’s works.²¹³ D. W. Bebbington alludes to the fact that the influence of Puritanism on John

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²¹⁰ For a detailed analysis of the theology contained in the rubrics of Wesley’s burial liturgy, see Westerfield-Tucker, “Till death do us part,” 185-219.


²¹³ Ibid., 16; Also see John A. Newton, *Susanna Wesley and the Puritan Tradition in Methodism*, 2nd edition (London: Epworth Press, 2002), 185-86. Also see David M. Chapman, *Born in Song*, 13-14. Chapman asserts that there is some doubt whether “the young John was even aware of his Puritan ancestry.” It would be
Wesley cannot be underestimated. He points out that “The fifty-volume Christian Library published by Wesley for his followers contains far more literature of Puritan stamp than of any other ecclesiastical genre.”\(^2\) It must also be conceded that John Wesley’s thinking was not only influenced by Anglicanism and the Puritans but also by the Moravians, especially in his understanding of the simplicity of faith, communal Christian living and care for the orphaned and vulnerable children and the aged. His emphasis on “the religion of the heart” as opposed to the “religion of the head” was influenced by his contact with them.\(^2\)

In addition to the foundation laid by the BCP, Methodists of Wesley’s time were also influenced by Puritan “Exceptions” and their theology of death as indicated above.\(^2\) John Wesley was influenced by the Puritan concept of ‘holy dying’ to the extent that he abbreviated Jeremy Taylor’s Holy Dying to include it in a Christian Library.\(^2\) This ideal also influenced the

\(^{214}\) D. W. Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 35.


\(^{216}\) John Wesley’s theological perspective and his Puritan influence were not necessarily in conflict but complimentary and compatible. The complementarity and compatibility was beneficial to theological growth and development in the 18\(^{th}\) and 19\(^{th}\) centuries. John A. Newton summarizes this fact: “Despite some obvious differences, there are clear resemblances between the Puritanism of the seventeenth century and the Methodism of the eighteenth. Both stand in a dialectical relation to the Church of England, originating within it. Both make their fundamental appeal to Scripture, and look to reason and experience to corroborate its deliverances. Both embody a conception of the Christian life in terms of disciplined living (‘method’ is a keyword for each of them), moral rigorism, and Christianity in earnest. Both stand for warm popular piety and lay religion, genuinely of and for the people. Both are intensely concerned for evangelical mission and pastoral care, and are ready to adapt and supplement the system of the Church in obedience to these primary needs. Both, finally and supremely, are concerned with the sovereignty of grace, and are eager to translate into human terms an understanding of the Christian life as ‘faith working by love’.” See John A. Newton, 16. The animosity that at times occurred between Anglicans and Christians of Puritan orientation, seem to have often been political more than theological and pastoral.

thinking of the 19th century nonconformist missionaries who came to labor in Southern Africa. “Good death” was celebrated as evidence of one’s unshakeable faith in Christ in the face of death and expectant hope of entry into heaven.

The “mother” of Methodists’ burial liturgies is John Wesley’s 1784 *Sunday Service of the Methodist in North America*. An understanding of Wesley’s theology is necessary for this liturgy to be appreciated. However, there is no clear-cut Methodist theological position on life and death. John Wesley himself did not develop a theology of life and death apart from the rest of his theological thinking. Rather, theological principles such as Prevenient Grace, Salvation by Faith, Christian Perfection, Sanctification or Scriptural Holiness are the basis of understanding Methodist theology of life and death.

It is the contention of this study that if one searches for a Methodist theology of death, one would need to understand more fully Methodist theology on Prevenient (previous) Grace and Saving Grace, Justification by Faith, and so forth. The task to elaborate on these theological tenets requires an independent study. This study only surveys the basic fundamentals of these theological positions as they relate to Methodist theology on life and death.

Wesley’s theology of Prevenient Grace sets the stage for a Methodist understanding of how one’s life is directed towards life beyond the grave in fellowship with the risen Lord. By Prevenient Grace, Methodists believe that God loves all humanity and this love or grace allows human beings to move from their fallen state, or from the state of natural sin inherited from the fall of Adam, to become aware of God. This process is not initiated by human ability or through works. Rather it is God’s love that draws us on the path towards Godself, making us aware of
sinfulness and the need for repentance and salvation through faith in Christ. John Wesley’s theology of Prevenient Grace was in contrast to Calvin’s theology of Predestination.

From his theology of salvation, Wesley developed what has come to be known as the Four Alls. All need to be saved; All can be saved; All can know they are saved, and All can be saved to the uttermost (completely). Wesley developed the Four Alls from his theology of salvation. To this day these Wesleyan convictions convey Methodist belief that salvation which is made available through the atoning death of Christ and his resurrection, is available both in the present and in the afterlife, known as eternity; in other words, they highlight Methodist theology on life and death.

These theological tenets are all premised on the conviction that human beings are free to accept or reject God’s offer of salvation. The rejection of God’s saving grace, however, leads to judgment; choosing God’s gracious love through repentance, trust and obedience leads to salvation in Christ. Thus conversion is important in turning away from one’s sinfulness and surrendering totally to God’s saving grace. Spiritual death occurs when we reject the offer of salvation and can occur even during our mortal or physical existence, if dead to God.

It can be understood from Methodist theology of Prevenient Grace and justification by faith that even at the point of death, one is able to respond to God’s grace, repent, believe in the atoning death of Christ and receive forgiveness. Even at this point it is not by one’s own effort but by God’s enabling grace that one is drawn into a relationship with Him, where one cries out, *Abba, Father.*

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219 Romans 8:15.
It is difficult not to deduce from Methodist theology of Prevenient Grace and Justification by Faith concerning life and death that non members are not excluded from burial by the church on the basis that they are sinful. This position is implicit in Wesley’s twelfth of his Twenty-five Articles of Religion. He stated that:

Not every sin willingly committed after Justification, is the sin against the Holy Spirit, and unpardonable. Wherefore the grant of repentance is not to be denied to such as fall into sin, after justification: after we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, and by the grace of God rise again, and amend our lives. And therefore they are to be condemned who say they can no more sin as long as they live here, or deny the place of forgiveness to such as truly repent. Therefore, John Wesley’ teaching on the Justification places emphasis on the fact that God’s forgiveness is available to all and at all times — even at the moment of death.

John Wesley deliberated on the fear of death. While his thoughts on this subject would have been influenced by the Puritan ideal of “dying well”, Wesley showed his original thinking on the subject of soteriology. This original view is evident in his sermons on Salvation by Faith and Justification by Faith. Also, he was more practical than is evident in the Puritan thinking on not fearing death. Wesley’s recognition of the different types of the fear of death is reflected in his own writing. He maintained that:

Men commonly fear death, first because of leaving their worldly goods and pleasures; (2). For fear of the pains of death; and, (3). For fear of perpetual damnation. But none of these causes trouble good men, because they stay themselves by true faith, perfect charity, and sure hope of endless joy and bliss everlasting.

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220 John Wesley, John Wesley’s Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America (The United Methodist Publishing House, 1984), 310.

As Kenneth J. Collins has observed, John Wesley “was sensitive enough to distinguish between fear of the prospect of physical pain in the dying process itself from the fear of perpetual damnation.”

Equally important is John Wesley’s theology of Prevenient Grace and how it related to his understanding of Paradise. The theme of Paradise was constantly referred to by John Wesley. In his letters he wrote:

In paradise the souls of good men rest from their labours and are with Christ from death to the resurrection. This bears no resemblance at all to the Popish purgatory, wherein wicked men are supposed to be tormented in purging fire till they are sufficiently purified to have a place in heaven. But we believe (as did the ancient Church) that none suffer after death but those who suffer eternally. We believe we are to be here saved from sin and enabled to love God with all our heart.

Colin W. Williams takes this argument further and highlights John Wesley’s view about what happens to those who have never heard the gospel. He avers that John Wesley states three theological positions all related to Prevenient Grace. Wesley believed:

That Christ works even in those who do not hear the gospel in this life. Second, he believes that those who do not hear the gospel are judged according to their response to this grace by which Christ works within them in a hidden way. Finally, there is the state of Paradise — “the intermediate state between death and resurrection” — in which a full knowledge of Christ is given and the souls of just men are made perfect.

Williams correctly argues that the doctrine of Paradise does not contradict the grand doctrine of Justification by Faith because no moment in our lives is void of God’s grace, giving the individual a chance to respond to the invitation to salvation. He puts it succinctly: “In each

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222 Collins, John Wesley, 59.
moment man is given the freedom to respond or resist, and thus each moment has its own peculiar and decisive significance."

Another important source of Methodist theology of life and death is Charles Wesley’s thought as reflected in hymns. Scholars point out that Charles Wesley was less famous than his brother John Wesley. Notwithstanding, his theology as seen in his hymns reflects for example the fundamental Wesleyan doctrines of justification by faith, sanctification, new birth and Christian perfection. As John R. Tyson observes, Charles Wesley’s “understanding of salvation and sanctification is significant for us, not only because he is one of the founders of the Wesleyan tradition, but also because his hymns are alive among us, perpetuating the Methodist distinctiveness in our age.” In this sense he “has not been silent among us! His hymns have remained as a monument to his ministry and God-given talents.”

Tyson’s analysis of Charles Wesley’s theology of life is helpful in highlighting the theology of life and death in Charles Wesley’s writings, especially his hymns. He believes Wesley was greatly influenced by his formative years. It is said he was born prematurely and this resulted in his frail health. Added to his frail health which meant the possibility of dying at any

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225 Ibid., 46.

226 Charles Wesley was the younger brother of John Wesley. He was born on the 18th December 1707 and died in 1788 at the age of 82. He was ordained a priest in 1735.


228 Ibid., 20.

229 Ibid., 237.
time, death was romanticized by the society of his time.\textsuperscript{230} These factors, Tyson argues, made Charles Wesley to become “‘obsessed’ or ‘preoccupied’ with death.”\textsuperscript{231}

Tyson arrives at the conclusion that Charles moved away from being simply obsessed with death. He came to see death as the moment of “the coming of the Bridegroom, the end of time and sin, and the entrance into ‘my eternal home’.\textsuperscript{232} For Charles Wesley at the time of death one is sanctified, that is, one is entirely sanctified at the moment of one’s death.\textsuperscript{233} This is evident in the words of his hymn: “Thou wilt not leave Thy work undone, But finish what Thou hast begun, Before I hence remove; I shall be, Master, as Thou art, Holy, and meek, and pure in heart, And perfected in love.”\textsuperscript{234}

The preceding paragraphs have outlined the Methodist theology of life and death. It is this theology that I believe gave reason to Wesley’s \textit{Order for the Burial for the Dead}. But it was also the socio-ecclesiological context of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century Methodism. Karen Westerfield-Tucker argues that Wesley’s omission of the restrictive rubric which excluded burial by the church, those who were not baptized, involved in serious crime and the unrepentant was a significant deviation from the 1662 BCP by Wesley.\textsuperscript{235} Her argument that the removal of the restrictive rubric from 1784 revision might have been motivated by the American post war situation has its

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{230} Ibid., 238.
  \item \textsuperscript{231} Ibid., 236.
  \item \textsuperscript{232} Ibid., 239.
  \item \textsuperscript{233} Ibid., 240.
  \item \textsuperscript{234} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 188.
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However I would argue that Wesley’s removal of the restrictive rubric was in agreement with his theology. To have retained the restrictive rubric would have been contradictory to Wesley’s theology of Prevenient Grace, Salvation by Faith and the doctrine of Assurance.

Westerfield-Tucker has pointed out that pertaining to resurrection, Wesley believed that “resurrection to eternal life was not guaranteed to all humanity but only to the saints who would rise ‘in due season.” Methodist doctrines outlined above do not contradict Wesley’s belief about the resurrection as stated by Westerfied-Tucker. Indeed there can be no universal salvation for all. It is the individual who is part of humanity who is called to respond to the grace of God and that offer is made by God at a moment that God chooses in that person’s life.

John Wesley’s Burial Liturgy and Subsequent Developments

Studies on Methodist burial liturgy, by a number of scholars, show that Wesley’s Order of the Burial of the Dead of 1784 went through a number of editions or alterations. Rowell noted that the first alteration appeared in 1786, and “it contained a shortened version of the burial rites, in which the first rubric concerning the unbaptized, excommunicated, and suicides was removed; the prayer ‘Almighty God’ was deleted; and the phrase ‘as our hope is this our brother doth’ was cut out of the collect.” Further, Rowell noted that the singing of hymns at funerals was unique to Methodism. Chapter five of this study will note the importance allotted to the singing not

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236 Ibid., 188-89.

237 Ibid., 221.


239 Ibid.
only of hymns, but also of popular Christian choruses at Methodist funerals among Barolong of Mahikeng.

David M. Chapman’s study shows that Wesley’s Prayer Book, which was introduced to British Methodism in 1786, assumed the title *The Sunday Service of the Methodists and Other Occasional Services*. It is this British version which witnessed a number of editions or alterations. According to Chapman the Methodist Conference in Britain resolved that Wesley’s Prayer Book be used in all Methodist chapels. Though scholars do not demonstrate the extent to which Wesley’s *Order of the Burial of the Dead* was affected by alterations made to the Prayer Book from time to time, Chapman notes that “subsequent editions from 1848 include marriage services, burial of the dead and ordination.” While there were many other alterations of Wesley’s Prayer Book, beyond 1848, it is evident that the Setswana burial liturgy used among Barolong Methodists is a result of some of the earliest editions of Wesley’s work. The close similarity of the Setswana burial liturgy to Wesley’s original work attests to this assertion.

Given the array of editions of Methodist burial liturgies during the 17th and 18th centuries, it goes to say that individual Wesleyan missionaries that came to Southern Africa would have brought and used an edition or editions of their choice in the missionary field. In this case uniformity would have been unlikely. However, this argument cannot be conclusive. These men — and women — were sent into the mission field by the Wesleyan Missionary Society. There is a possibility that this missionary society would have had rules and regulations on what available editions they would use.

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240 Chapman, *Born in Song*, 16.

241 Ibid., 18.

242 Ibid., 23.
resources missionaries should take with them into the field. While there does not seem to be evidence to support this proposition, the fact that MCSA’s *Order of the Burial of the Dead* contained in vernacular hymn books is the same, suggests that some uniformity among African congregations did exist or was introduced at some stage in the early history of Methodism.

*Wesleyan Missionaries and Methodist Burial Rites in Southern Africa*

Regardless of the nature of a version or versions of Methodist burial liturgy or liturgies that Wesleyan missionaries could have brought to Southern Africa, they remained products of their times. They came from Christian traditions that for centuries had grappled with issues of life and death in the light of the Christ event. The dominant evangelical thinking of their time and the influence of their denominational traditions and theology would have influenced them as they dealt with burials in the mission field. After all, they did not only come to evangelize the “heathens” but also to establish the work of the denominations that sent them. It would be expected that the Wesleyan missionaries would have brought with them instructions on what it meant to be Wesleyan or Methodist. The same would apply to Congregationalists and others. It is unimaginable that these instructions would exclude material on burial rites. The current burial liturgies used in the MCSA are therefore part of a long Christian tradition that has influenced many other Methodist traditions for centuries up to the present time.

As discussed in the foregoing pages, it was important to establish whether the missionaries came from cultures and Christian traditions that gave any significance to burial rites. This exercise was carried out considering the evident affinity of Barolong people to funerals. The investigation also arose — as indicated in chapter one of this study — from the
apparent silence of Wesleyan missionary records on how burial rites were conducted in Southern Africa.

The records of the Wesleyan missionaries should now speak for themselves. Available missionary records, especially those of the Wesleyan missionaries are examined under this section. Themes, nuances and practices related to death and burials in the missionary field are explored. Only a few examples are cited as there is evidence of a similar pattern in the way individual missionaries dealt with occasions of death and burials in Southern Africa.

The first observation to be noted is that the experiences of missionaries were no less than those of all humans. They lost children, husbands, wives and co-workers in the field. The experiences of deaths of family members were as painful as it would be for any family today. The degree to which they accepted and dealt with these losses seems to have been influenced to a large extent by their theological orientation. Their records provide some glimpses of these experiences and reactions and highlight ways in which their own family members were buried. Therefore in this chapter discussing Christian burials in Southern Africa does not only refer to death and burials of African people among whom the missionaries labored, but it includes the personal experiences of the missionaries.

This inclusive approach is useful and appropriate. It opens a door of opportunity to understand more comprehensively their theology of death across the board and illuminates the kind of burial rites they employed for their kin and their Christian converts. The question whether they buried their families the same way they buried their converts is answered through the scrutiny of their records. The recordings of the burials of children also provide useful
information about theological orientation of the nonconformists and to ascertain whether adults and children were buried in the same way.

Barnabas Shaw, the first Wesleyan missionary in Southern Africa, made a number of references to deaths and burials he encountered during his missionary labors. Among these was the sobering experience of the death of his five-day old baby boy. About this experience he writes: “On the second of June, the Lord blessed us with another infant, but on the sixth, he breathed his soul into the hands of Him who gave it. It was a trying season, but especially for my partner in life. The flower, which was so beautiful, fairer than spring, and on which our hopes were fixed, was cut down and left to wither in the field.”

In these words one cannot miss the depth of pain and anguish of losing a child under the challenging circumstances of the mission field, but also a sense of helplessness amidst the knowledge that “It was our duty to hear the voice of Him who cannot err, and we endeavored to listen to it. ‘Be still, and know that I am God’. May we be enabled to say submissively to say, ‘It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good’.”

As for the burial of the baby, Shaw records that the body was buried inside the walls of the chapel in Namaqualand. The burial site is of interest because it appears not to have been the practice of Methodism to inter the remains of children nor those of babies inside chapels. In his journals John Wesley refers to a child’s funeral that he conducted, and the burial site is the cemetery. We do know, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, that the people of Southern Africa, especially Batswana, buried small children inside their houses. The Namas, who formed

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243 Shaw, Memorials, 115.

244 Ibid.
Shaw’s congregation and were present at the funeral could have influenced the decision to bury the baby inside the chapel. We are not told about the rites that were employed during the burial. Rev. Hodgson, one of the first missionaries to labor among Batswana, and his wife Anne also lost a child in the field. Here too we are not told about the rites of burial. After relating the agony that the child went through and which led to her death, we are told: “her parents closed her eyes, laid her in a coffin, and committed her to the earth.”

Samuel Broadbent also recorded the experience of the loss of his newly born baby. His report about the interment throws some light on what could have been the practices of burying the departed. He wrote: “It was with great difficulty that I could leave my wife on her couch when our baby’s remains were carried to the grave. However, with the assistance of one of the brethren, and a stick in my hand, I accompanied them to the place of interment, where the Rev. Hom performed the funeral service. I tarried to witness the filling up the grave, during which I observed several small slabs or boards, marking the place where the mortal remains of individuals formerly at the station had been buried.” The officiating minister at this burial ceremony, Rev. Hom, probably used the Methodist liturgy for burial as it existed at the time.

The two instances cited are about families of the concerned missionaries, and none has been found about burial rites employed for the burial of converts or members of the young

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247 Ibid.

248 It is not clear who Rev. Hom was. It is probable that he was a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church in Namaqualand, for the incident reported by Broadbent occurred at the beginning of his pursuit of Batswana.
congregations. However, Broadbent’s testimony does reveal indications that his deceased baby was buried in what would have been a graveyard designated for Christians.

While there is little or no reference to the nature of burial rites, a dominant characteristic in the reporting on deaths and burials by missionaries is the last words uttered by the dying. The deaths of Mr. Shaw’s baby and the Hodgson’s daughter, whose age was not disclosed, are among the rare instances where the reader is not told about the last words of the deceased. In the case of the death of the baby the reasons are obvious. However, it was in almost all cases that our Wesleyan missionaries made a point of recording the last words uttered by those who were about to depart. This also applied to children. Mr. Shaw wrote of a schoolgirl who “when near her dissolution that she exclaimed, “Glory, glory, glory!” and then sweetly expired.” 249

Immediately after reporting about the schoolgirl, Mr. Shaw wasted no time and continued to report on the death of Mrs. Lucas from England. As in all other cases, Mr. Shaw took care to record the last words of this individual before death.

A number of observations are obvious from the references cited above, relative to the manner in which death and burials received the attention of the nonconformist missionaries. Missionary records in general — and in particular those that have been examined here — do not indicate what liturgies the nonconformists used to bury their family members who died in the field, and members of their flocks. 250 The reader is robbed of the opportunity to gain insight into how funerals were generally conducted. The only reference that the research has uncovered that

249 Ibid., 254.

250 It must be observed that the lack of references as to how the missionaries buried their subjects is not limited to the Wesleyan missionaries. It was a general trend among nonconformist missionaries who labored in Southern Africa.
provides a very vague and limited insight is by Rev. Barnabas Shaw, referring to the funeral service he conducted of a gentleman known as “brother Snowdall.” He gives an obscure description of the chapel at Simon’s Town on the occasion of the funeral. “The trustees had put the chapel in mourning, and sorrow was depicted on every countenance.” ²⁵¹ It appears that it was at the discretion of missionaries to be creative with burials under different circumstances and contexts under which deaths occurred. There are no indications that children were buried differently from adults. There is also no indication that families of missionaries were buried differently than African converts.

While creativity would have been a common feature in the early periods of missionary work, Wesleyan missionaries remained under the supervision of the Wesleyan Missionary Society in London and later under the District Superintendent. It was unlikely therefore that they would choose to do something that was out of concert with the rest of the Wesleyan family, both at home and elsewhere in the mission field.

It should be remembered that the Wesleyan liturgy was primarily designed to be used in the context of a literate congregation. The responses in the liturgy attest to this. The missionaries would therefore initially have had no congregation that would create a situation conducive to the use of such a liturgy. This fact explains why it would have been difficult for them to use the liturgy in their congregations that were still elementary and illiterate. The use of Methodist burial liturgy that existed at the time would have been introduced only later, when congregations became more stable and increasingly literate with the introduction of mission schools.

²⁵¹ Shaw, Memorials, 235.
However, Casalis’ record presents a slightly different picture from that of the Wesleyans. Referring to the burial of a Mosotho he conducted, he wrote: “The next morning more than five hundred persons accompanied the remains of Tseniei to the new cemetery. The procession preceded by four bearers, advanced in the most profound silence. I conducted the funeral service according to the rites of the Protestant church, after which the crowd retired, evidently touched by the beauty of that hope that faith gives to the Christian.”

An examination of the letters and journals of the missionaries who labored in Southern Africa in the 19th century, indicate that across the board theologies or themes of Judgment, Heaven, and the Salvation of the Soul were the key themes that preoccupied their theological thinking and pastoral practices. A consideration of how they dealt with issues of death and ensuing burials and rituals associated with them are best understood in the context of their primary objective, namely to convert heathen Africans to Christianity. These identifiable theological themes should also be understood within the missionaries’ assessments and conclusions on the religion of the Southern African people, especially Batswana people. It cannot be said conclusively, however, that a particular nonconformist denominational theological position on death predominated in the missionary approach of, for instance, the Wesleyans. What seems to be evident is that a common nonconformist perspective was the norm when it came to the theology of life and death.

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252 Eugene Casalis was a missionary of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society. He spent his missionary labours in Lesotho from 1832 until 1854 after the death of his wife.

The Puritan concept of “holy dying”, observed earlier in this chapter, was also dominant in the work of missionaries of 19th century Southern Africa. Testimonies of those who were about to die often served as a confirmation of the positive results of true conversion, and a testimony of those still alive, about a blissful relationship between God and the dying person.254 Journal entries of moments of the death of either a convert or a member of missionary family, cited above, illustrate the extent to which the concept of “holy dying” was pervasive. It appeared not to matter what burial rites would ensue; what was most important was the testimony of an unshakable faith in Christ even in the last moments of death.

The question raised earlier about the silence of missionaries on burials in Southern Africa is partly resolved here. Though the influence of English Puritanism was not very strong during the 19th century, its impact left an enduring characteristic on the Evangelical movement and therefore on nonconformists who came to labor in Southern Africa, including Wesleyan missionaries. As Pat Jalland observes:

The Evangelical movement had enormous influence on deathbed behaviour through its revival of the Christian ideal of the ‘good death’, which can be traced back to the medieval tradition of the *ars moriendi*, the Christian art of dying well. This ideal of the good Christian death was still exceptionally powerful in 1850 among the middle and upper classes; it was disseminated for popular moral instruction by Evangelical tracts and journals, which in turn influenced the depiction of deathbed scenes in Victorian art and fiction. The good death required piety and lifelong preparation, as well as fortitude in the face of physical suffering. It should take place in a good Christian home, surrounded by loving and supportive family, with the dying person making explicit farewells to family members, comforted by the assurance of future family reunion in Heaven. There should be time, and physical and mental capacity, for the completion of temporal and spiritual business. The dying person should be conscious and lucid until the end, resigned to God’s will, able to beg forgiveness for past sins and to prove worthy of salvation.255

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254 It is questionable whether this concept has totally disappeared today. This will be explored more fully in chapter five when some of the aspects of burial programs are examined.

The views of Stannard, Canne and Jalland cited above strongly support the view that nonconformist missionaries in Southern Africa were undoubtedly influenced by Puritan thinking in their understanding and dealing with death and burial. The use of John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* as a prescribed reading for local preachers by the Methodist Church of Southern Africa until recently, attests to the influence of Puritan views of the self in the Evangelical movement of the 19th century and beyond.\(^{256}\) The *Pilgrim’s Progress* was the most widely translated piece of literature by nonconformist missionaries. The text was regarded as an important piece of teaching for those who sought to find a closer relationship with God. Seemingly this theology was also prevalent during Wesley’s time. As D. W. Bebbington confirms, “John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* and Joseph Alleine’s *Alarm to the Unconverted* were particularly prized by the early preachers.”\(^{257}\) It seems to have been used during the 19th century by missionaries to foster the evangelical search for individual consciousness of salvation, that is, the “modern” self.

That Bunyan’s book was influential is confirmed by the assertion that it was the first most important book after the Bible in Protestant missions. The translation of the Bible by missionaries was always followed by that of *Pilgrim’s Progress*. The Setswana translation of *Pilgrim’s Progress* was called “*Loeto Iwa Mokreste*” the literal meaning of which is: “The Journey of a Christian.” As regards burials, the influence of Puritanism meant that the “Absence of ceremony and restraint of emotion was, in short, the rule and practice” during funerals, as was the case in the 17th century.\(^{258}\)

\(^{256}\) The *Pilgrim’s Progress* had been influential in the Evangelical Movement since its publication in 1678.

\(^{257}\) D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 35.

\(^{258}\) Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death*, 103.
The Wesleyan missionaries who came to work among Barolong came with a background that was charged with Bunyan’s theology of judgment and eternal life. In their teaching and pastoral ministry, especially during the time of death, and in their conversion sermons and conversations it is not hard to identify the influence of Bunyan’s theology.

A discussion on Christian burial rites in Southern Africa needs to be cognizant of the primary intent and focus of the missionaries. Their primary task was to convert the Africans to Christianity. Testimonies during moments of dying were expectantly sought because they were evidence, in part, that the Christian faith was effective in the lives of people. Any other task performed was to serve this purpose. European civilization and its cultural antecedents which were introduced to Africans were necessary conduits towards achieving this missionary goal.

Williams has articulated the primary task of Wesleyan missionaries as follows:

The Wesleyans admitted that with the Christian religion generally there was no neutrality, the dominating question being: ‘Who is on the Lord’s side?’ Christianity had to combat the powers of darkness, spiritual wickedness in high places, ignorance and superstition, moral evil which defiled the conscience, hardened the heart and “drowned the soul in perdition.”

A critical dimension of their preaching, says Williams, was emphasis on “the wrath to come and the necessity for fleeing therefrom.” The message of “Death and judgment, heaven and hell” was proclaimed by nonconformist missionaries across the board.

The foregoing assessment of the records of the 19th century nonconformists in general and the Wesleyan missionaries in particular, reveals conspicuous silence about the importance of

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260 Ibid.

261 Ibid.
burials among the people with whom they lived and worked. Notably, burials and their corresponding rituals are not noted as a threat to the course of the Gospel. No reference is made to occasions where missionaries who labored in Southern Africa attempted to influence African communities to abandon their burial customs and adopt those of the missionaries.

In contrast, examples of intense efforts by missionaries to persuade Africans to abandon their ways of life, especially public ceremonies, fill the pages of their journals and history books. Customary rituals of rainmaking and initiation ceremonies and polygamy were opposed vehemently and were regarded as heathen and a hindrance towards acceptance of the gospel and civilization. Rev. Giddy, a Wesleyan missionary at Thaba Nchu celebrated and declared that “Bechuana customs and ceremonies are considerably on the wane. The native dance is in some instances kept up; but I frequently go at the time of the dance, oppose it, and preach to those who are willing to hear.”

Instructions to Missionaries of the Wesleyan-Methodist Societies made it very clear that “No man, living in a state of polygamy, is to be admitted a member, or even on trial, who will not consent to live with one woman as his wife, to whom you shall join him in matrimony. No female, living in a state of concubine with any person, is to be admitted into Society, so long as she continues in that sin.”

Similar stances were taken with regard to rainmaking and initiation ceremonies. However, there were other great ceremonies about which the missionaries generally were less concerned. Among them Schapera mentions the

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263 Report of the Wesleyan-Methodist Missionary Societies, for the year ending December 1831, xiii.
inauguration of seed-time (*letsema*), “biting” the first fruits (*molomo*), and harvest thanksgiving (*dikgafela*).²⁶⁴

Where records of the missionaries make reference to instances of burial practices by Africans, and Batswana in particular, there is also no indication that nonconformist missionaries in Southern Africa regarded the manner in which Batswana and other people of Southern Africa buried their people, as a threat to the acceptance of the gospel. On this basis it can be concluded that burials as practiced by the people of Southern Africa — especially Batswana — were an activity with which the missionaries largely did not interfere.

Could the silence and the apparent passivity of the missionaries towards Batswana burial practices be an indication that they came from European cultures and Christian traditions that paid less attention to the burial of the dead — or were there other reasons? It is the opinion of this study that the missionaries of the nineteenth century were steeped in their respective liturgical traditions. They were greatly influenced not only by liturgies dating back to the times of the Early Church, but also by their own cultural background and influences which often wittingly or unwittingly were perceived as Christian.

*The Methodist Church of Southern Africa and Its Beliefs about Life and Death*

The official MCSA is grounded in the theological tradition of Methodism as espoused earlier in this chapter. As a result the denomination does not have a theology of life and death apart from that of John Wesley and subsequent Methodism, and especially as espoused in the historic British Methodism. The evidence of this relationship is the official adoption by the MCSA of burial liturgies developed by the Methodist Church in Britain as late as 1975.

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However, this writer is of the opinion that the adoption by the MCSA of burial liturgies developed by Methodists in Britain has a disadvantage. The MCSA adopts these liturgies without scrutinizing them for purposes of contextualizing them for the African context. This assertion does not insinuate that the theology of the liturgies that the MCSA adopts is lacking in depth.

Indeed, these liturgies are theologically sound in every respect. However, in the writer’s view their rubrics are reflective of the worldview of the context in which they were developed. It is submitted here that in its adoption of these liturgies, the MCSA must take cognizance of the absence of the African worldview in the rubrics of their liturgies. Chapter six of this study will argue that the creativity of the members of the MCSA relative to burial liturgies needs to be formally integrated into the official rubrics of Setswana burial liturgy. Having made the claim that the MCSA adheres to the theological heritage of Methodism, including beliefs about life and death, I highlight them here. They are the Apostle’s and the Nicene Creeds and hymns translated from English into Setswana, and hymns written by Batswana Methodists about life and death.

*The Apostles’ and the Nicene Creeds*

The Methodist family globally, including the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, subscribes to both the Apostles and the Nicene Creeds. The two Creeds are contained in the Methodist English Service Book. In both these Creeds there are references to death, burial, resurrection, judgment of the living and the dead and life after death or eternal Kingdom. These elements of the Creeds summarize and confirm the central beliefs of the denomination concerning life and death.

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265 It is worth noting that the Nicene Creed does not appear in any of the vernacular Service Books of the MCSA namely, Setswana, Sesotho, IsiZulu, IsiXhosa and Sepedi.
The earliest statement by the MCSA about the Creeds was in 1925 when The Wesleyan Methodist Church of South Africa, now the MCSA, produced a booklet for the instruction of new members. Herein was one of the profoundly statements of the denomination’s teaching on the Invisible Church. The statement has direct implication on the relationship between those who are alive and those who have died. It taught those who were to be received into full membership that:

The Church Universal is sometimes called “The Church Militant here on earth,” to distinguish it from what is called “The Church Triumphant,” which consists of the saints above. We speak of that as though it were a different Church, but in reality it is part of the Church Universal. Death is no ultimate division in that society. Just as boys of a school do not cease to be members of the school when they go down, so those who have departed this life are members of the Church equally with us those who are alive… The Church above and the Church on earth are one. Jesus Christ is the bond between them. They are on the light side of Jesus Christ, we are on the dark. … Our blessed dead are brought near to us in Jesus Christ, their life and ours. We worship in their presence.\(^\text{266}\)

The statement quoted above is consistent with Methodist beliefs about life, death and life after death, and the relationship between the church in the here and now and the church in heaven. It is a pertinent theological statement that has an appeal to Barolong Methodist. As will be shown in a later chapter, the Creeds seem to resonate with Barolong belief in ancestors. The Creeds highlight for the African Christian the element of community that is equally important for life in the present world and in the world to come. Secondly the singing of the Apostles’ Creed during the lowering of body of the deceased into the grave demonstrates the significance of the theology of the Creeds for Barolong Methodists.

MCSA and Funerals among Barolong: The Pastoral Challenges

The non-judgmental nature of the Methodist burial liturgy has extended the ministry of burials to all. The use of Methodist burial liturgy in a cultural context that has affinity to funerals needs to be articulated here. In the first chapter of this study it was observed that Methodism made significant inroads among Barolong. The result of this success, among other indicators, has been that Methodist burial liturgy became widely used for both the burial of members in good standing and non members. It is also the case that African Independent Churches in the area use Methodist burial liturgy at their discretion. The second feature that needs to be stated is that the use of Methodist burial liturgy among Barolong happens in a cultural context where people have affinity to funerals. This affinity influences the expectations that Barolong have in the participation of the official church in the burial of members of the community.

The expected role of the church in burials in Southern Africa and among Barolong specifically is not surprising considering the influence of Christian missions in the region, in particular the success of Methodist missions among Barolong of Mahikeng. One of the ministries that the Methodist Church engages to a large extent is that of burials. The Methodist liturgy of the burial of the dead is therefore used regularly and in the context of Barolong’s affinity to burials.

The affinity of Batswana people, especially the subjects of this study, is demonstrated in the manner in which they use their language. The Setswana saying motho ga a iphitlhe — “no one buries himself or herself” or the expression moswi o tlareng fa ke sa ya ko phitlhong ya gagwe— “what will the deceased think of me if I do not attend his or her funeral?” — are some
of the expressions and sentiments which indicate the value which Batswana people in general 
attach to burials to this day.

These expressions are cited to highlight the general attitude of Southern African 
communities concerning participation in the burial of deceased members of their communities. 
Because the church is part of the community, it is expected to participate officially in burials, 
whether the deceased persons were members of the church and in good standing or not. In many 
communities in Southern Africa, especially among Barolong, Christian burial rites are regarded 
as a ministry that the church should offer to all. This is the cultural and ecclesial context in which 
the MCSA carries out the ministry of burials using Methodist burial liturgy. The scenario is now 
described in more detail.

In Mahikeng, funeral services for all age groups are well attended by both congregants 
and members of the community. In other cases, however, the large numbers are influenced by the 
social standing of the deceased individual and his or her family. In general, funerals are well 
attended across the board. Among other reasons that account for large numbers of people at 
funeral services, is that among Barolong, burials are a community affair. They still constitute a 
significant dimension of community life as found in many African communities. A private 
funeral is a rare occurrence. Oral interviews for this study, conducted among older people, have 
confirmed that large numbers of people attending funeral services is not something new among 
Barolong and Batswana in general. 267 It has been part of the culture of the people to attend

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267 The experience of the writer is that this is also witnessed in many parts of Southern Africa and is therefore, in fact, a predominantly African phenomenon.
funerals of kin and community alike. What has been noted as a new phenomenon however is a visible growing number of youth and children who are present at funeral services.\textsuperscript{268}

Whether the growing numbers of young people at funerals is representative of the growing influence of religion in Africa has not been researched; it is an argument that is beyond the scope of this work. Suffice to mention that one of the probable reasons is that because of modern technology of communication and networks of association among the youth, they are able to support each other by attending the funeral of a friend’s relative. There is a great sense of belonging through clubs or associations, such as burial societies, soccer clubs, cooperatives, associations at the workplace and political associations, to mention but a few. The experience of losing school mates has also introduced children to the attendance of funerals. It is a common practice that students or pupils accompanied by their teachers attend a funeral of a school mate. Generally there seems to be a growing sense of support for one another during times of loss, more especially with the seeming increase of deaths caused by Aids, road accidents, crime related deaths, and the increase in deaths related to chronic diseases such as heart attacks.

However, attending funerals goes beyond fulfilling social and communal responsibilities and expectations.\textsuperscript{269} Communal and family relationships are to a large extent measured and demonstrated through the manner in which people pay their last respects to the departed.

Attending a funeral of kin, a neighbor or acquaintance is regarded as a gesture that goes beyond

\textsuperscript{268} According to elderly (60 years and older) informants of this study, the presence of children at funeral services is not in accordance with earlier Barolong practices. Children were protected from the traumas and taboos associated with the experience of death and burial. The presence of children at funerals is therefore associated with modernization, which has resulted in the nullification of what was regarded as important taboos associated with death and burials. It will be explained later in this study how children featured in the rituals associated with death and burial.

\textsuperscript{269} Among Batswana people, there are those who attend funerals out of the fear that if they do not attend, they will be labelled witches responsible for the death of the deceased.
one’s immediate physical existence and attitude towards present life. By attending funerals and participating in certain communal burial rites, participants feel they have participated in the life of the deceased, even beyond the grave.

In Southern Africa and among Batswana in particular, it is generally regarded as anti-community, anti-social and impolite not to attend the funeral service of a kin member, neighbor or that of a member of the community of which you are part. Among Batswana, the feeling of an obligation to attend a neighbor’s funeral is in no way connected to the fear that one might be suspected of being responsible for the neighbor’s death. Attending a neighbor’s funeral is part of Botho – being human. Setswana expression cited earlier, moswi o tlareng fa ke sa ya a phithlong ya gagwe – “what will the deceased think of me if I do not attend his or her funeral?” is also an expression of a sense of indebtedness towards the deceased and his or her family, and the preservation and continuation of one’s relationships with the family kin of the deceased – those who are alive and those who have passed on. Speaking of the continued relationship between kin and a deceased relative, Mmutlanyane S. Mogoba writes:

In pre-Christian times, Africans believed that the community of the living and of the living-dead were one continuous community. Parents and grandparents have a physical link with their children and grandchildren. They look like them and they have their attributes and character. In addition, they pass on cultural and community lifestyles and norms of life.\(^\text{270}\)

In the same vein M. P. Moila explains the beliefs of the people of Southern Africa about the maintained relationship of the living with their living-dead:

The peoples of the Northern Sotho, Tswana, Zulu and Xhosa societies believe that humans survive after death. They believe that at death the soul is separated permanently from the body. For them the person never dies, death is a separation, not annihilation. It is

\(^{270}\) Mmutlanyane Stanley Mogoba, *Convicted by Hope*, ed. Theo Coggin. (Johannesburg: The Methodist Church of Southern Africa, 1994), 5-6. Rev. Dr Mogoba is a past Presiding Bishop of the MCSA.
a bridge to another existence, the life of the dead. However they also believe that the living dead maintain a close relationship with the living.²⁷¹ Clearly there is a common belief in the living-dead, and a common bond that is maintained by the living with their family members who have passed on. Understood within the purview of the African worldview, kin members not only keep a continuous relationship with their living-dead but they also have a moral responsibility that goes beyond this present life, the devastating effects of death and the grim image of the grave. This responsibility explains the ritual of visiting the grave of a deceased and the placing of a stone upon that grave, by a family member who was not present for the burial of the deceased; and the washing of hands when they arrive back at home— a practice found among certain Southern Africa peoples.

The continuous relationship between the living and the living-dead explains why attending the funeral of a kin member is regarded as important. Speaking of the importance of attending the funeral of a relative among the Sotho-Tswana, Setiloane says: “the funeral is an occasion of communal importance, … Kin from far and wide give up daily occupations from which their livelihood is earned much to the annoyance of their European masters and overlords, to attend the funeral service of relations. For this reason in the urban industrial areas, where mortuaries are available, the dead might be kept for upwards of ten days in order to afford kin from far away an opportunity to come and participate.”²⁷²

The expectation that the church should take part in the burial of members and non members explains the high number of burial services conducted by Christian churches in


Southern Africa. Both in rural and urban centers burials conducted by the church are in the majority as compared to those of other faiths. This phenomenon is not surprising as the majority of people in Southern Africa are Christians. The large numbers of Christians in the region, among other factors, can be attributed to the influence and success of Christian missions during the nineteenth century and the subsequent growth of the church in the region. The influence of the church is therefore phenomenal in Southern Africa.

As indicated above, the expected role of the church in the burial of all who wish to receive a Christian burial means that not all burials conducted by the church are of people who have genuinely held membership in a particular denomination. Some burials conducted by the church are of people who did not attend church, but whose family members belong to the church and request a Christian burial for their loved one, hence these are generally referred to as *phitlho ya motho yo o kopetsweng*, meaning, “burial by request.” In other instances even families who never belonged to the church request a Christian burial for their deceased member.273 The result of these requests is that often the number of burial requests for non members is more than the number of burials for members who have been active in the life of the church.274 There is a general perception that if one was baptized or confirmed into full membership of the church, the church has the responsibility to bury them even if they had no affiliation with the church at all.

273 Westerfield-Tucker, “Till death do us part,” 87, refers to a similar phenomenon in the 18th century England. She remarks that “Burial of the dead was generally regarded as duty incumbent upon all Christians out of love and charity for the deceased. With few expectations, such as high treason and suicide, all were entitled to a “decent” burial. Social rites accompanied the rites of the Church to compromise what was popularly understood as “Christian burial,” and in many respects, social custom outweighed ecclesiastical rite both in practice and in the eyes of the bereaved.”

274 This was my experience when I served as a superintendent minister in Mahikeng from 2002 to 2004.
While the church is willing to conduct burial services of non members, the practice continues to pose a dilemma for the church. At Circuit Preachers’ Meetings of the MCSA in which the writer participated, questions were raised on exactly what should be preached and what parts of the Methodist burial liturgy should be used for such burials. This discussion is premised on the fact that the present Methodist liturgy is meant for the burial of members of the church, that is, those who have not only confessed the Lordship of Christ but have also been actively part of the faith community. This debate has taken place in the black section of the MCSA. However no intentional debates have been entered into the relevant forums of the denomination.

It needs to be said, however, that these issues seem to be immaterial in the white section of the church of the denomination. Prominent reasons in this regard are: Most black communities experience more funerals per week than white communities. This makes a considerable difference to how funerals are viewed and the workload placed on the already overworked ministers and lay preachers, who in most cases have limited financial resources. In the black context the ratio of church membership per minister in charge is far too large, due to lack of resources to support more ministers. Secondly, it is a common practice in most white contexts that the funeral undertakers, as part of their obligation, remunerate the officiating minister.

In most, if not in all black contexts, funeral undertakers do not remunerate officiating ministers. It is argued by those who have to carry out this ministry that the local church should contribute financial resources to ensure that the deceased, who never contributed to the mission of the church, receive all the benefits similar to members who have remained faithful and have contributed to the financial life and sustainability of the ministry of the church. Local preachers
are finding it increasingly financially strenuous to travel long distances and in some cases on
difficult roads, to bury people who have made no contribution to the life of the church.

The burial of non members is ultimately done on theological and pastoral grounds.
Firstly, the church feels that refusal to respond to requests to bury non members is tantamount to
passing judgment on the deceased, and denying the ministry of the church to all those who need
it. Further, the church labors under the hope that there will be those who will respond to the call
of the gospel during funeral attendance. In this sense burial services become missional in the
narrow sense of winning converts. They provide an opportunity for a Christian witness to the
Gospel – they are therefore a mission opportunity. Secondly, it is viewed as a failure on the part
of the church not to offer ministry of comfort to the bereaved. Conducting funerals is therefore a
response to the need to stand alongside the bereaved during their grief and loneliness.

The third element is what has been stated by Colin O. Buchanan, namely that a burial is
what is expected of religion by society. He highlights this dilemma by citing the challenge in
England and says “a gulf has opened between church and society and it goes on widening; yet
many who have shown no sign of Christian belief are brought to Christian funeral services,
which sets up a tension for the church.” Ninian Smart makes the same observation but
specific to the role of the priest. He says:

One main connecting point between church beliefs and the administration of rites
to the dying and the dead is, of course, the priest or the minister. While
Catholicism retains in good measure a confidence in the role of the priest, and a
ceremonial and doctrine still rather unaffected by the changes …, the Anglican

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275 Ninian Smart, “Death and the Decline of Religion in Western Society,” in *Man’s Concern with Death*,
ed. Arnold Toynbee, A. Keith Mant, Ninian Smart, John Hinton, Simon Yudkin, Eric Rhode, Rosalind Heywood,
and H.H. Price (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968), 141. The preference for a Christian burial certainly presents
some challenges for the church. What Ninian Smart says about religion in Western society in the early 20th century
applies equally to the Southern Africa situation.
parson and the nonconformist minister increasingly finds himself in difficulty as to his role and status in society. He is expected to administer rites to many who are not active members of the church; and he is expected to act pastorally towards the dying. This is often taken to mean the supplying of comfort to those who are dying and to the bereaved, and this in turn is often interpreted as meaning that he gives assurance about the afterlife. He is thus, with the denominationalisation of religion in a doubly ambiguous position. He has to act within generally agreed social conventions and beliefs, but is expected to take a particular line.276

By taking a “particular line” this writer understands Smart to mean that the minister has to remain within the confines of his or her denominational burial tradition and accepted norms and teaching. He or she has to use the liturgy of his or her denomination which in all probability was meant for the burial of people who are committed members of the church.

Notwithstanding the theological and pastoral reasons that compel the church to conduct burial services of non members, there is a fundamental challenge expressed by local preachers. They question: what kind of message should they give during the burial of someone who never professed to be a Christian? This remains a challenge that needs to be addressed by developing liturgies for such burials. It is needless to emphasize that those liturgies should be founded on sound Christian theology. What keeps the church responding to these requests is a sense of pastoral responsibility towards the bereaved and toward their public role as ritual specialists for the well-being of all. In part, the responsibility of the church for public theology lies here. The church by its very nature would find it difficult to miss the opportunity to declare the message of the gospel, wherever the opportunity presents itself, even at occasions of burials where the message of hope for life beyond the grave is paramount. In all of these responses the importance of burial rites in human society – particularly for Christians, stands out.

276 Ibid., 142.
There could be other reasons why people request a Christian burial, such as social recognition and the norm that a burial, as a rite of passage, requires a “priest.” Ewan Kelly’s point illuminates this further. He argues, “Church representatives, whether they work in community or institutional settings, are still regarded by many who are not confessional Christians to be the most culturally appropriate persons to perform a funeral. Church representatives are perceived to have ritual authority – possessing the skills, knowledge, training and experience to help give them or family ‘a decent send-off’.”

Kelly’s assertion is among the most compelling reasons for people who request burials for their loved ones who are not church members. Additionally, there is a belief that those who were baptized in their infancy deserve a Christian burial, irrespective of whether they had cut ties with the church for decades. In most instances in Africa or among Batswana people, it points to the fact that in Africa, belief in the afterlife is a cultural norm. Therefore the significant place of burial rites and their perceived place in ensuring not just a decent passage but also an acceptable and honorable passage to the other world, remain essential for the African. More profoundly, a burial rite in this case serves as an act of intercession on behalf of the deceased by the community of faith and the neighbors. What is evident is that Christian burials have a wide influence and appeal among the people of Southern Africa.

While discussions and questions about the burial of non members continue and the church continues to conduct services for burials, a burial liturgy has not been developed. The MCSA has left the liturgy for their burials to the creativity of the local preachers. Ordained and probationer ministers are usually spared the task of conducting these services on grounds that

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they already have the burden of conducting the funeral services of members of the church. Further, it is agreed that if ministers were to conduct burial services of non members, the public might be encouraged to assume that it does not matter whether one commits to the life of the church or not because ministers of the church will bury them anyway. While these arguments are justified, the church appears to assume that the task of burying non members is an easy one for local preachers, yet the question of what message the church preaches, how it is represented by local preachers at these funerals, and how burials of this nature are conducted, are priority considerations to which the church should apply its mind.

It is the view of this study that a liturgy for the burial of non members should be developed. This is a ministry provided by the church and a liturgy relevant to it is necessary. An objection that such a liturgy is unnecessary since the MCSA has a burial liturgy is unconvincing. A close analysis of the present Setswana burial liturgy will show that it was meant for the burial of persons who confessed the Lordship of Christ and belonged to the community of the faithful. An example of this position is the opening statement read from John 11: 25, 26. These scripture verses are recited as the preacher goes before the corpse: “I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord: he that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die.”278 This reading is followed by reciting the words from the nineteenth chapter of the book of Job, verses twenty-five to twenty-seven: “I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And after my skin is

278 RSV.
destroyed, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall
behold, and not another.” 279

It cannot be argued conclusively that there are no sections in the Setswana burial liturgy
that are relevant for use in the burial of people who are not members of the Christian church. An
example is where the liturgy uses the following words from 1Timothy 6:7 and Job 1: 21 which
reads: “We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we carry nothing out. The Lord
gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” 280

Attachment of Batswana to burial services should be regarded as evidence that African
people have always attached great importance to the burial of the dead. The prime reason for this
attachment is because of their belief in the existence of ancestors or the living dead, a critical
aspect of their religious life which most nonconformists declared did not exist among the people
of Southern Africa. It is a phenomenon that has also been attested to by numerous studies. 281 It
predates the missionary era. The next chapter will be devoted to a discussion on the relationship
of ancestors to burial rites.

Conclusion

The evidence in this chapter has shown that Methodism from its very beginnings was
attentive to well developed and sound theology of life and death. This reality was reflected in
Methodist burial liturgy for the burial of the dead. John Wesley’s adoption and abridgement of

279 RSV.

280 RSV. In my view, the theology expressed in the English version of the Methodist burial liturgy of the
MCSA contained in the Methodist Hymn Book and Methodist Service Book of 1933 is more amenable to use for the
burial of members and non members. See Appendix B.

281 A full discussion of the views of scholars on the subject of ancestors is pursued in chapter four of this
study.
the 1662 BCP *Order for the Burial of the Dead* is a testimony to Methodism’s quest for theologically sound but simple liturgy for such burials. Methodists have over the centuries held the conviction that Christian burial rites are part of channels through which the Christian church communicates the message of the resurrection of life in Christ, comforts the bereaved and invites others to receive the fellowship that God offers to all through Christ, and the abundance of eternal life.

Methodist burial rites are one of the avenues through which the MCSA carries out its public witness ministry. Further, the liturgy is theologically acceptable and attractive to both church and non-church members. It offers comfort to the bereaved and offers hope of the resurrection of life attained through Christ.
CHAPTER FOUR
BAROLONG TRADITIONAL BURIAL PRACTICES

Introduction

Ke seka ka bona lerapo la motho le gogwa ke dintja (translated:
“I should not see human bones dragged by dogs along the streets of our village”)

Oral tradition has it that these are the words of Chief Moroka of Barolong of Seleka of Thaba Nchu. He ruled Barolong Boo-Seleka in Thaba Nchu from 1830 to 1880. The words are always quoted and repeated by Barolong people during the concluding ceremonies of a burial. They are said in the context of an appeal to the community to make sure that no one is left unburied. More fundamentally, they are an appeal to the community to continue the practice of communal participation in funerals to make sure that no family is left to struggle alone in burying their kin. At their very core the words are an expression of the belief that burial is a communal responsibility. Hence at the end of recalling the words of Chief Moroka, the speakers conclude with the words Bagaetsho, a re bolokaneng — “dear members of the community, let us continue to bury one another.”

The historical background to Chief Moroka’s utterance can be associated with the disconcerting experience of human bodies that missionaries record were often left unburied, and the hyenas of the wild and the dogs of the village would be seen dragging human remains and feeding on them. Should what the missionaries reported about the lack of burial practices among Batswana, reviewed below, be regarded as the norm of the day or as exceptions? Should Chief Moroka’s admonition be regarded as a reminder to his people to return to a treasured and

282 S.M. Molema, Chief Moroka, 30, 143.
respectable practice that was diminished by the displacements caused by the conflicts in the region, as described in Chapter Two? Regardless of what could have prompted the chief to make this enduring appeal, it is clear that the burial of the dead was an important act for Barolong people and that it was unacceptable to see the remains of an unburied human being.

Moroka’s admonition also suggests that burial practices were not unknown to Batswana and the people of Southern Africa in general. It should also be seen as an affirmation of the importance of burying the dead. It stands to contradict early statements by missionaries that Batswana or Barolong people did not practice the burial of the dead. The reports of some missionaries that Batswana did not have burial practices are contradicted by some of the earliest reports by other missionaries and travellers about burial practices they witnessed among Batswana and other people of Southern Africa. The latter reports confirm the claim that Moroka’s admonition was an indication that Batswana did have burial practices, and that these practices predated the arrival of Europeans.

In the light of Moroka’s admonition and the reports of some missionaries and travellers about the burials they witnessed among Batswana and other Southern African people, this chapter is based on three premises. The first is that Batswana and Barolong people in particular had traditional ways of burying their dead. This assertion is based not only on the written accounts of missionaries and other written sources; the manner in which some of the practices associated with burials (such as cleansing ceremonies and burial rituals associated with the belief in ancestors) are adhered to by people of Southern Africa is an indication that the practice of burying the dead has survived for generations. The second premise is that burial rites posed no threat to acceptance of the gospel, which partly explains why traditional and Christian burial
practices have tended to exist side by side, as will be seen in the next chapter. Nowhere in the sources that have been consulted were there any objections by nonconformists to burial practices unlike in the cases of polygamy, initiation and rainmaking ceremonies, which were regarded as hindrances to acceptance of the Christian gospel by Africans and vehemently opposed. The third premise is that burial practices of Barolong people and their concomitant rites evolved over time due to cultural, social-political and environmental circumstances, as well as the influence of Christianity.

The key elements of this chapter include descriptive analyzes of nineteenth century accounts of missionaries and travellers of Barolong traditional burial rites and those of other people of Southern Africa. Barolong traditional burial rites are examined through the lens of the burial practices of Batswana people in general. This does not imply that the burial rites of Batswana groupings are the same all over, but is premised on the grounds that Barolong burial practices have more similarities than divergences with those of the rest of Batswana people.²⁸³

Furthermore, Batswana people — and Barolong in particular — do not have a stand-alone cultural milieu that is apart from those of the rest of the people of Southern Africa. Most of their cultural practices are in concert with those of the people of the region. A good example of this similarity is the belief in ancestors, differences being primarily in how this belief is acted or lived out. It is on the basis of this shared cultural milieu that the literature review in this chapter includes burial practices of some of the African tribes in Southern Africa. This is done with a

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²⁸³ Also see Andrew A. Anderson, *Twenty-five Years in a Wagon: Sport and Travel in South Africa* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1888), 83. He observed that Batswana groupings throughout Southern Africa shared the same customs, language and habits.
view to providing a broader perspective of how the people of Southern Africa buried their dead before and during the nineteenth century missionary era.

Earlier perceptions or assertions by some nonconformists that Batswana did not have burial practices are examined within the context of dominant eighteenth and nineteenth century European views about people other than Europeans. The chapter also gives a brief explanation of the context in which some of the missionaries encountered death among Batswana. Not all missionaries reported non-burial practices among the people of Southern Africa and Batswana; some witnessed burial customs, and their descriptions of burial practices that they witnessed are discussed. A third component of this chapter is a discussion of the subject of the African understanding of ancestors and how the belief in ancestors relates to burial rites.

**Claims about Non-Burial Practices among Batswana**

The nineteenth century missionaries came into the mission field from a Europe that had a worldview that was very different from that of the people they went to evangelize.\(^{284}\) The eighteenth and nineteenth century influence of the Enlightenment and theories of Evolutionism were becoming dominant and influential in one way or another. It could be expected that these ideas would covertly influence the way the missionaries interacted with those they sought to convert. This point is emphasized by Charles R. Taber, when he makes the argument that “ideas do not arise in a vacuum, but rather out of a matrix of specific social structures, social dynamics, and historical processes.”\(^{285}\)

\(^{284}\) See Paul G. Hiebert, “Beyond Anti-Colonialism to Globalism,” in *Missiology: An International Review* 19, no. 3 (July 1991), 263.

The ideas around the uncivilized “pagan” or “heathen” would find an accomplice in some of those previously influenced by the Enlightenment and the theories of evolution. I believe that some of the missionaries’ interpretations of their encounters with the people of Southern Africa were influenced by their home backgrounds, charged not only with strong evangelical motivations for missions but also the ideas espoused by the Enlightenment and Evolutionism. I believe these ideas reinforced their initial conclusions about Batswana burial practices.

The ideological thinking of that worldview relative to the people to be evangelized was “Otherness” with those who were to be evangelized being categorized as the “Other.” Andrew Ross asserts that the “the evangelicalism of end of the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth, with its mixture of Biblical piety and Enlightenment principles” placed emphasis on the cruelty of slavery and the equality of all human beings regardless of their race. He makes the point that these ideas were influential even in Southern Africa, and cites Dr John Philip as one of those who espoused them. However, he goes on to argue that while an egalitarian spirit and attitude inspired the struggle against slavery and belief in the equality of all human beings, at the same time there were beginning to emerge theories of social evolution which advocated for a hierarchical order of the human species. “These species” says Ross, “were usually ranked on an ascending scale in terms of both moral and intellectual ability, the European was always at the top and the African always at or near the bottom whatever other variations in

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the order there were among the various writers.” Social Darwinism and Scientific Racism were the new theories that were beginning to exert their influence.

While Ross’s argument seems to suggest that Scientific Racism and Social Darwinism were not very influential at the beginning of the nineteenth century, their influence is evident in some of the missionary thinking of the time. Already the labels “pagans”, “heathens” and “unconverted” were susceptible to an idea that saw the “Other” as different — and uncivilized and without religion. An example is Robert Moffat, who declared:

He seeks in vain to find a temple, an altar, or a single emblem of heathen worship. No fragments remain of former days, as mementoes to present generation, that their ancestors ever loved, served, or reverenced a being greater than man. A profound silence reigns on this awful subject. Satan has been too successful in leading captive at his will a majority of the human race, by an almost endless variety of deities. While Satan is obviously the author of polytheism of other nations, he has employed his agency, with fatal success, in erasing every vestige of religious impression from the minds of the Bechuanas (sic), Hottentots, and Bushmen; leaving them without a single ray to guide them from the dark and dread futurity, or a single link to unite them with the skies. Thus the missionary could make no appeal to legends, or to altars, or to an unknown God, or to ideas kindred to those he wished to impart. To tell them, the redemption of the world, the resurrection of the dead, and immortality beyond the grave, was to tell them what appeared to be more fabulous, extravagant, and ludicrous than their own vain stories and lions, hyenas and jackals. Our labours might well be compared to the attempts of a child to grasp the surface of a polished mirror, or those of a husband labouring to transform the surface of a granite rock into arable land, on which he might sow his seed.

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288 Ibid., 7. Charles R. Taber argues that while Christianity rejected Darwin’s biological evolution it fell prey to his sociocultural evolution which advocated that there are superior and inferior races. See his *The World is Too Much with Us*, 38.

289 Among other writings examining social Darwinian theories of evolution is Saul Dubow’s *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995). He surveys the intellectual theoretical foundations of racism in South Africa. He establishes the development of racism as an outgrowth of evolutionist thinking of Europe that advocated racial difference and hierarchy.

Moffat was not the only missionary among the Batswana who held these views; Samuel Broadbent, a Methodist missionary working among Barolong, held a similar view:

When we went there, the people had no religion. They had sorcerers, and witchcraft, but they had no God, no temple, no Sunday, no worship. They had no knowledge of an immortal soul in man, or a state of existence after this life. In a word, their minds were blank on spiritual and eternal subjects; and yet, though it was dormant, they had a conscience which was awakened by the testimony and Spirit of God.\(^\text{291}\)

While nonconformist missionaries in Southern Africa were conscious of the Biblical and theological motivations for missionary outreach and resolved to protect the Africans from injustices directed towards them by colonizers, it is hard to justify how these ideas about the absence of religion among Batswana could have been influenced by an egalitarian spirit and belief in the equality of humankind. They are indicative of the influences of Scientific Racism and Social Darwinism that were beginning to take an upper hand at the time. To what extent the missionaries were conscious of this influence requires a separate project. Suffice to note Taber’s observation, of which the missionaries would not have been innocent:

Western civilization was self-evident at the acme of this ladder. It had passed through all the previous stages, and had emerged as the exemplar of where all other peoples would go if they were fortunate enough. This notion was greatly exaggerated in Christian circles, where the superiority of the West was attributed to its “Christian” character, in contrast with the starkly pagan foundations of lesser societies.\(^\text{292}\)

The influence of anthropology also added to how missions would define the “Other” who was the object of mission. Anthropology and missions (at least from a scientific perspective)

\(^{291}\) Broadbent, \textit{A Narrative}, 203.

\(^{292}\) Taber, \textit{The World is Too Much with Us}, 49.
both had their genesis in the concept and reality of the “Other.” Hiebert argues that in the quest to understand the “Other”, both anthropology and missions were prompted by the critical question of “who are our ‘Others’ and concomitantly, who are we?” “It is clear” he says, “from the history of anthropology — the science of Others and Otherness — that our views of “us” and “others” deeply influence our theories and our ministries.” He goes on to show how the “Other” was defined in the Middle Ages through the Age of Exploration (in the fifteenth century), the Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment. From the Age of Exploration through that of Post-Enlightenment, Christian theology successively defined the “Other” as “pagan”, “savage”, “primitive” and “unreached.” Similarly, anthropology, science and secularism defined the “Other” as the “primal”, the “savage”, the “primitive ancestor”, and the “native”, in that order.

In contrast to my views and those of Taber about the influence of the Enlightenment on missionary thinking and attitudes, Brian Stanley adopts a sympathetic and apologetic stance. He argues that there was a distinction between the ideas of the superiority of Western civilization emanating from the intellectualism of Enlightenment and the rationale for missions during the same era, and that “evangelical Christians were much more inclined than their predecessors in Christian history to insist on the fundamental unity of humanity as foundational principles of


295 For a detailed analysis of these characterizations see Ibid., 66-81. George W. Stocking maintains that the general characteristics of “Colonial Otherness” were “Dark-skinned and small of stature, unattractive, unclothed and unclean, promiscuous and brutal with their women, they worshipped the spirits animating animals or even sticks and stones — their smaller brains enclosing and enclosed within the mental world described in Spencer’s chapters on the mind of primitive man.”, see his Victorian Anthropology (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1987), 234-5.
biblical teaching.\textsuperscript{296} The evangelical reasons for missions were therefore for no other reason than to “appeal to the basic humanity of the ‘heathen’ as constituting in itself a reason for seeking to restore to them those dimensions of a fully human existence that had been supposedly lost as a result of sin.”\textsuperscript{297} To equate Western civilization with the reasons for missions to non-Western people, Stanley argues, indicates the inability to separate conceptually the expansion of Europe and the expansion of Christendom.\textsuperscript{298}

Because human beings are sinful, even when the passion to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to the world was unquestionable and the motives for doing so justifiable, there would be inclinations of superiority, and the possibility of this even overshadowing the prime motivation for missions cannot simply be dismissed. Cultures of different people in the mission field were judged against the culture of the evangelizers. It would not be surprising that in this process the evangelizers would deem their culture superior to — rather than different from — that of the evangelized. As George W. Stocking puts it:

Although they were full of the spirit of self-abnegation and Christian love, these motives were compromised some what by an aggressive ethnocentrism. When confronted with peoples whose cultural values seemed at polar variance, they assumed that because they themselves had risen from ignorance and low estate by their own exertions and by embracing vital Christianity, the natives to whom they offered education and the word of God would do likewise. When these expectations were frustrated, they were quite capable of portraying fallen savage man in rather bleak terms, whether to vindicate their own disappointed efforts or to exhort those at home to greater ones.\textsuperscript{299}

\textsuperscript{296} Stanley, “Christian Missions and the Enlightenment,” 10.

\textsuperscript{297} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{298} Ibid., 10-11.

\textsuperscript{299} Stocking, \textit{Victorian Anthropology}, 87-8.
These categorizations during the mid to late 1800s of the “Other” by Western disciplines (anthropology, missions and science) should not be understood in isolation from the influence of how each of them defined this “Other.” As much as terms were coined within and for each discipline, they could not have escaped influencing one another across disciplines. That there were “Christian nations” and individuals involved in slave trading goes to show how the commercial labeling of the “Other” as “slave” was influential across the board, for example. Both in anthropology and missions, the discovery of the “Other” coincided with the western colonial era. The result of this was a strong undercurrent of Western superiority. The “Other” was not in fact just different but also inferior and subject to colonization. To that effect, Hiebert concedes:

The first response of Western traders and governments to these racial and cultural differences was a sense of their own superiority. Western science and technology were becoming increasingly powerful, and their superiority to the sciences and technologies of other cultures seemed self-evident. Moreover, Western governments were conquering other nations and making them colonies.300

Missionaries too were affected by the spirit of the high imperial era. They equated Christianity with Western culture, and the latter’s obvious superiority over other cultures proved the superiority of Christianity over pagan religions.301 Thus anthropology and missions shared a common outlook towards people of other cultures. The “Other” was always the one to be studied, civilized and converted. The other was not approached with an open mind and on the terms of his or her cultural milieu; the “Other’s” worldview and culture were judged on the


301 Ibid.
merits of the worldview of the “converted” and the “civilized.”

The views of the nineteenth century missionaries about burial practices of Batswana were approached from the perspective that the “Other” had no religion and customs.

Having reviewed the factors that I believe were instrumental in shaping the perceptions of the nineteenth century missionaries and other Europeans who came to Southern Africa, I now focus on the descriptions of Batswana burial practices by some of them.

One of the earliest references to the disposal of the dead was by W.H.C. Lichtenstein in 1811. However, his account does not provide any details of burials, and is limited in the sense that it only refers to corpses of dead people being thrown to hyenas for their food. It does not say anything more about any established traditional ways of burying the dead. The manner in which Lichtenstein reports gives the impression that it was normal practice to avail dead corpses to hyenas. He reports no rituals that he might have observed. The lack of these essential details lends itself to a conclusion that there were no burials. It is unfortunate that Lichtenstein did not do justice in observing the burial methods of his subjects of study — this despite his critique of the missionaries and their lack of careful observation of Batswana ways of life. He ridiculed the missionaries for approaching Batswana with preconceived ideas.

Judging him against other 

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305 Ibid., 62, 71.
accounts of the same period, his observations about the disposal of the dead seem to have been hasty, and there does not seem to be evidence that he spent enough time among Barolong. 306

The impression created by some missionaries and other observers like Lichtenstein is that Batswana were not accustomed to or did not care to bury their dead. A number of their comments lead one to conclude that, by and large, Batswana were not used to the practice of burials. Rev. T.L. Hodgson, one of the first Wesleyan missionaries to work among Barolong, complained that Batswana did not bury their dead. He wrote:

Mr. A. and I walked a short distance from the wagons to see the body of a person said to have died in the night. The dogs and birds were feasting upon the flesh with greatest eagerness as we approached the body, which we found to be that of young woman not in the least reduced by sickness but quite fat, and from the blood appearing on her left temple I fear she had been murdered. The dogs, etc. had eaten a part of the body. 307

Mr. Hodgson was totally unimpressed by the state of human remains degraded in this fashion. To that effect he questioned the sanity of the community that left a dead body in the fashion that he saw, and lamented: “When will relations and friends be shocked at seeing within their view of the whole village their own dogs feasting upon the body of one who but yesterday formed a part of their own company?” 308 He concluded: “But the life of a fellow creature is of no value or their death considered of any importance.” 309

306 This does not imply that his observations and critique of the nineteenth century missionaries does not contribute to the body of knowledge about the life of Batswana during the nineteenth century.

307 Cope, The Journals, 305-306. Mr. A. refers to Mr. Archbell, a fellow Wesleyan missionary.

308 Ibid., 306.

309 Ibid.
Mr. Hodgson was not the only missionary to hold these views. His colleague, the Rev. Archbell, referred to a similar incident he experienced among the Bushmen, with Rev. John Edwards, another Wesleyan missionary. He stated:

In walking about during the day, we found a number of human bodies, some of which appeared to have been cast out but yesterday. I asked the Bushmen why they left the dead bodies of their relatives thus exposed, and if it did not pain them to see the wild beasts tear them in pieces and carry their bones to their dens to become the sport of their young; adding that it was but little trouble to inter them. “They were old people,” said they; “for what must they be interred?”

It is likely that Rev. Edward’s experience of the Bushmen was an isolated incident, not representative of the culture of the Bushmen. George W. Stow in his study described at great length the burial practices of the Bushmen.

Notwithstanding the common and horrible scenes of unburied human remains as witnessed and described by the Wesleyan missionaries, and which they regarded with great scorn, they did not speak about efforts to teach Batswana about the expediency of interring human remains. The nonconformists did not refer to Christian instructions or taking it upon themselves to teach the people how to bury their dead as part of their evangelizing work. They were silent on this question. “Civilizing” the people in regard to burials seemed not to have been their concern. This was unusual in terms of missionary approaches in their early encounters with the “uncivilized” and “unconverted”; in many cases they were keen and ardent to introduce new ways of lifestyles and to encourage people to abandon their customs and adopt “Christian” ones (cases in point being polygamy, rainmaking and initiation practices). In view of the absence of

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missionary efforts to introduce the practice of burying the dead, it is to be concluded that indeed there was no need to undertake that responsibility and that Batswana were not devoid of knowledge of burial practices.

The comments of the missionaries about Batswana’s attitudes towards the dead prompt the reader to ask the following questions: Did Batswana bury their dead or not prior to the advent of European missionaries? Were the incidents they describe of unburied corpses exceptions or the norm? In the next few pages an attempt is made to explore these questions in the context of the then prevailing socio-political milieu. I try to highlight some of the factors that led the nonconformists to explain what they saw as normal rather than exceptional or a temporary pattern influenced by abnormal circumstances.

*Missionary Encounters with Non-Burial Practices: The Socio-Political Contexts*

The perceptions, comments and disdain of the missionaries cited above concerning unburied bodies among Batswana need to be understood and reinterpreted not only in terms of the influence of their backgrounds but also against the socio-political background of the period. It is therefore important to highlight some of the background elements characteristic of this period that could have led an outsider to conclude that these people were not accustomed to the burial of the dead.

The conflicts of the 1820s not only destabilized communities and caused hunger and starvation, but (as observed in Chapter Two) gave rise to cannibalism. These conditions disrupted the basic way of life of those affected. The practice of burying the dead would have been one of the cultural practices affected. Hunger and starvation would have resulted in loss of life in unprecedented proportions. It is likely that under these circumstances and conditions,
normal burial practices would have been dealt a blow or gone underground when communities felt under threat of being attacked and displaced without warning.

Wesleyan missionary John Edwards wrote the following in 1836 to describe the mood and reality of the time: “Poor women and innocent children are destroyed with savage cruelty; no cries, no tears, can move the heart of a savage, hardened with reiterated crimes. This country may be termed the Golgotha of South Africa.”

Another description of the horrors of this time is given by Jenkins:

There is scarcely a corner in the land but what we meet with human bones strewed on the face of the earth, and in every direction we find the remains of once populous towns and villages left without an inhabitant. Those who have survived the ravages of war and the awful scenes of cannibalism have generally made their residences on the summits of mountains or in almost inaccessible precipices, in order to defend themselves from their enemies.

Rev. Samuel Broadbent’s description of the situation as he and his team encountered it during the turbulent 1820s is even more telling:

In the afternoon of the day Mr. and Mrs. Hodgson and myself and wife took a walk among the deserted houses, where we have abundant evidence of the haste with which the late inhabitants fled. In some parts, houses were partly broken and partly burnt. Here and there were strewn wooden utensils, and sometimes skeletons of persons who had been slain in the assault, or of children who had been left by their friends, and had been killed by the enemy, or perished from starvation. While passing from place to place, I saw the form of a living child, set upon haunches near the door of a hut. …We went to the spot, and found a girl about seven years of age, seated as just described, with her hands drawn up to the shoulders. No part of her frightfully emaciated form moved but her eyes. There was a large wound on her left side, made as we afterwards learnt, by crows. A bare skeleton lay near her — the bones of her sister, who had died from starvation.

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313 Ibid., 52.

It is evident from this graphic description that children (and the elderly and weak) were likely to be the immediate victims of these attacks, running the risk of being abandoned and left to die at the hands of an enemy or of starvation. These horrible scenes would no doubt have created an impression that it was normal practice that people were left to die and given no burial.

Given the political turbulence during the time when the first missionaries arrived, it is probable that as the result of the wars, compounded by the climatic conditions that led to starvation that claimed the lives of many inhabitants in the region, the number of those who died overwhelmed communities to the extent that bodies were left unburied. Describing the turbulence that occurred in Lesotho as a result of the advances of Chaka, and the chain reaction that followed, with conflicts between Mantatisi and the Basotho, Casalis stated:

The state of things lasted for years; the fields remained uncultivated, and the horrors of famine were added to those wars. Whole tribes were entirely ruined by this two fold scourge. The ties of kindred and friendship were broken, and were at last entirely forgotten. All gave themselves to murder and pillage. At length, associations of cannibals were formed in the mountains, who, belonging to no particular party, went everywhere in search of victims.  

While Casalis showed sympathy for the state of affairs arising out of the turbulence, he equally ascribed the habits of cannibalism to the disintegration of morality:

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315 Casalis, *The Basutos*, 7. It is clear from Casalis’ accounts that cannibalism was never accepted as part of Basotho culture, and King Moshoeshoe did all in his power to work with his people to put it to an end, Ibid.,19-22, 116. John Edwards and Jenkins both relate the fears of villagers because of cannibals, causing them to flee and seek refuge elsewhere. It is the personal experience of the writer that when he was a young child, the story of Dimo was told time and again to children, warning about Dimo, the big human-like monster who kidnapped children to kill and eat them if they wandered without the company of adults in places they were not familiar with and at night. Children were told that Dimo was a huge monster in the form of a human being. He walked around in the bushes and at night with a sack to catch those that he could and feed on them. The story of Dimo is told today as part of African storytelling tradition. Informants confirm the story of Dimo. They testify that their parents and grandparents related to them about the existence of people who eat others and they were known in the singular as *dimo* or *bo-dimo*. The story of Dimo confirms the existence of cannibals and the disdain in which they were held by communities. It is also important to note that there is a distinction between *dimo* and *badimo*, ancestors.
Morality among these people depends entirely upon social order, that all political disorganization is immediately followed by a state of degeneracy, which the re-establishment of order alone can rectify. Thus in the mountains of Lesuto and Natal we have seen tribes, of gentle and humane habits, plunge into all horrors of cannibalism during a season of universal confusion; and simultaneously, and almost spontaneously, abandon this kind of life as soon as a good and wise chief sets about reconstructing the social edifice.\textsuperscript{316}

This scenario would naturally have affected practices such as the burial of the dead. Burial practices would not have been observed by the missionaries because normal village life was often disrupted by wars and migrations. Tribes were often massacred to the point of extinction. Under these circumstances cultural life would be greatly disrupted and the fabric of society dismantled. It seems that these conditions led the missionaries to conclude that all that they saw at that time was representative of the lives, traditions and customs of the people they came to evangelize.

The absence or reluctance of any detailed description of Batswana funeral customs by Wesleyan missionaries can be accounted for in four ways. Firstly, as has been observed in the foregoing arguments, the missionaries encountered Batswana at a time when their communities lived nomadic lives due to regional instability. This state of affairs would have made it difficult for the missionaries to witness and observe customary funeral rituals. Therefore what the missionaries witnessed was the disposal of bodies under circumstances of social and political uncertainty and heightened alertness and panic.

Secondly, and as Lichtenstein has observed, there was very little that the missionaries did to study the religious life of the people. They were more concerned with the “urgent task” of making converts and “civilizing the uncivilized.” Therefore they would have had little interest in

\textsuperscript{316} Ibid., 302-303.
observing the burial practices of the communities they worked among. The third reason has to do with the type of residences that the missionaries established among the objects of their missions. The missionaries did not reside among the villagers. It was the general practice for them to create mission villages where most converts lived and were encouraged to follow the patterns of European life and civilization under the watchful eye of the missionaries. The majority of the people who were not part of mission villages continued to remain under the rule and control of the chief and adhered to traditional ways of life.

I conclude this section with James Kiernan’s words, which reinforce the foregoing point:

When Methodism first encountered the southern Tswana in 1822, they were on the run from marauding Sotho groups, themselves displaced by the great social and political upheaval of the nineteenth century (Difikane), the shock waves of which had rolled westwards from its epicentre in Shaka’s Zulu kingdom. The missionaries jumped to the conclusion that this state of instability and social dislocation was the permanent condition of the Tswana and their customary way of life, and it simply confirmed their predisposition to depict the indigenous people as benighted and backward, miserable, superstitious and inhabiting a moral wasteland.317

These words summarize what the missionaries failed to grasp about what they saw concerning burial practices which led them to make the conclusions they did about the attitudes of Batswana towards the dead.

Accounts of Burial Practices and Rituals in Southern Africa

Despite the conclusions of some of the missionaries in the second decade of the nineteenth century about the non-burial practices of Batswana, others recorded widespread practices of burial rites in Southern Africa, including among Batswana people during the same

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period. It is my contention that as the missionaries stayed longer among Batswana and as political stability was on the horizon, communities were beginning to re-attain some form of normal community life in some places and later missionaries and travellers were able to witness and record what others had claimed did not exist. They therefore produced the earliest records about how Batswana and other people of Southern Africa buried their dead. These descriptions demonstrate that where burials took place in relatively resettled villages, they were able to observe traditional burial customs and rites under relatively normal and stable conditions.

One of the earliest and most comprehensive descriptions of burial rites among Batswana is given by Robert Moffat who worked among Batlhaping, a Batswana group that seems not to have been affected adversely by the turbulence of the time. It is worthwhile to quote in full his observations as he recorded them.  The first description is about preparing the body for burial: “When they see any indications of approaching dissolution in fainting fits or convulsive throes, they throw a net over the body, and hold it in a sitting posture, with the knees brought in contact with the chin, till life is gone.”

The second description is about the preparation of the grave: “The grave, which is frequently made in the fence surrounding the cattle fold, or in the fold itself, if a man, it’s about three feet in diameter, and six feet deep. The interior is rubbed over with a large bulb.” The third description is about the burial: “The body is not conveyed through the door of the fore-yard or court connected with each house, but an opening is made in the fence for that purpose. It is

318 Moffat, Missionary Labours, 307-308.
319 Ibid., 307.
320 Ibid., 307-308
carried to the grave, having the head covered with a skin, and is placed in a sitting posture. Much
time is spent in order to fix the corpse exactly facing the north; and though they have no
compass, they manage, after consultation, to place it very nearly in the required position.”

The fourth description relates to the rituals observed:

Portions of an ant-hill are placed about the feet, when the net which held the body
is gradually withdrawn; as the grave is filled up, the earth is handed in the bowls,
while two men stand in the hole to tread it down round the body, great care being
taken to pick out every thing like a root or pebble. When the earth reaches the
height of the mouth, a small twig or branch of an acacia is thrown in, and on the
top of the head a few roots of grass are placed; and when the grave is nearly filled,
another root of grass is fixed immediately above the head, part of which stands
above ground. When finished, the men and women stoop, and with their hands
scrape the loose soil around on to the little mound. A large bowl of water, with an
infusion of bulbs, is then brought, when the men and women wash their hands and
upper part of their feet, shouting “pula, pula”, rain, rain. An old woman, probably
a relation, will then bring his weapons, bows, arrows, war axe, and spears, also
grain and garden seeds of various kinds, and even the bone of an old pack-ox,
with other things, and address the grave, saying, “there are all your articles.”
These are taken away, and bowls of water are poured on the grave, when all retire,
the women wailing, “yo, yo, yo,” with some doleful dirge, sorrowing without
hope.

Robert Moffat’s detailed description of his witnessing a burial shows that burial rituals
were meticulously observed. The experience was a moment of “conversion” for him. While
previously he had maintained that Batswana had no religion, witnessing a burial rite brought him
to a different position, although without explicitly negating his earlier stance. Moffat concludes
his observation of the burial with a statement that shows an implicit realization that Batswana
had a religion, and that one aspect of that religion was associated with ancestors. This

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321 Ibid., 308.

322 Ibid. Moffatt’s interpretation of the wailing of women is typical of nineteenth century nonconformist
evangelists. To cry, because of the death of a relative was, to missionaries, an indication of despair and lack of belief
and hope in the afterlife and entrance into heavenly places. It was not seen as natural consequence of experiencing
recognition emerged during his encounter with a burial ceremony. He noted: “It is remarkable that they should address the dead; and I have eagerly embraced this season to convince them that if they did not believe in immortality of the soul, it was evident from this, to them now unmeaning custom, that their ancestors once did.”

Although Moffat does not tell us how the dead were addressed, this part of the ritual made him encounter something previously concealed from him about the religion of these people. It is important to note that his recognition that the rituals were part of a long tradition justifies my assertion that the subject of African burial is an enduring one. Clearly Moffat was persuaded to use the belief of Batswana in the afterlife to explain the Christian message of eternal life. He was beginning to discover one of the religious dimensions of the African worldview that has affinity with the Christian message of the existence of life after death. How Moffat proceeded from this point of “awakening” to enter into constructive engagement with Batswana traditional belief in the afterlife and that of Christian faith is a subject beyond the scope of this research.

According to Eugene Casalis, Basotho buried the dead almost in the same manner as did Batswana: the corpse was placed in the grave in a squatting position, with the chin “resting on the knees.” The squatting body faced to the north or north east. He testified that the reason given by the Basotho for facing this direction is “that the children must always look towards the

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324 Casalis, The Basutos, 202. Positioning the corpse in a squatting position seems to have been a general practice among most people of Southern African. It was also found among the Zulus.
regions from which their ancestors proceeded.” The burial also gave expression to what was believed about death and the afterlife. What is worth noting, however, is Casalis’ observation about what Basotho believed about the transition from this life into the realm of the ancestors:

As soon as a person has expired, he is supposed to have taken his place among the family gods; his remains are deposited in the cattle-pen, which is looked upon as a sacred spot by these pastoral tribes. A victim is immolated at the tomb – the first oblation made to the new divinity, and at the same time an act of intercession in his favour, intend to ensure him a happy reception in the subterranean regions inhabited by the barimos.

While burial in the cattle-pen was a general practice, immolation of a victim as described here cannot have been a practice that applied to all burials. First of all, only men were buried in the cattle-pen. Secondly, only a chief would be accompanied by one of his subjects in the manner that Casalis explains.

Emil Holub referred to the belief of the Marutse, a tribe in the northern parts of Southern Africa, about burying their dead. To them death was associated with Nyambe, or the Supreme Being: “If a man dies a natural death, it is said that Nyambe has called him away, or if any one is killed in battle or by wild beasts, or by the fury of elements, it is all supposed to have occurred at the bidding of Nyambe.” The corpse is then

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325 Ibid., xvii. Here we also have an indication of the recognition by Basotho people that they, like most Bantu people, originated from the north. This historical link was then incorporated into their burial ritual, embodying their oral history.

326 Ibid., 88. It is to be noted that Casalis uses terms that contradict each other in the same argument. He refers to “gods”, “divinity” and barimos, meaning ancestors. The designations “gods” and “divinity” have a totally different connotation. They were never used to refer to ancestors. It was a common mistake that missionaries translated “badimo” to mean gods. Gabriel Setiloane explains this at length in chapter 5 of his The Image of God. Frederick S. Paxton’s study shows that in Early Medieval Europe, a similar concept and ritual activity was meant to aid “the incorporation of the soul into the other world.” See Frederick S. Paxton, Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe (London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 7.

327 Holub, Seven Years in South Africa, 301-302.
committed to the grave. If it was a chief who was buried, an elephant’s tusk would be placed in the grave so that “he may be consoled for his separation from his property, and may be induced to extend to them his protection, now more powerful than ever by reason of his nearness to Nyambe.”  

Here again is an indication of the people’s belief in the role of ancestors and their relation to God or Modimo.

The accounts explored so far about the existence of burial practices among people of Southern Africa, and Batswana in particular, point to one important phenomenon that should be highlighted before proceeding to the next discussion. In contrast to the impressions given by Hodgson and Archbell, Batswana burial practices as described by other observers and missionaries demonstrate that they have evolved and were practiced as part of the people’s normal way of life in villages. References to burials and their concomitant rites in kraals, houses and backyards could only suggest a culture that developed and was observed primarily in permanent settlements.

That Batswana, and other tribes in Southern Africa were accustomed to burial practices is evident in their types of settlements. Missionaries and travellers alike described the types of villages inhabited by Batswana and Basotho. In other instances the houses and household effects are described in detail:

Their houses reflect great ingenuity in their construction, particularly in the formation and design of their granaries for storing their winter corn, which are quite artistic in form. … The interior of their huts and yards outside where they cook, which are surrounded by high fence made of stick, are kept remarkably clean and tidy, and their iron utensils also receive their share of attention.  

The reason for citing the above references and descriptions of Batswana eighteenth century settlements is to demonstrate that burial practices as described by missionaries and travellers who acknowledged their existence were part of their established social and cultural life. The non-burial of corpses, where it occurred, would have been the exception rather than the norm. Burial practices would also have evolved as circumstances changed. Two factors would have been the most influential: cultural borrowing, especially during times of great migrations as a result of tribal conflicts and the invasion of the Boers, and the missionary Christian influence.

Thus far, the records of the nineteenth century missionaries have shown that burial of the dead among Batswana and other people of Southern Africa was widespread. Rites associated with such burials were part and parcel of the traditions and customs of the people.

Early to Mid Twentieth Century Accounts

Having explored descriptions of burial practices of some of the people of Southern Africa by nonconformist missionaries in the nineteenth century, this section focuses on descriptions of burial practices during the mid-twentieth century. An exploration of these accounts is carried out against the backdrop of a new appreciation of African cultures that began from the early parts of that century.

One of the instruments that enhanced a better understanding of the cultures of the people of Southern Africa, and therefore their burial practices by some missionaries of this period was anthropology. Paul G. Hiebert dates the relationship between missions and anthropology to the

Unlike Anderson and Lichtenstein, William J. Burchell was totally unimpressed by the type of Batswana houses and their general layout. What seems to have unimpressed him more was the absence of streets and squares, as he was accustomed to in Europe. See his *Travels in the Interiors of Southern Africa* (London: Batchworth Press, 1822), 361.
mid-nineteenth century when the work of anthropologists and missionaries began to influence and enrich each other. The attempts of anthropologists to understand the cultures of those they were studying and the conclusions they reached enabled missionaries to these cultures to understand them better for their work, thus providing a better way of presenting the gospel to them. What missionaries encountered in the mission field and the accounts they wrote became sources of information and springboards for further anthropological endeavors. Hiebert cites the translation of the Bible into different languages as a result of the interaction between missions and anthropology.

Among some of the missionaries who approached African life and culture from an appreciative observation and optimistic view of African cultures was Edwin Smith. His positive thinking and attitude towards African cultures and beliefs was different from the egalitarian position of evangelicalism of the eighteenth century. While eighteenth century evangelicalism was committed to and espoused the principle of the equality of humans, it did not necessarily seek to identifying points of contact between Christianity and the cultures of the unreached. Unlike the racial theory of armchair anthropologists, some late-nineteenth century missionaries embraced the belief in the equality of humanity, but went a step further to see how Christianity could find resonance with the beliefs of non-European.

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332 Bernard McGrane explains that “In the nineteenth century, the non-European Other – as does the “animal” – ceased being the unstable form of a contestation of Western man and now, thoroughly domesticated, became, instead, compared to him”. See his *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 78.
In the African context, Edwin Smith represents the school of thought that was beginning to emerge at the time. His ethnography emerged from his background as a Primitive Wesleyan. He was born in Aliwal North, South Africa, in 1876 and died in 1957. At the time of his birth the small town of Aliwal North was part of what was then known as the Cape Colony of South Africa. He was the son of John Smith, a minister in the Primitive Methodist Mission who adhered to a theology of equality. John served as a superintendent in Aliwal North for ten years where Edwin learnt to speak Afrikaans and was exposed to African languages, especially Sesotho. Life as a missionary “kid”, particularly in Africa led him to ethnography. In 1888 Edwin's parents returned to England. This is where he completed his education. He returned to Africa to labor as a Primitive Methodist missionary for 17 years. In his missionary travels he went to different places in South Africa and then Northern Rhodesia.

The development of Smith’s theology of fulfillment, which culminated in advocating for an indigenous theology, was to large extent influenced by the theological convictions of his father. He indicates that he was in agreement with his father as far as believing in a form of contact between the African worldview and Christianity. To that effect he wrote:

My father insisted upon the cardinal importance of building an indigenous Church in Africa, self-propagating, self-supporting, self-governing, with a native ministry, not Europeanized and not severed from the people. Everything will fail, he urged, unless Christianity be given a real living root in the native soil. He doubted whether the tone of African Christianity will ever be thoroughly healthy until it is the spontaneous product of native thought and energy, working mainly through native channels. He advocated the frank recognition and even assimilation, of

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whatever is good in other forms of religion. With all this, as with his noble exposition of the Christian motive, I am in entire and cordial agreement.  

Edwin Smith’s importance and relevance to the subject at hand is his development of what I would call his consistent theology of inculturation, for which he used the theory of “fulfillment.” His judgment was that the African worldview was not totally at loggerheads with Christianity. Smith took seriously the nature of the religion of Africa, its culture and its relationship to Christianity. Ethnographic observations led him to refuse simply to dismiss African religious ideas as vague and void of any divine intention. From this perspective he concluded that Christianity was a fulfillment of the religious aspirations of the African people. He wrote:

> It is necessary to urge that our religion be presented to the Africans, not in antagonism to, but as a fulfillment of their aspirations. In actual practice this means, among other things, cultivation of their languages, conservation and sublimation of all that is of value in their customs and institutions, frank recognition of the measure of truth contained in their religion. It implies, not a paganization of Christianity for the purpose of making it easier to the Africans, but the Christianization of everything that is valuable in the African’s past experience and registered in his customs.  

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335 Ibid., 315. In addition to the influence of his father, Edwin Smith shows evidence of having been influenced by social anthropologists like Sir James Frazer and A.C. Haddon among others. See Plans and People: A Dynamic Science of Man in the Service of Africa, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948), 21. He was also the founder of the journal Africa, and was respected by secular anthropologists.


337 A survey of the writings of Edwin Smith shows a multiplicity of issues that he sought to address as a missionary to the African people. Among others, he was concerned about the way South African black people were treated by the white colonizers. A more pronounced issue that Smith dealt with was the question of how Christianity relates to the African worldview. Also see W. J. Young, The Quiet Wise Spirit: Edwin W. Smith, 1876-1957 and Africa.

He also went beyond the position that saw the human being first and foremost as a biological creature apart from cultural influences. The view which Smith took without negating the biological argument was that culture is not a later development after the biological and physical conditions of the human being are well developed. Rather, culture is part and parcel of the development of the human being — an evolutionary process. Smith agreed with Frazer on the reasons why culture, especially of the "savage", was a necessary subject for serious study — it was because "such a study is essential to the understanding of the evolution of humanity." 339 

Culture, he argued, is as old as the human being; it is a process that is characterized by complex changes constitutive of the total growth and development of the human being. 340

Edwin Smith was the Secretary of the 1926 International Conference, held at Le Zoute. This conference was a watershed moment in relation to changing views about African religious beliefs. According to Smith there emerged at this conference a realization that “Christianity comes to Africans with greater power when it is shown to be not destructive but a fulfillment of the highest aspirations which they have tried to express in their beliefs and rites.” 341 This theological orientation cemented a new missionary approach that observed the social and cultural life of the African with keen interest, and resolved to see where the “point of contact” takes

339 Smith, 1948, 8.

340 Edwin W. Smith's book *The Religion of the Lower Races* (New York: Macmillan, 1923) introduces us to his initial thoughts and evaluation of the religion of the African people. The title of the book conspicuously suggests that Smith arranges religions in a hierarchical order. However, it is not an order that remains static; it is one whereby the "lower" evolves towards the "higher" realizing its shortcomings and attaining its fulfillment in the "higher". This title was imposed on him by the publisher. He rejected it!

Missionaries like Smith and their orientation towards anthropology also served as a motivation towards a different approach in the early 20th century.

Smith employed social sciences for the outcomes of his theology of mission and his missionary labors. This scientific approach manifested itself through the manner in which he criticized some missionaries who labored in Africa before him. Smith criticized Moffat's earlier observations and conclusions about the religion of Batswana:

Robert Moffat never showed much sympathetic interest in the traditional customs and beliefs of the Bechuana. While many missionaries delight in recording such things, he excused himself from doing so on the ground that "it would be neither very instructive nor very edifying." He could not write his book, it is true, without some reference to these matters, but if he spoke of them at all, it was with the purpose of showing them in conflict with Christianity. They were to him "a mass of rubbish," and he never gives any indication that there was a single custom or belief that was worthy of perpetuation.

It is my contention that the Wesleyans who labored among Barolong in the 1820s deserve the same criticism that Smith leveled against Moffat. Smith’s anthropological contribution as a missionary in Southern Africa was his insistence that Christianity should not serve purposes of disintegrating African social life. His main thesis was that African Christianity must be indigenous. He argued that Christianity and Western civilization are not synonymous and therefore should not be confused. While Smith did not observe burial practices of those that he worked among as a missionary, his theological perspective on African culture opened up a new and positive attitude towards African cultures.

Henri Junod was another of the missionaries with an ardent ethnographic interest and a sympathetic outlook towards the cultures of the Africans he worked among. He was a member

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of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society and labored among the BaVenda in South Africa. His study conducted in 1912 details the burial practices and rituals of the people. In contrast to what most missionaries reported about the last words of a dying Christian, Junod exposed the reader to something that was and is still regarded as important to the African namely, the words of a dying person to his children and relatives expressing his wishes, and at other times giving instruction about what should happen after his or her death.\textsuperscript{343} He also referred to the squatting position of the corpse at burial. His description of the size of the grave was similar to that of Moffat. The corpse is also buried with some personal belongings and materials from nature, such as grass. The rest of the details about the burial are peculiar to BaVenda.

The sources that were consulted for this study show that changes in burial practices began to take places from the 1950’s. Hugh Ashton’s study of 1952 shows that among Basotho, while the Christian minister had become a prominent ritual leader, many of the traditions associated with death and burial were still adhered to, while other practices were modified or abandoned.\textsuperscript{344} Practices like taking a corpse through a gap in the wall of a hut or the encampment were no longer practiced. All indications are that the squatting position of a corpse was no longer in practice, evident from Ashton’s contestation of M. Martin’s record about the practice.\textsuperscript{345}

In 1952 P. L. Breutz reported that “The traditional ceremonies in connection with death and burial have survived in all baRolong tribes of the district.”\textsuperscript{346} His observation confirms that


\textsuperscript{344} Hugh Ashton, \textit{The Basuto} (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 100-106.

\textsuperscript{345} Ibid., 102.

\textsuperscript{346} P. L. Breutz, \textit{The Tribes of Mafikeng District} (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1955), 68. Isaac Schapera also mentions that there were many other “great ceremonies associated with agriculture…” that the missionary did not pursue to eradicate. Where these disappeared, it was at the initiative of chiefs. See his \textit{Tribal Innovations}, 125.
Barolong burial rites generally still retained their core features. Breutz went on to conclude that “death and burial ceremonies did not have much effect on general social function.” This conclusion should not imply that burials were “private” affairs. The wailing of village women, often referred to in the records of missionaries and other observers, would have prevented any privacy of death and burial. What Breutz referred to as “private” was the absence of the role of tribal ritual leaders at funerals. The rainmaker and the chief were the primary ritual leaders of the community. Rituals of a social nature, such as initiation and rainmaking ceremonies, were led by them. As shall be seen below, ritual leaders in the case of burials were those designated according to the custom of the clan or family. Burial ceremonies have always been a community concern. Chief Moroka’s admonition, as we observed earlier, and the wailing of village women are testimony to this fact.

Interaction with informants who were between the ages of seventy and ninety years of age corroborated much of the information about traditional burial rites as presented in the twentieth century records reviewed above. They were asked at what stage they became aware of burial practices in their communities and how much they knew about burial practices as related to them by their parents. They responded that it was the norm for young people to witness burial practices when they had passed puberty stage and were in their youth. Therefore most of the elderly informants were in their mid twenties in the 1950’s. When they were young adults and could be told about death and funerals by parents and community elders, they learnt that in the past people were buried in a squatting position — as described in missionary accounts and other observers of the nineteenth century.

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347 Ibid., 68.

348 See appendix E for some of the question that informants were asked to respond to.
They were also asked about during what part of the day funerals took place. Because there were no mortuaries, the deceased body was prepared for burial in the morning and burial took place in the afternoon. It was a taboo for children to be exposed to the sight of a corpse or a funeral procession. As a result children were kept away from the house where burial proceedings took place. According to elderly informants funerals did not require the authorization, involvement and ritual participation of the Chief, as was the case with other public ceremonies. The maternal uncles and homestead elders were responsible for funeral arrangements and associated burial rituals. The family ngaka (doctor) and the maternal uncle were the main ritual leaders when it came to burial rites. According to Barolong informants, the ngaka, chosen by the family, usually began his role from the time a person showed signs of sickness. Should the person die, the ngaka would continue with performance of the required burial rites as determined in consultation with the family and relevant to the presumed cause of death. The role of the maternal uncle was and still is associated with the ritual of marking the place where the grave is to be dug.

The time of digging the grave was always left until evening. The grave diggers stayed by the grave until after the funeral the following day. When the use of the coffin was introduced, the other role of the maternal uncle was to oversee the viewing of the body of the deceased before the funeral. To this day this role is still assigned to the maternal uncle.

All indications are that traditionally there were three places where people were buried. Men were buried in the kraal. However, informants clarify that a man was buried in his kraal or that of his father, or in the kraal of a relative. Those who had no cattle, and therefore no kraals, were buried outside the perimeters of a kraal or at a place determined by the family and the clan.
Women and young children were buried either in the *segotlo* (backyard), or *lolwapa* (courtyard) of the home, and small children inside the hut. After the burial inside the hut or *lolwapa*, the place is repaired leaving no sign of where the body was laid. Only family members and relatives know the exact spot of the grave. This was also the case with burials in the kraal. Cattle would be brought inside the kraal to walk over and tramp over the place where the body was laid, leaving no sign of the exact place of burial.

The designated places for the burial of women and small children in the encampment of the home and men in the kraal or outside the perimeters of the kraal were significant. It was maintained that the space for women and their sphere of influence is the house and home, where they are also protected. Men had as their sphere of influence the kraal and beyond. These spheres of influence are adhered to, to this day, and reflected in the rituals associated with death and burial rites. It shall be shown in the next chapter that the rituals of “sphere of influence” have close connections with patriarchal domination and control. When a woman loses her husband, a child, or someone closely related to her, she is immediately confined to the house, and sits on the mattress laid on the floor until after the burial.

Mid-twentieth century observers of Batswana burial rites testified that bodies of deceased persons were not taken through the doorway for burial. Instead, a hole was cut in the wall of the house. Informants say that the hole was closed as soon as the burial had taken place. According to Barolong informants this practice survived until late into the 1900s in some quarters.

The practice of cutting a gap in the wall would not have applied in the case of small children (normally those under 12 months) and stillborns, who were buried inside the house. A gap was created in the encampment or *logora* (fence around the house) for carrying men to be
buried in the kraal or at an identified place. The reason for exiting the bodies through holes cut in the wall or *logora* was a ritual associated with the perceived negative effects of death on the living. It was therefore taboo for a dead body to pass through the same entrance used by those who are still alive. In a sense, to pass a dead body through the normal entrance or doorway would be tantamount to contaminating the passage with the “infectiousness” of death, which will in turn fall upon those who are alive. At the core of this ritual was an attempt to stop or minimize the return of death to the family again anytime soon. Talking about the “infectiousness” of death, Willoughby explained to his audience that the idea that death is “contagious” is not in the sense of micro-organisms but in the sense of “a magical or spiritual effect.”

Another practice worth mentioning is that of telling children about the death of someone they know. Informants related that generally young people were informed about someone’s death when they had reached their late teens. This information is corroborated by Willoughby’s record: “A corpse must not be buried by a person who is not full-grown, for the sight of it would kill a youth with fear. Children must not play nor work near a corpse nor look upon it, nor tread upon a grave.” As far as children were concerned, it was whispered in their ear while they were asleep that so and so had died. This practice is still in use in some quarters among Barolong and other Batswana tribes.

The informants confirmed that information left by missionaries about burial practices of Batswana people was correct since they had heard the same descriptions from their parents and grandparents. They also confirmed that during the period they were growing up and were able to

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350 Ibid., 134.
witness the burials of those who had died, methods of burials evolved into something different from what was related to them by their parents and grandparents. They also indicated that because of the Christian influence many practices were beginning to adjust to and accommodate the teachings of Christianity and the influences of European civilization.

The practice of wrapping the body with the hide of a slaughtered cow was practiced until about the second decade of the twentieth century. Thereafter the use of the coffin slowly became common, until it became the main practice for burial. In other instances, however, people still wrapped the body of the deceased before placing it into a coffin. Coffins were made out of simple planks bought from local stores. The coffin was constructed at the house of the deceased by men of the village who were regarded as having the expertise to make it. The deceased’s body was then placed in the coffin and the coffin was covered all around with a black cloth or the skin of the ox that had been slaughtered. The use of black cloth was not only to cover the coffin but came to be used by the next of kin in different forms. As I will show in the next chapter, this practice was European in its origin and clearly an adaptation of European burial rites by Barolong, as among almost all people of Southern Africa.

The burial of a deceased person took place within three days and after all the next of kin were informed. Three days was the longest that a body could be kept without decomposing. During this time salt and other herbal plants were used to prevent the body from decomposing. The term used for decomposition is “go siya”, that is, “to leave behind or to run ahead of.” A body that is beginning to decompose will be spoken of as “a person who is leaving us behind or running ahead of us.” This terminology is still used to this day. The introduction of mortuaries has meant that a funeral can take place up to two weeks after the death of a person. In most cases
two weeks is meant to allow those who are a long distance away enough time to be able to come and attend the funeral. However, this is largely dependent on the circumstances of the death and the family.

Batswana burial rites have evolved over the years. Isaac Schapera’s study entitled “Tribal Innovations” of Bangwaketse people, a Batswana tribe and cousins to Barolong, shows that among other aspects of cultural life, their burial rites evolved at the initiative of the Chiefs in consultation with their people. The changes that were effected changed the way people were buried. One of the changes agreed upon was to set aside land where all adults would be buried. The burial of children in houses continued until finally they too were buried at the graveyard. One of the factors that influenced the Chiefs was their becoming Christian. However, this would not be the only reason. As the population grew and many people died, it would have been impossible to continue with the practice of house and kraal burials, so there had to be a practical adaptation to changing circumstances.

These changes would not have escaped Barolong people who to this day are closely connected with their cousins, Bangwaketse. However, as the next chapter will show, many of the burial customs and values still persist among Barolong of Mahikeng.

*Mogoga*

Michael Jindra and Joel Noret aver that: In many Africans societies today, funerals and commemorations of deaths are the largest and most expensive cultural events, with families harnessing vast amounts of resources to host lavish events for multitudes.” In the context of

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Batswana this state of affairs could be said to have its origin from mogoga. In the foregoing section mention is made of a cow hide that was used to wrap either the coffin or the body before it is placed inside the coffin. The slaughtering of a beast was associated with a ritual called mogoga. The ritual of mogoga still persists today, although it has been transformed to the extent that it has lost some of its original meaning and intent.

Mogoga refers to the slaughtering of a beast whose chime or moswang was thrown into the grave immediately after the body had been secured into the grave. Informants say that the words that were said when the chime was thrown into the grave were: “re robalele ka kagisho,” meaning, “may you sleep for us in peace.”

Sitiloane’s observation is also confirmed by the informants for this study, namely that, “To-day, when people are buried in coffins, the slaughtering still takes place. The hide is kept and is given, with the head and hoofs, to the ‘malome’, the maternal uncle. He is the only one who is allowed to carry off to his home these ceremonial portions of the slaughtered beast from the scene of mourning.” Until recently some of the chime was added to the water for washing of the hands after the funeral, together with herbs regarded as having cleansing elements.

After the burial the meat of the beast was consumed by all those who had come to attend the funeral. Those who exempted themselves from participating in the meal were viewed with suspicion and disdain. By abstaining from partaking in this meal, “one declares himself or herself

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352 Also see Eunice P. Sekgarametso, “A Comparative Study: Rites of Passage in African Traditional Religion (Botswana) and that of the Old Testament People (Hebrew)”, Dissertation TRS 401 in partial fulfilment of the Degree Bachelor of Arts (Gaborone, University of Botswana, 1987). While the practice of throwing the chime into the grave has almost disappeared, at a recent funeral that I attended (June 2011) in Qwaqwa, South Africa, after the Christian minister had completed the Christian ritual of committal, they threw the chime inside the grave.

unwilling to be integrated into the community and to participate in their “badimo.”\textsuperscript{354} The repercussions of this behavior can be adverse when one’s family member has died. The significance of the meal was also related to the ancestors, \textit{badimo}. It is correct to see it as “an act of handing over the deceased into the life of ‘badimo’, who received him into their company.”\textsuperscript{355} But there is another element. The participants take part in the reception of \textit{badimo} of the deceased into their community. The community is spiritually connected to the living gathered at the home of the deceased and his or her kin around the funeral meal.

\textit{The Hyena}

The association of hyenas with dead corpses by most observers is a subject that comes up repeatedly in nineteenth century literature on Batswana burial. As was mentioned earlier, Lichtenstein mentioned that corpses of dead people were given to hyenas. I also mentioned Rev. Hodgson’s disgust with dead bodies that were left for dogs and other creatures to devour. While he does not mention hyenas, it is possible that his expression “The dogs, etc. had eaten a part of his body” could also include hyenas.\textsuperscript{356} What is evident in these accounts is that hyenas were abundant in most parts of Southern Africa and especially in the areas occupied by Batswana groupings.

Elderly informants refuted the idea that it was a common practice to feed human remains to hyenas. They testify that tradition has it that hyenas lived in close proximity to humans to the extent that they were constantly attracted by any human remains left unburied, as much as they

\textsuperscript{354} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{355} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{356} See footnote 24.
were by weakling human beings and livestock. According to the informants, Batswana folklore about hyenas originated from their habits of attacking and dragging away unattended weak and ailing human beings.

From these experiences with hyenas came the custom of informing children about the death of a relative by telling them that a hyena has taken him or her away. Small children were whispered to while they were still asleep. The practice was associated with the attempt to deal with the trauma that might be experienced by children if they were told openly about the death of someone close to them. For older children telling them that someone had been taken away by a hyena was considered more appropriate; they knew that when someone was taken by hyenas they would never be seen again.

The explanation of the informants about the role of the hyena differs significantly from the impression often created by the stories told by missionaries and travellers. Willoughby makes reference to hyenas in connection with the practice of not burying corpses, which in his view predated the custom of burials. Batswana have buried their dead for so many generations that they deny that they ever disposed of them in any other manner, but I noticed that when little children asked where their missing relatives had gone, older folk, not wishing to discuss death and the grave with little children, were wont to reply: “Oh, he has gone on a journey with Mr. Hyena.”

Explanations about the custom of not openly telling children about the death of someone they know and the prevalence of hyenas in areas occupied by Batswana need not be overestimated. However, Willoughby showed his ignorance about Batswana’s ways of communicating to their

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children news about death. The habits of hyenas gave rise to a custom that came to be used to communicate news about death to children.

George W. Stow’s information about the association of the hyenas with dead persons is similar to that of informants. According to him, “the custom of placing stones over the graves of the dead amongst primitive tribes originated from the desire of protecting the bodies of the relatives from the ravages of hyenas and other ravenous beasts.” The one conclusion that can be reached about the constant reference to hyenas is that Southern Africa, especially the areas occupied by the Bushmen, Batswana and other tribes in their neighborhood areas, were infested with these animals. They were always after the tracks of humans to feed on human flesh, especially the weak and frail and the dead. It is quite reasonable for Batswana to have developed folklore about the hyena because of unpleasant experiences with them.

*Burial Rites, Ancestors and the African Worldview*

The subject of ancestors is among those that are at the core of the African worldview. Jean-Marc Ela and Jack Partain have dubbed the question of ancestors and African Christianity “An African Problem” and “A dilemma of African theology” respectively. The belief in ancestors, whether it is pronounced or implicit, plays a crucial role in the manner in which burial rites are executed. It is a subject without which this study would not have done justice to its main objective, namely inquiring into the inculturation of Christianity among Barolong of Mahikeng.

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Among Batswana and African people in general, old age brings with it wisdom and respect. It is expected that the elderly be respected and given the honor they deserve. Ashton’s comment about the Basotho people summarizes the belief about the wisdom that old age brings:

It is accepted that age should bring with it wisdom, and for this reason grey hairs are entitled to respect. Provided they are not doddering and senile, the counsel of old people should be listened to with respect and their advice heeded. Correspondingly, they should set a high standard of behavior; if they fail and their misconduct comes before the courts, they will be gravely censured. 560

The respect for the elders by the community transcends the grave. It is from this attitude of respect for the elders, because of their wisdom and other attributes that go with it, that the belief in and attachment to ancestors should be understood.

Within the traditional religious consciousness of the African people, ancestors are not seen as abiding in a distant place far removed from the activities and experiences of those who still continue to live in the physical world. Cullen Young was not far from the truth when he acknowledged the difference between the West and Africans when it comes to the centrality of ancestors:

To us the idea of ancestral priority has just no meaning, but to these older African men and women in the backland villages, life from day to day and we might legitimately say, from moment to moment, has no meaning at all apart from ancestral presence and ancestral power. 361

Smith noted the complex yet central place that ancestors have:

Certainly, the Africans live in a strange world - a world which is very difficult for us to comprehend. We shall never come near to understanding them unless we fully recognize the degree to which the spiritual attracts and dominate their minds. The veil that is drawn between the seen and the unseen is to the Africans a very thin veil; so diaphanous is it


that it can hardly be said to exist. The world of the spirit is an intensely real world to them. The community which we can see and count — the men, women and children with whom we converse — is only a part of the actual community. The other members are unseen - at least they do not appear to our eyes every day; their voices are not audible every moment; but they are ever present. The living, and those whom we call the dead, form together a close, interdependent community. We shall never understand the Africans unless we recognize that cardinal fact in their experience.\textsuperscript{362}

Death is not seen as severing ties of relationships and communication between the living and the living-dead (ancestors). Rather, at the point of death the deceased enter into another form of existence not unrelated to that of the living. At death a mystical form of relationship is set in motion between the living and their departed.

It has been noted that after the dawn of the twentieth century a number of Christian missionaries and observers began to present a different view that countered earlier conclusions about the absence of religion among Africans. These views not only recognized that African people had a religious system but they also began to acknowledge the presence of a belief in the afterlife, a subject that relates to the belief in and rituals that accompanied burials of those who enter into the afterlife.

An example is that of Rev. J.N. Houseman, who in about 1923 acknowledged that among the Nguni people “there is the belief in Immortality, or more correctly perhaps the afterlife of the soul.”\textsuperscript{363} He also linked this belief to burials.\textsuperscript{364}


\textsuperscript{364} Ibid.
The role of ancestors seems to have been one area that most African people in Southern Africa would not depart from because of its apparent social significance. William summarizes its role: “The ancestor cult is — and was a force making for family solidarity.”

Ritual killing (in the form of an animal and not a human being) was a rite associated with ancestor cult. This is a family affair, and the calling upon ancestors on the occasion of a killing stresses the common font of descent from one ancestor. In this way it is emphasized that the individual is not a separate entity. As the prosperity of the living depends on the goodwill of the dead, family and other quarrels are not encouraged, as a person would hesitate to quarrel with someone who is likely to be close in spirit after death. The cult was also “a sanction for the respect of seniors upon which the social and political system is based.” The power and importance of seniors is brought home to children through parents.

The subject of ancestors and the African worldview is widely written about, but debates about African ancestors often do not relate to the subject of burial rites. It is a contention of the present study that the manner in which burials are conducted and the rites that accompany these practices reveal much about the connection between burial rites and belief in ancestors. The words that are said, the actions that performed, all too often reveal the relationship desired and necessary to be established between the living and the dead. In one sense the actions that are performed and the words that are said are both about the present and the future: they are meant to establish and affirm the relationship with the ancestors in the now and in the future.

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366 Ibid., 314-315.
Ritual performances during burials take place within the broader conceptions of time and community in relation to the living and those in the afterlife. In order to illustrate the African worldview’s conceptions of time and community, the views of Gabriel Setiloane and John Mbiti on community and time are scrutinized.

Gabriel Setiloane, a Motswana of Barolong descent, approaches the subject of ancestors from a Sotho-Tswana perspective which is not, however, limited to the Sotho-Tswana worldview but takes into consideration other African views. Mbiti’s approach is more of a general approach. Drawing from numerous examples of religious practices, experiences and sources, Mbiti pulls a common thread that runs through these variations of the same phenomenon to present a common picture of African ancestors within the conception of time.

In Setiloane's Sotho-Tswana terminology, ancestors are referred to as Badimo or the Living Dead. Here there is no distinction between the living dead and the spirits (as is shown in the case of Mbiti, below). The lack of this distinction is not surprising because Setiloane does not deal with the concept of time as Mbiti does. In Setiloane's frame of things, the term ancestor is inclusive of Mbiti's living dead and spirits.

A close reading of what Setiloane says about the Sotho-Tswana concept of ancestors reveals that they are regarded as having a mystical existence and relationship with the Divinity (God) and human beings. The state of Badimo — ancestors, in essence transcends the human limitation that bars them from complete closeness and a measure of interaction with divinity. "There is something about the intangible all-pervasiveness of vapour which reflects the intimate
presence of ‘badimo’ at every point of life.”

The qualitative state of the ancestors, according to Setiloane, is demonstrated by the etymology of the noun *badimo*.

The Bantu root of the noun *badimo* is *-dzimu*. The noun root derives from the numinous and all-pervasive quality of *Modimo*—divinity or God. What this relationship suggests is that *badimo* participate in the quality of *Modimo*. Ancestors therefore participate in the numinous quality of divinity. The implication of this is that the ancestors' relationship to divinity constitutes a moral quality and obligation. The ancestors' relationships and dealings with human beings exert and demand a moral outlook and conduct, to be lived through ritual observance and respect for customary law.

Owing to their relationship to the numinous quality of divinity, ancestors are regarded with high esteem. Their direction and the counsel they give to human beings through dreams are not divorced from the Creator's desire for the wholeness of those who are still in physical existence. Their relationship to the living is ethical and moral. They "ensure the good ordering of social relationships among the biologically living, and the fertility and well-being of men, their crops and stocks." In recognition of their role and perhaps their own authoritative demands, the ancestors must be served.

It is important to note at this point that Setiloane does not use the terms "worship" or "appease"; the distinction between these terms and the idea of serving is important. If the ancestors were worshipped or appeased, this would constitute a deviation from a fundamental relationship with the Creator who alone deserves an attitude of worship. Therefore Africans

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367 Setiloane, *The Image of God*, 64.

368 Ibid., 65.
believe in the presence of God and that God is the ultimate originator and meaning behind everything. Ancestors do not take the place of God nor do they contradict the power of God over creation. Ancestors, too, are subject to the authority of God.

In this regard Setiloane correctly uses the Tswana word *tirelo* translated as "service."\(^{369}\) This word expresses the essence of the relationship between ancestors and the living. It carries with it an attitude that one would show towards the elderly and the service that ensues from that. The respect and diligence which is maintained between children and the elderly in an African setting are characteristic of the relationship between human beings and their departed. As such a parent would be expected to protect, guide and correct the child.\(^{370}\) Herein lies the continuation of the social hierarchical relationship of children and parents in this world, projected and maintained in the relationship with the living dead.

In a Sotho-Tswana setting, service to the ancestors does not take place at shrines. It is rather carried out in the ordinary events of ordinary life. Some of such ordinary events include the dishing up of food. When meals are served it is taboo to clean the pots immediately. Some remains of food should be left in the pots for the would-be visiting ancestors at night. But this practice is not literally restricted to the would-be visiting ancestors. The practice also takes into account a stranger who might appear hungry. The remaining food left in the pots would be made available to the needy stranger. In this way the ancestors are believed to be fed.\(^{371}\)


\(^{370}\) Ibid.

\(^{371}\) Ibid., 66.
In Setiloane's view African religion is fundamentally inclusive. It emphasizes the centrality of community in all relationships. The Creator is understood to have created inclusively. The Sotho-Tswana creation stories teach that the first appearance of people was as a group, in the company even of animals. In these myths, whether the first people came out of "a bed of reeds" or "a hole in the ground", it is as a community of men, women, children and animals that they came.\textsuperscript{372} The implication of these creation stories is that it is not by choice that people are born into a community. Being in a community and relating in that sense is part of being a human being. Community and relationality transcends all possible barriers including death. Therefore both human beings and ancestors are part of the same community of existence.

This communal relationality expresses itself in the social organization of family and kinship ties. Emphasizing the sense of community and interconnectedness that originates from the inclusivity of creation, Canaan Banana argues that:

The African extended family is a proverbial expression. In an African village or township where people have been allowed to settle without the disruption of forced removals, one finds that an air of a large family broods over the atmosphere: Every person is related to another. These relationships, “by blood”, “by marriage” or by mere association are emotionally seated and cherished daily. This becomes evident when a need arises, like some tragedy (a death) or some occasion for rejoicing (a wedding).\textsuperscript{373}

The emphasis on the importance of community in the African setting extends to include the ancestors. It is in this sense that African people do not understand their existence apart from their ancestors. Ancestors are considered to be part of what is dearly cherished by members of the community. In keeping links with ancestors, communal life is preserved. Invariably

\textsuperscript{372} Setiloane, \textit{The Image of God}, 33-34.

community extends beyond the visible world. Those who have lived among a visible community are not cut from their relationship with those who remain on this side of existence. At death the deceased assume another form of existence which is mystically connected to that of the living.

The crucial point in Setiloane’s approach to community and inclusivity is where the problem of ancestors for orthodox Christian theology lies. Western Christian theology lays much more emphasis on individual conversion and accountability before God and the theology of a new people of God (or the church). In African Traditional religion, particularly Batswana religion, the emphasis is on community and not the individual. The implication of this is that the individual cannot exist outside the community and in turn community does not refer to the living only, irrespective of whether they are Christian or not. It refers to both those in the present life and those who have departed.

In the Christian tradition, community or the communion of saints refers specifically to those who have “died in the Lord.” By implication, one’s family members or even one’s mother or father who died unconverted to Christianity are left outside the community. For the African this poses great difficulties, for to disregard one’s kin and forget them as continuing to be part of the family and community is unimaginable. As long as the principle of community remains one of the central tenets of African life, the belief in ancestors will stay with the African.

Mbiti’s discussion on ancestors brings into the equation the subject of time. The African concept of time forms an important frame of reference within which African ancestors are seen to perform their role and relate to the living. Within this African concept of time the relationship between the living and their ancestors is possible. However, this perception of time is not only limited to the role of ancestors. It also embraces all phenomena in the African worldview. Mbiti
postulates that "The concept of time may help to explain beliefs, attitudes, practices and general way of life of African peoples not only in the traditional set up but also in the modern situation whether of political, economic, educational or Church life."  

According to Mbiti, the African concept of time is different from that of the West. It is not understood in linear terms with the indefinite past, present and infinite future.  

In contrast to the Western linear concept of time, time in traditional African thought is two-dimensional; it constitutes "a long past, a present and virtually no future."  

To explain this two-dimensional phenomenon of time, Mbiti employs two Swahili terms: 

*Sasa* and *Zamani*. *Sasa* refers to the present, the actual time with its short future (three to six months). The *Sasa* is the micro time. It is a framework within which the existential world is lived and experienced. To the African, that which lies in the distant future is void of any meaning to the African and therefore has no impact on the present — the lived experience. Mbiti concedes:  

A person experiences time partly in his own individual life, and partly through the society which goes back many generations before his own birth. Since what is in the future has not been experienced, it does not make sense; it cannot, therefore, constitute part of time, and people do not know how to think about it — unless, of course, it is something which falls within the rhythm of natural phenomena.  

*Zamani* refers to the time that is past. It constitutes the immediate past; today's past; far past; unspecified time. This is the macro time towards which the present moves toward the past. *Zamani*, however, is not just empty time where past memories are buried. More important, like

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375 Ibid., 17.  

376 Ibid.  

377 Ibid., 17.
the *Sasa, Zamani* is ontological. Within it there is the life and activity of the living dead and the spirits. Because of its ontological nature, *Zamani* is able to link with *Sasa*. The life of *Sasa* reciprocally participates in that of *Zamani*. This reciprocity includes the interaction between the living and the living dead.

*Sasa* and *Zamani* are intimately related. It is on the basis of this relationship (which does not diminish their distinctiveness) that the whole of existence finds its meaning. The living, the living dead and the totality of creation have a mystical relationship and interconnectedness in the *Sasa* and the *Zamani* periods. It is within the relationship between the *Sasa* and the *Zamani* that the interaction between the living dead and the living must be located. The living are sustained by memories of the past. In reality, while they are citizens of this physical world they are also truly mystically part of the past, both through their past experience and in terms of the present that continues to be drawn into the past. The immediate future only exists for the past. Mbiti says that "*Sasa* generally binds individuals and their immediate environment together. It is the period of conscious living. On the other hand, *Zamani* is the period of myth, giving a sense of foundation or security to the *Sasa*; and binding together all created things, so that all things are embraced within the Macro-Time."\(^{378}\)

In the context of the intricate and inseparable relationship of *Sasa* and *Zamani* it is inevitable that the relationship between human beings and the living dead is inseparable. Those who "die" are not perceived to be cut off and separated from their family and kinship ties. The link between the two persists. The deceased by means of death move from the present into the immediate past. In that state they are still part of the present and therefore of the existence of the

\(^{378}\) Ibid., 18.
living. This relationship is neither of complete closeness nor of complete remoteness. In a mystical sense this dialectic is dynamic. Both the living and the deceased are part of the same timeframe and therefore in constant interaction. The living are still part of the dynamic present while the deceased, within the Sasa, are part of the experienced past. Nevertheless, both belong to micro time.379

Because of the intimacy of the relationship between Sasa and Zamani, the living dead are remembered by their relatives and the community. Their way of life, which is remembered from the near past and having impact on the present, is still cherished. Equally, the deceased appear to their relatives and continue the communion that was and still is part of the present. As a demonstration of this nearness and connectedness acts of pouring out libation (of beer, milk or water), or giving portions of food to the living dead, are symbols of communion, fellowship and remembrance. They are the mystical ties that bind the living dead to their surviving relatives.380

Equally, however, because events in the Sasa move into Zamani, the deceased progressively move into the far past, where they will not be remembered anymore. They "sink beyond the horizon of the Sasa period."381 Mbiti places this dimension of time within the period of five generations. At this point no one remembers the deceased. In Mbiti’s terms, they now become spirits. It is in this form of existence within Zamani that they now relate to the living in a different way. They communicate with the living without being recognized as specific individuals connected to specific persons and individuals. Primarily they communicate through spirit mediums.

379 Ibid., 22.
380 Ibid., 26.
381 Ibid.
Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter I explained that the discussion would be premised on three theses namely that: Batswana and Barolong people in particular had traditional ways of burying their dead; burial rites posed no threat to acceptance of the gospel, and burial practices of Barolong people and their concomitant rites evolved over time due to cultural, social-political and environmental circumstances, as well as the influence of Christianity. Discussion throughout this chapter sought to illustrate the validity of the theses through evidence collected from written sources and informants. What has been evident in the foregoing discussion is that the people of Southern Africa, and Barolong in particular, had established burial practices with concomitant rites long before the missionary era.

The manner in which Batswana buried their dead and the rituals that accompanied the burials gave expression to their belief in the afterlife and ancestors, a phenomenon which is still present in the African religious life. Those who died were presumed not only to continue life in the afterlife but were also to become ancestors. The role of ancestors was a critical one: they were the core of African religious values and the cement that held together social relationships.

This chapter has demonstrated that current Barolong burial practices reflect some aspects of traditional burial practices and beliefs. It also highlighted why certain rituals were performed (for example, for fear of “contamination” by death). Burial rites therefore had a dual purpose – to deal with the contamination of death and to orient both the living and the living-dead into one community of continuous existence.

While written sources that were examined in this chapter did not make any reference to rituals affecting the family of the deceased, it should be noted that the subject is of importance
and will receive attention in the next chapter. Chief Moroka’s words: “I should not see human bones dragged by dogs along the streets of our village”, confirm that burial practices prior to and during the time of Chief Moroka were an important part of the cultural life of Barolong people as they are today.
CHAPTER FIVE

METHODIST BURIAL RITES AMONG BAROLONG

Introduction

The focus of chapter two of the study was to highlight the historical beginnings of the encounter of the 19th century Wesleyan missionaries with Batswana, especially Barolong. It also examined how the cultural, social and religious worlds of Barolong developed when they accepted Methodism. The origins of Methodist Burial Rites were examined in chapter three. Attention was also given to the theological beliefs of Methodism of John Wesley’s time that ultimately influenced the burial liturgy used by the MCSA. A survey of Barolong Traditional Burial Rites was the subject of the foregoing chapter. The present chapter describes and analyzes Methodist Burial Rites among Barolong, including the wide range of practices observed during the dissertation research. Further, the chapter highlights the mutual enrichment and transformation that takes place between Christian teaching and Barolong worldview.

Burial Rites as Ritual Complex

Over the years, culture has influenced Christian practice, and Christian practice has influenced traditional burial rites. This relationship and coexistence is best described as what Paxton refers to as a “ritual complex.” The complex nature of ritual is best described by Victor Turner. He explains that in a ritual context “almost every article used, every gesture employed, every song or prayer, every unit of space and time, by convention stands for something other

382 This is the term which Paxton uses to describe the rituals in response to death in reference to the Europe of the 900s up to the time beyond the Middle Ages. He says “ritual complex began before death, with rites of purification and separation; it accompanied the agony and the moment of death, the laying out, the vigils, and the burial; and it continued for many years in commemorative ceremonies that affected the state of the soul in the other world and bound together the communities of the living and the dead”. See Frederick S. Paxton, Christianizing Death, 1.
than itself. It is more than it seems, and often a good deal more.”383 The story that follows is about my conversation with a young man during a funeral. It is an example of a “ritual complex,” where in an African Christian context, it is not always obvious where the line between Christian and traditional burial rites is drawn.

At one of the funeral services I attended during this research, a young man in his twenties came over to me and asked me: “Sir, what is the significance of washing our hands after the funeral”? This question was relative to a practice that is widely observed after a funeral at the home of the deceased or at the home where the concluding rites are observed, after returning from the place of interment.

I responded by saying that the washing of hands was an African practice symbolizing the cleansing of what is believed to be defilement connected with death. I asked the young man if it was the first time he had ever washed his hands after a funeral. He responded that he had done it several times before, but had never understood why it was done. He acknowledged that all along he thought that the practice was Christian, because his experience was that all members of the church participated in it. Hearing that the practice was not Christian-based, he wondered why it was observed at the funeral of a Christian.

The conversation around his lack of understanding of why role rituals are performed continued for some time. In the context of this conversation, I came to the conclusion that the young man had not participated in any traditional burial rituals that directly affected him, through the death or burial of a relative. Two other explanations were possible: the young man could simply have been naïve, or he could have been affiliated with one of the Christian groups

that forbids or discourages its members from participating in any form of rites associated with African customs. Nevertheless he found himself participating in a ritual that to him could have looked like a simple washing of hands for hygienic purposes. My conclusions could be misplaced, but they arose due to the lack of any evidence of this young man’s knowledge of the meaning of some of the burial rites observed in public. A few weeks later I met with a number of young Methodists between the ages of 21 and 27 years, who demonstrated fair knowledge of the meaning of some of the burial rites observed in Mahikeng.

The conversation that took place between myself and the young man was important for setting the stage for reflection on the meaning and coexistence of and the relationship between Christian burial rites and those of Barolong tradition.

Is it necessary to draw the line between a Christian ritual and a traditional ritual? I believe it is necessary to do so if inculturation and contextualization are to be informed and meaningful. Otherwise how else does the church critique culture and its own practices in the light of the gospel, if it does not interrogate the actions, words and symbols that are invoked on occasions of burial rites? Such an exercise requires what Geertz has called a “thick description,” illustrating this notion by repeating a story of two boys from a particular culture who started contracting their eyelids rapidly. The argument that Geertz advances is that for a casual onlooker, the two boys would be mistaken to be doing one and the same thing, while this may not be the case at all:

The two movements are, as movements identical; from an I-am-a-camera, “phenomenalistic” observation of them alone, one could not tell which was a twitch or a wink. Yet the difference, however unphotographable, between a twitch and a wink is vast; as anyone unfortunate enough to have had the first taken for the second knows. The winker is communicating in a quite precise special way: (1) deliberately, (2) to someone
in particular, (3) to impart a particular message, (4) according to a socially established code, and (5) without cognizance of the rest of the company.\textsuperscript{384}

From this story Geertz attempts to emphasize that the analysis of cultures must "sort out the structures of signification"; in other words, actions must be examined in the particular and not in generalities. According to him, an act must be interpreted and analyzed relative to when it happened, where it happened, and the results it produced.\textsuperscript{385} In the case of the young man initially referred to, the washing of hands could simply have been an act of hygiene observance washing one’s hands to dispel germs after having touched the hands of many people through greetings. He would not have been observant of nor would he have understood the meaning of the manner in which the hands were washed or the reason for it.

In going beyond the actions performed, one discovers the "thick" meaning of what is being enacted, and it is at this level that the ethnographer is required to engage in an interpretive exercise. The "thick description" that Geertz regards as the grand essence of ethnography also entails the ability to describe intelligently the conceptual world of signs and symbols more precisely. Ethnography is comprised of the ability to enter the imaginative world of the actors within a particular culture, and bring out the meaning for their enacted world. In the context of this study, an example is the use of coded words to describe events. In my view, the usefulness of ethnography for missiology is as a tool that enables us to "enter the conceptual world in which our subjects live" so that we can converse meaningfully with them.\textsuperscript{386}


\textsuperscript{385} Ibid., 9.

\textsuperscript{386} Ibid., 6.
Methodist burial rites among Barolong look simple and ordinary when observed from a distance and from the perspective of insiders who feel no obligation to view them with an objective and curious mind that seeks to comprehend the meaning behind the actions and words uttered. But in the process of observation, the achievements, limitations and challenges of the church’s engagement with culture and context are identified and addressed.

While Geertz’s call for a thick description is valid and necessary, what follows does not claim to be that thick description. However, I attempt to describe as much as possible what I observed when I attended funerals. Information gathered from Barolong Methodists and what has been observed are analyzed. One of the tools used in this analysis is the researcher’s knowledge of and experience in the field of burial. In the processes of observing, listening to and gathering information from informants, a deliberate attempt was made not to take anything for granted and to delineate as much as possible the elements of traditional burial rites and those of the Christian church. This manner of proceeding attempted to do what Schreiter calls “the listening to the culture,” which he defines as “that long and careful listening to discover its principles, values, needs, interests, directions, and symbols.” Schreiter also invokes Geertz’s appeal for a “thick description.” I attempt to do the same with Methodist practice, so that calls for inculturation and contextualization in the final analyses are made informatively. Furthermore, it was necessary to follow this route since in the eyes of many Barolong Methodists, burial rites are incomplete if one tradition is not complemented by the other; that is to say, for a burial to be complete, complementarity and synthesis of Christian and traditional burial rites, as practiced today, are a must.

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Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 28.
I am not suggesting or advocating for syncretism or “filling the gaps,” but rather that recognition be given to the creativity that already exists between the practices of culture and those of the church — whether or not this can pass the scrutiny of theological soundness or cultural legitimation. This creativity has provided a basis from which an informed critique can begin to take place and upon which new recommendations can be made.

In other words, I do not use the terms “complementary” and “synthesization” in the sense that Amba Oduyoye suggests in using the term “syncretism” (although she does not suggest that syncretism is the way to go). She writes:

Modernization has had a disruptive and weakening effect on African life and thus on African religion. At the same time it is evident that the missionary religions together with modern technology have proved inadequate to our needs. Since the old appears to stand on its own and the new by itself is proving inadequate, we should expect some creative syncretism to develop in Africa.

Her use of the term is amenable to what Schreiter sees as “an inconsistency, in which conflicting ideas and practices are brought together without coherence.” What I wish to recognize is a harmonious relationship that arises out of the value and integrity that each tradition brings to make whole, meaningful and useful strides towards the goal that is desired.

The description that follows is of what forms part and parcel of burial rites in Mahikeng generally. It describes what Barolong people would see as part of their culture, but at the same

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388 Schreiter, Constructing Local Theologies, 153.


time what Barolong Methodists would regard as what their denomination upholds as acceptable and not in conflict with the Methodist doctrinal heritage.

*Death and Burial: Terminology, Concepts and Themes*

Before moving on to describe and analyze what happens during funerals and the rites that accompany them, it is important to highlight some words, expressions, concepts and themes associated with death and burial. It is equally useful to mention some of the concepts or themes that are connected to death. Familiarity with these words, concepts and themes allow better insight into some of the reasons why certain rituals are observed.

Setswana words used in connection with death are carefully chosen. The way to express the manner in which death is to be spoken about is *go sisela*, which means to be extraordinarily careful about the choice of words to describe an uncommon event or occurrence that is not part of everyday experience. In the context in which it is used here, it means that the language used in connection with death has to be different from language used in everyday speech and experience.

In the case of death, the Setswana language has terminology that expresses not only that a person is no more but also beliefs about death: this terminology expresses the worldview of the people who employ the words. Barolong and most people of Southern Africa speak about *loso*, death, but they do not generally use the expression “so and so has died”. Instead, words are used that a stranger to their language and worldview would perceive as meaning that the person being spoken about is still alive.

The following expressions or words are used: *o didimetse* — he or she has gone quiet; *o tsamaile* — he or she has left; *o re tlogetse* — he or she has left us; *o khutlile* — he or she has come to the end; or *o robotse* — he or she has fallen asleep. Even in the case of a decomposing
body, terms like *o re seile* — he or she has gone ahead of us or *wa re sia* — he or she is leaving us behind are used. The word usually used in everyday language to describe decomposition or to rot is *go bola* and an alternative term is *go senyega*, to be wasted; however, the word *go bola* is never used to refer to the decomposing body of a human being. Use of these words in relation to death clearly indicates that death is not seen as an end in itself. They have resonated well with the Christian message, providing a rich repertoire of vocabulary amenable to communication of the gospel about life in this present life and life beyond the grave.

While not always recognizing the role that the existing African terminologies played, at the time of introducing Christianity some missionaries recognized these words as a critical vehicle in communication of the gospel. Others gave credit where it was due; already in the 1920s Eveleigh was attentive to the terminology used to speak about the death of a person as opposed to that used for the death of an animal. Making reference to Nguni terminology that gave testimony to the belief in immortality, he wrote: “We have seen that there is a belief in a future existence. When a person dies, invariably this expression is used: ‘*Upumileumphefumlo*,’ i.e. ‘the soul, or spirit has gone out.’ In the case of an animal they say, ‘*ifile*’ i.e. ‘it is dead’.\(^{391}\) He continued to observe that “This distinction is significant. The soul or the spirit of life goes back to God who gave it.”

*The Position of the Body upon Exiting or Entering an Enclosure*

One of the rituals observed dutifully is the manner in which the body exits and enters an area or enclosure, for example a house, mortuary or cemetery. The position of the body is watched attentively by family members immediately as it leaves the house after death and enters

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into the hearse. The elders of the family keep a close eye on the coffin to make sure that it is carried in the right manner. Watchful eyes on the coffin are particularly intense where a casket is used. The officiating minister or preacher and the pallbearers all take responsibility to make sure that the coffin is carried correctly, with the head or the feet facing in the right direction. Close attention is paid to the position of the body, particularly when a casket is used for burial. This ritual is also observed until the last stage of the burial when the body is carried from the hearse to the grave.

The importance of this ritual became evident during one of the funerals I attended for observation. The casket was used for the burial of the body. After the coffin had been lowered and placed in the grave and filling of the grave with soil had commenced, the family ritual leaders discovered that the casket was facing in the wrong direction — the head was facing in an easterly direction. I was fortunate to be next to them and overheard their conversation and disturbance about the manner in which the corpse was lying. Among themselves they secretly agreed that this misfortune would need to be corrected in the form of a ritual after the completion of the burial.

The significance of this ritual is not readily obvious. It stands to reason that when the body of a deceased person was prepared for burial in a squatting position, the body would exit the house and enter the place of burial facing forward. It could therefore be surmised that the horizontal position of the body facing upwards was a later development, probably influenced by the Judeo-Christian manner of burial. In the Afro-Tswana cosmological scheme of things, it is believed that it is the feet that enter a house first and the head that leads the way upon exiting. The more profound idea is that when one leaves an enclosure, the light of the free space outside of the enclosure shines on one’s face, bringing the hope of a new existence. In the case of the
deceased, entering an enclosure would represent coming into a space where the presence of a corpse brings pain and sorrow. At each moment that the body leaves an enclosure, a new step into a new existence and a different kind of life is symbolized.

Mr. Phatudi, one of the informants, stressed that it is the prerogative of the church as much as it is of family elders that the body is carried into or out of the house in a proper way. “It is not allowed in our culture, and in ordinary life for that matter, for someone to enter or to leave the house facing backwards. It would therefore be disrespectful to the deceased to do something like that to him or her,” he said.  

*Ritual seasons and time*

Burial rites among Barolong and Batswana in general take place within culturally accepted seasons and times. They are associated with certain times of the day and seasons of the year. While today they are not strictly adhered to, they still provide the framework within which burials rites are performed. Rituals are performed either in the morning or in the late afternoon — generally the morning is preferred. Other rituals such as the third stage of tatolo are performed during the winter season or before the leaves of trees begin to turn green or before the rainy season.

The significance of associating coolness with burial rites is linked to the idea that coolness brings tranquility and therefore the healing of brokenness brought by death and *sefifi*. Heat, which is present or felt during the middle of the day or during the seasons of the year other than winter, is associated with disturbance, pain and death in people’s lives. In other words heat

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392 He was interviewed on January 4th, 2009 at Lomanyaneng Village, Mahikeng.
symbolizes death. While mid-day of each day in all seasons is regarded as the hottest time of the day, it is also regarded as the time of ancestors. It is therefore a taboo to perform any ritual be it those of burials or any other traditional ceremony.

Part of the role of traditional medicines used for the cure of the “heat” that death brings is to restore “coolness” and “calmness” on those affected by the death of their loved one. In other words, these traditional medicines are meant to restore and bring healing and wholeness. The concept of *sefifi*, discussed below, is also treated with traditional medicines believed to bring under control the effects of *sefifi*, particularly as they affect the widower or widow and her or his off-spring. It is interesting to observe that the Ndembu of northwestern Zambia believe, as do Batswana, that heat represents death while coolness represents life and cure.393

**Sefifi**

One of the themes connected with death and burial rites is what is called *sefifi*, and Barolong of Mahikeng strongly believe in its presence. The concept is not exclusive to Batswana; evidence shows that almost all cultures at one stage or the other believed strongly in the existence of *sefifi*. Cleansing ceremonies are closely related to it; it is a dominant theme connected with burial rites, around which purification rites derive their justification.

There is no direct English translation of the word *sefifi*. It approximates what in the Old Testament is called “defilement”. In the cosmology of Batswana people this concept represents a negative force deriving from the consequence of the death of a human being. The word *sefifi* derives from the noun *lefifi*, meaning darkness. *Sefifi* can therefore be properly defined as the negative force of personality which arises from the death of an individual. It is therefore a form

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of darkness that has assumed personality, with a potent invisible force of its own negatively affecting those closely related to the deceased.

Sefifi becomes effective as soon as the person dies, the most affected being the family of the deceased, and the widow or widower most of all. Cleansing and purification rites are all meant to remove the effects of sefifi from those it has affected; it is therefore essential that the concept of sefifi be explicated here as best as possible before a description and analysis of cleansing rituals connected with death are dealt with.

In everyday language Batswana people speak of death as a “dark cloud that has befallen a family.” The expression *re wetswe ke leru le le ntsa* — “a dark cloud has fallen upon us” — is a common one. The extent to which this “cloud” and its weight affect the relations of the deceased differs. Hertz observed a similar phenomenon among the Olo Nganju who he says speak about the “impure cloud” which “surrounds the deceased, pollutes everything it touches.” 394 It should be contended that in the worldview of Batswana, sefifi does not equate to “pollution,” for inherent in pollution is the possibility of a state of irreversibility of that which has been polluted. Sefifi, however, is temporary in that it can be removed when the prescribed rituals are observed.

Sefifi is perceived as personifying the darkness which the death of an individual releases upon those to whom he or she was closely connected (for example, wife, husband, or children). Those who come into close proximity with the deceased’s body are also perceived to be affected by sefifi (for example, those who attend the funeral). As much as a live individual (or personality) has the capacity to influence others (positively), because life is viewed as a positive

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existence, death is viewed as a negative force that takes away life and is so powerful as to “destroy” life, thereby becoming contagious. We can only surmise that in human cultures the “contagious” nature of death arises from that fact that death causes pain and not joy. Because of death, family and kin are left with widows, widowers and orphans. The closer one is to the deceased, the more one is affected by sefifi. Herein lies the contradiction between the positive view about life after death and the fact of death itself.

Throughout the history of humankind, even in the so-called World Religions, death has always presented this problem. The Old Testament is full of taboos prohibiting people from getting close to dead bodies. The Early Church dealt with the contagious view of death by accepting baptism as a ritual that cleansed the contagiousness of death. Therefore baptism, to some extent, was regarded as a ritual also effective in defeating the power of the contagiousness of death. Among Barolong of Mahikeng and Batswana in general, it seems that the death of a child does not have sefifi. The understanding is that a child had not yet developed a force that could become negative at death.

It seems that sefifi is not only the resulting negative effects of death of an individual upon those to whom he or she is closely related. It also seems to represent the presence of the spirit of the deceased in the world of the living. In this sense, burial of the body is not simply the internment of the body; it is also an important act of sending off the spirit of the deceased into the world of the afterlife. Until interment of the body has been effected, the spirit of the deceased is presumed to be in an intermediary state. This is most evident in the prayers of the living for the deceased: the faithful continually pray that God will grant him or her eternal resting peace.
Tatolo

In order for a person to be buried and for family members, friends and neighbors from near and far to participate in the rituals of burial, they must receive notice of the death of that individual. The act of informing close relatives, especially the maternal uncle (who then formally takes responsibility to inform all the ‘significant others’), is an important act in the process of burial. The Setswana saying ‘motho ga a iphitlhe’ (‘no one buries himself or herself’) expresses the belief that it is incumbent upon relatives and neighbors to surround the bereft during the time of death and to make sure that the family is surrounded by support and enabled to bury their loved one with dignity. It is therefore the contention of this study that among the first acts of burial rituals is tatolo. The literal meaning of tatolo is to say ‘a person is no more’; it refers to announcing or letting people (especially the next of kin) know that so and so has passed on. There are three stages of tatolo, which reveal that tatolo is much more than just announcing the death of an individual; it is deeply connected to the burial rites of Barolong and Batswana people in general. Tatolo also demonstrates the extent to which the ultimate act of burial involves the whole community; it is inclusive to the extent that those who are told about the death of someone carry with them the responsibility to pass the message on. On the other hand, those who receive the message are at liberty to join those who come to console the bereaved family in different ways. The three stages are still largely adhered to in the areas where the field work for this study was conducted. Here attention is paid to the first stage of tatolo. The second and third stages receive attention later in this chapter.

395 In her study, which was conducted among Bangwaketse people in Kanye, Botswana, Margaret A. K. Sheppard refers only to what I will refer to as the third stage of tatolo. See her “Protection and Healing in a Tswana Village: With Particular Reference to the Traditional and Zionist Beliefs and Practices,” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Surrey, 1984), 200.
The first stage of *tatolo* could be regarded as the more general one, and less of a formal rite than the second and third stages. However, this should not be interpreted to mean that the first stage is of lesser importance than the other two — in fact, it is the most crucial stage, upon which the second and third stages are grounded. It is general in the sense that there are no specific ritual leaders designated for it (unlike in the other two stages). While it is incumbent upon the next of kin, especially the *malome* (maternal uncle) and close relatives of the deceased to make sure that the relevant people are informed first, the church leadership and members of the community are also important role-players here.

During the first stage of *tatolo* the next of kin are informed immediately after the passing away of a person. Trouble is taken to ensure that the closest family members and relatives are informed as early as possible. Sihlangu’s description of how the next of kin are informed first is as follows:

> When death occurs, first of all, the nearest relatives are notified immediately. At this time it is still a secret; not even the minister is informed so that he can inform the congregation by means of the church bell. If the church bell should ring before some of the closest relatives know of the death, there would be dissatisfaction among them. When the relatives arrive at the home of the deceased they immediately assume their task of cleaning the house and preparing for the coming people.396

This quotation refers to the secrecy of *tatolo*. It is important to clarify this in the light of Barolong burial funeral rites. *Tatolo* helps to prevent *dikung* (plural of *kung*), which are misfortunes caused by ignorance or the absence of knowledge that your closest relative has died. These types of misfortunes could manifest themselves in the form of being suddenly unfairly

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treated by one’s colleagues at work or treated badly or unfairly for no apparent reason by people you do not know, and so on. In essence, dikung comprise more than just bad luck.

In Tswana cosmology, the purpose of informing the next of kin as soon as possible about a death is therefore to prevent the descending of dikung upon the individual. Conversely, the effects of death (as observed in the previous chapter) are believed to affect all those connected to the deceased in one form or another. Among Barolong (and Batswana in general) it is preferred that tatolo reach the next of kin as early as possible, primarily for purposes of avoiding (di)kung. However, it is also important to inform the next of kin at the earliest possible time because it is proper to do so. There is no stage where tatolo is withheld from the minister, neighbors and closest friends. Sheppard also observed a similar pattern among Bangwaketse, writing:

“Immediately a person has died, messengers are sent to inform all relatives and neighbors. A messenger is sent to announce the death to the local Headman and at the Chief’s kgotla. People immediately begin to collect at the home of the deceased.”

Nowadays public media are also used to communicate deaths of individuals to the wider community. The most commonly used media are radio stations, and most African language radio stations allocate time slots for ditatolo, where the community sends in names of their deceased to be announced in order that those who have not been informed formally (be they relatives whose whereabouts are unknown or friends unknown to the family near and far) have the opportunity to know about the passing away of the individual. In most cases announcements over the radio are made when the date, time and place of the funeral have been finalized.

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397 Sheppard refers only to what I will refer to as the third stage of tatolo in “Protection and Healing in a Tswana Village”, 185.
Further consideration needs to be given to Sihlangu’s assertion that *tatolo* is kept secret until the relevant next of kin have been informed. When I come to the role of the church in *tatolo*, I will show that secrecy was and is not a dominant feature here, considering that even the church bell is used to communicate a message about the death of a church member. However, according to informants there was a time when a measure of secrecy about the death of a person was observed. This secrecy related to how children were informed about the death of their next of kin or someone intimately known to them. Withholding of information from children about the death of a person is cited by informants as one of the reasons why children were told that the hyena had “snapped away” the person or the whispering into the ear of small children or babes while they are asleep. This form of secrecy was used to protect children from the shock that the individual experiences when news about someone’s death reaches them. If reference to secrecy is about informing the uncle first — who would then inform the parents of the deceased — this was not about secrecy but rather about protocol.

Having examined the terminology, concepts and themes embedded in burial rites, now we traverse the actual performances of this rite of passage from the moment the individual is pronounced dead.

*Second Stage of Tatolo*

The Methodist burial liturgy ends with the pronouncement of the benediction at the grave site, effectively concluding burial rites on the part of the church. While this may be the end of the Christian ceremony, the cultural aspects are nowhere near conclusion. Members of the church, including the minister who led the funeral, all join in the customary proceedings as much as they can and according to socially accepted norms. By and large the remaining rites are in the hands
of family ritual leaders. In other instances where a minister or church elder is the family ritual leader, he plays his part accordingly and participates in the second stage of ditatolo, the primary function of which is to explain in more detail the lineage of the deceased on both sides of his or her parents.

There is no evidence to suggest that the second stage tatolo, commonly referred to as ditatolo, the plural of tatolo, were part of Batswana traditional burial rites. They can be regarded as part of the process of the evolution of burial rites. However, the absence of this practice in traditional burial rites should be understood in the context of the nature of the social environment and communal settlements of the times. Members of the tribe and clan lived in close proximity to each other, and the history of the origins and family ties was therefore less complex and remote. Marriages between young men and women were generally arranged by adult relatives based on the extent to which families knew each other. Therefore, when a person died it would have been easy for his or her blood relations to be well known in the community and neighbouring clans. Society was less complex.

This scenario changed as time progressed and society became more complex. Inter-tribal conflicts and those arising out of the encroachments and conflicts inflicted on communities by migrant Europeans forced the people of Southern Africa to abandon their closeness to clan associations and their neighbors. Disintegration and reintegration would have introduced the need to find other ways to keep family clan lineages alive.

Communities and families were further polarised by migrant labour systems. In modern times people are no longer confined to their tribal lands and communities; the younger generations find themselves in urban areas in search of jobs away from their ancestral lands. For
places like Mahikeng, *ditatolo* are therefore seen as a critical part of burial ritual whose role is to connect kin, kindred, and ancestors on the occasion of the burial of a family member or relative. This rite is cherished by Barolong of Mahikeng in the areas where the study was conducted.

While it embraces the community, the second stage of *tatolo* is more focused on the family and relatives. The obituary of the deceased giving most of the details about his/her life would have been read during the church service. The second stage of *tatolo* takes place in the *kgotla*, where it is mainly men who assemble (women are not prohibited from doing so). *Tatolo* in the *kgotla* is led by the uncle of the deceased, and that of the widow or widower, and differs from the written obituary in that, firstly, most of the time, the *malome* (maternal uncle) does not read from a piece of paper. *Tatolo* in *kgotla* does not concern itself with the temporal engagements of the deceased, and seldom does it say where the deceased was from. Its main features are to give an oral history of the life of the deceased.

The lineage of the deceased is traced as far back as possible, often by one maternal and one paternal relative of the deceased. The uncles of the deceased relate the maternal and paternal lineage of the deceased. The importance of this is not just about linking the deceased to past maternal and paternal past generations but also by so doing the link with one’s ancestors is symbolized through this ritual act.

Whether this is something that is understood by the surviving offspring, relatives and community present during *ditatolo* need not be debated here; my primary concern is to inquire as to whether *ditatolo* has any significance to those for whom it is meant. *Ditatolo* at the *kgotla* are generally meant for all those present. Once the elders of the clan, including the paternal and maternal uncles, have concluded their business, they entreat the assembly to pass on the message
that so and so has passed away and been buried: “Now that you know the one whom you have just said goodbye to (meaning that they heard the lineage of the deceased recited by the elders), go and tell others that so and so is no more.” The proceedings then end with the appeal by the chief or his representative to the assembly to continue burying one another. Then he says the word: *Pula* (rain) and the people respond, *Pula*. This brings this part of *ditatolo* to an end.

This custom is maintained by those who feel strongly that *ditatolo* should be continued. Oration of the lineage of the deceased by the elders seeks to impress upon the minds of younger generations the importance of knowing one’s origins, and therefore the origins of one’s clan and connections, without reading them from a piece of paper. There is some superficiality and a lack of emotional attachment when *ditatolo* are read from paper.

Elderly informants were emphatic and unwavering in pointing out that the role of *ditatolo* is embedded in the values of the culture of Barolong and other Batswana people. Customarily, *ditatolo* demonstrate the knowledge of the living elders of those connected to the family tree. By reciting the clan relatives they are in way handing over (orally) family and clan connections. As an important part of the burial ritual, *ditatolo* are also meant to be a conscious moment when the living members of the family and the clan are connected to those who have passed on. This happens when the names of the principal representatives of family and clan who have passed on three to five generations ago are invoked.

During *ditatolo* siblings of the deceased are officially introduced in person to the gathered assembly. They are reminded of their responsibility towards their surviving parent and towards one another. Those among them who neglect family responsibilities are told to take more responsibility as part of the family. The surviving eldest son would be called upon to keep
the family together and to take the lead in representing the family, and therefore the clan in all
the activities of the clan and the community. Relatives are called upon to give the support that is
needed.

Where there has been conflict in the family or lack of respect for parents or life in
general, the maternal uncle, who is expected to be impartial, calls upon them to do things
differently from there on. The substance of what is at the center of ditatolo is captured by
Paxton:

Rituals do things. They are performances, participatory activities that involve groups of
people — people who learn things through their participation in rituals. They can model
the way in which crisis or change has been met in the past and suggest ways to meet it in
the future. They can, …be “one of the ways in which human beings construe and
construct their world.” They are social actions that reveal, enhance, and sometimes even
alter the relations among members of the society in which they are acted out. ³⁹⁸

_Ditatolo_ seems to be intended to fulfill the sentiments outlined by Paxton. It is
informative to observe that elaborate rituals of the tenth and eleventh centuries and of the Middle
Ages as researched by Paxton, also “created and mirrored bonds not only between the living and
the dying but between the living and the dead, and played an important role in the definition of
the family and community.”³⁹⁹ From what has been observed, _ditatolo_ are not meant to be an end
in themselves, but rather serve as social moral codes.⁴⁰⁰

Participation of the official church during this second stage of _ditatolo_ is absent; the
process is left entirely to the elders of the family and community. In this sense there is a
conspicuous break between the burial rites of the church and those upheld by cultural tradition.

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³⁹⁸ Frederick S. Paxton, _Christianizing Death_, 7-8.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 9.

There is no hostile relationship shown toward the rituals that the church has led so far. However, there is a seeming lack of interest on the part of the church in the intended purpose of *ditatolo* and the values they seek to impress upon the rituals of the family and the community. On the other hand, what could seem to be disinterest by the church in these rituals is the desire of traditional leadership not to have the church interfering in cultural traditions. This scenario has some justification. It must be remembered that the itinerant ministry of the church allows for any minister from any cultural groups or tradition to be stationed anywhere within the Connexion; what this means is that if the church is allowed to have a greater participation in *ditatolo*, a minister from a different cultural background could bring undesired elements into the culture of Barolong. This could be one of the reasons that Methodist officials in Mahikeng have not shown a keen interest in being present during *ditatolo*. However, as chapter six will argue, it is important for the church leadership, especially ministers, to make efforts to understand the cultures of the people they serve. This is especially necessary when the minister is an “outsider.”

When asked whether *ditatolo* are still necessary, informants between the ages of 30 and 45 years said they are still important but need to be transformed. They applauded the intended purpose of *ditatolo* as spelled out above, but pointed out that *ditatolo* have become a platform for other issues unrelated to the funeral, such as making announcements about political meetings.

So far I have described processes that are more the responsibilities of the family, the elders and the community. We now focus attention on the participation and the role that the church plays in burial rites.
Third stage of Tatolo

This stage of tatolo constitutes the last stage of Barolong traditional burial rites. The rite is performed in the case of a deceased male person. The rite is not performed for a deceased female person. Tatolo of the third stage is usually performed during winter. If it is considered to be performed late in the season it must take place before the rainy season. The rite is a family affair and includes close relatives only such as paternal and maternal uncles and siblings.

This stage of tatolo comprises of two main elements. The first aspect of the ritual involves the distribution of personal belongings of the deceased male person such as clothes among his children (especially the sons) and other close relatives, those present and absent at the occasion. The ritual takes place in the morning. Care is taken to make sure that the deceased belongings are distributed fairly and generously. The distribution of the personal belongings of the deceased does not include dividing the inheritance of the deceased such as cattle, land and other belongings of significant value, among his or her children. The dividing of the inheritance is a different process and it is not regarded as part of the rites of burial.

It is important to observe that the morning following the burial of the deceased, personal belongings are collected and kept safe in one place. His clothes are washed as well. Every evening until the third stage of tatolo, the widow or his daughter or an appointed relative, lights a candle before sunset until the next morning. This is done every day next to the items of the deceased until the day of tatolo.

The second aspect of the third stage of tatolo consists of taking the most essential personal belongings of the deceased to his maternal uncle – such as his axe, chair, eating
utensils, coat and other basic essentials. These items are accompanied by an ox as they are taken to the homestead of the maternal uncle.

The ox is slaughtered as soon as it has entered the kraal. A section of the slaughtered animal is given to the family of the deceased to take back with them to cook and eat the same day. The essential personal belonging of the deceased are handed over to his maternal uncle. If the recipient is deceased, the items are handed over to his wife. If she is also deceased the items are handed over to one of their children. During this rite only the close relatives of the maternal uncle are present. The rite is also regarded as an affair of the family and close relatives only.

The symbolic significance of this rite is to say to the uncle – “your nephew is no more.” This symbolism is significant considering the rights and responsibilities that a nephew and the maternal uncle have towards one another. Generally a nephew is expected to have a caring attitude towards his uncle in many respects, especially masori — a gift or gifts that a nephew or niece voluntarily give to his or her uncle. Further it is the duty or the responsibility of the uncle to take the lead in the most essential affairs of his nephew. One of these essential affairs is to ensure that when his nephews or nieces get married, he assists with cows for lobola in the case of a nephew and the purchase of wedding clothes for the niece. Another important right and responsibility of a maternal uncle is to ensure that all burial rites of the nephew are observed, including taking responsibility for the viewing of the nephew or niece’s corpse.

Something else must be noted about the third stage of tatolo. We observed that traditionally a deceased person was buried with his or her essential personal items such as one’s chair and eating utensils; this symbolized the continuation of life after death. The third stage of tatolo shows that this traditional burial rite has evolved over time. Instead of being buried with
one’s personal essential belongings, they are given to his or her close relatives. I believe it is not far-fetched to conclude that the present-day third stage tatolo could have been influenced in part by the Christian belief that beyond the grave material possessions are immaterial — faith and eternal praise to God are the new mode of existence.

Death and the Commencement of Burial Rites

Among Barolong burial rites begin immediately at home after a death occurs. Such rites take place at the home of the deceased, especially in the case of aged persons, many of whom would have been lying sick in their homes or in the homes of their descendants or relatives. For others, the departure from this life happens in hospitals. Others meet their death through accidents in different contexts and under different circumstances, be it because of human error or natural disasters.

However, in all cases of the occurrence of death, rites observed at the home of the deceased are generally the same across the board. Variations in observance of these initial rites do not warrant an independent discussion, since these are minor, if present. Ashton in the 1950s wrote of the Basotho that:

When it becomes obvious that a person is going to die, his relatives and friends are informed of his condition so that they may gather in the village to prepare themselves for the funeral. 401

If by “preparation” Ashton means mental preparation, we must agree with him — for when someone has reached a point where it is obvious that death is imminent, those around him or her can only prepare themselves mentally for such an eventuality. If, however, by “preparation” he

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refers to practical engagements in preparation for burial, we must disagree. Among Barolong and
the people of Southern Africa in general, preparations for a funeral are not embarked upon before
the person has been certified dead by those around him or her. However, Ashton’s observation of
the calling and gathering of relatives, friends and neighbors does happen. Just a few are usually
called, depending on the wishes of the family.

The realization that the death of a person is imminent requires the family around him or
her to be strengthened and accompanied in facing the loss of a loved one. Not to inform relatives
or friends and neighbors when it is obvious that a person will soon depart is viewed with
suspicion. Adults are usually the ones who are informed and called during these moments.
Informants in this study explained that because of the shock, pain and devastation that death
brings to the family of the dying, the company of others is required and necessary, especially
those who have experienced the loss of a loved one.

The presence of relatives, friends or neighbors around the person about to depart this life
serves another purpose, and it is this that we shall now consider: the initial rite associated with
death and burial. If a person dies at home, adults make sure that the body is put into a straight
position, lying on the back, with both arms placed on the chest or parallel with the body. A cloth,
usually white, is wrapped around the head to hold the lower jaws together. A close relative is
usually assigned to perform this role. The aunt or the eldest daughter of the deceased (in the case
of a female) and the uncle or eldest son (if the deceased is a male) are usually preferred.

*Go tswala matlho a moswi* — the closing of the eyes of the person departing, is regarded
as an honorable responsibility. On the part of the relatives, particularly close relatives like the
wife, husband, children, brothers or sisters, son- or daughter-in-law, it signifies love, care and
responsibility of the one who performs it. Those who are present when this act is carried out share in the same honor, for when it happens they are not excluded, nor do they stay aloof from the action performed. Closely associated with go tswala matlho is the opportunity to hear the last words of the departed, if the deceased does utter any last words. In most cases, however, the experience is that the last words or final ‘verbal will’ are uttered days or even weeks before death occurs.

What Jude Ongang’a describes as important for Luo people at the time of someone’s death captures what “closing someone’s eyes” entails for Barolong and Batswana in general:

Death for the Luo is a public event. To die alone or to be found dead is a disgrace to the community. There must be someone to close the eyes of the dying person, fold his/her fingers, hold his/her legs together, …and finally turning the dying person on his/her back. Thus, dying, though the most private and personal act which one must perform alone, is for the Luo transformed into a public event. It is not only a family affair, but one that involves the whole community. 402

The presence of relatives and neighbors when a person reaches his or her their last moments is regarded as important.

Separating the body from Home

It was noted in the previous chapter that traditionally the body of the deceased was buried after three days at most. This was mainly due to health reasons. With the introduction of the mortuary burials take place a week after the event of death, at the earliest.

Today after the body is prepared, it is taken to the mortuary. At this stage no church rituals are performed. However, it is my experience and that of informants that after the person

has departed, prayers are said by whoever is chosen among those present at the time. Further, if a local preacher is present, the words “I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall not die eternally” are said. There is every reason to suspect that even in the absence of a local preacher, these words are repeated at least by a member of the church present as the body is carried to the undertaker’s vehicle.

The reason that this section of the burial liturgy would be recited at this early stage needs to be explicated. It makes sense that pastorally or culturally, the beginning of the burial process begins as soon as the person has departed and all that befits a burial should begin at that point.

There should not be a time when the mood of the loss of a loved one and the rituals that accompany the whole process are not applicable, only to begin at a later stage. The message of the church about life in the present world and the life after mortal death can only be meaningful and pastoral when it is allowed to be continuous and unbroken, beginning at the time when a Christian departs this world and for the duration of the bereavement period. Reciting the words cited above is important at this point. They draw the attention of the bereaved family at that early stage to the fact that even at that moment, Christ’s promise of eternal life is assured. It is proclaiming the message of the gospel at the time when it is most needed.

The next paragraph in the liturgy of the burial reads “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh shall I see God: I will see him with my own eyes — I and not another.” These two

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sections are critically important to be occasioned at the time when death has just occurred. The liturgy for burial contained in the Methodist Service Book has the words “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted”, which are most appropriate not only on the day of the burial service, but also at the beginning of the loss, because that is where mourning starts and is deeply felt. As we shall show in the next section, for the family ritual mourning begins immediately at the time of the loss.

Mr. L. Seremo and Ms. B. Tlape, informants of this study, mentioned that in their experience, when a local preacher is absent, there is hesitation by those around to recite these words. The body is led out in silence from the company of the loved ones. This is a weakness and a pastoral concern that the church needs to address. A church like the MCSA that emphasizes the theology of the priesthood of all believers needs to rethink the pastoral role of its lay members at times such as when a family loses a loved one. Such losses might happen in child-headed families where the pain of losing the only sibling who has been the anchor of her younger siblings is hard to fathom. The words of comfort such as the ones cited above would bring a sense of oneness with Christ at that moment of great loss. For the body of the deceased to leave the house in silence would be daunting and overwhelming.

The words or terminology used to refer to a deceased person, as will be spelled out below, are helpful to understand the need for the church to review the importance of reciting the words of the burial rite liturgy right at the beginning of the loss of a Christian. In the last chapter of this study some attention will be devoted to examining some of the hindrances that could be in

405 These informants are residents of Tlhabologo Village, Mahikeng. They were interviewed on January 9th, 2009 and January 4th, 2011, respectively.
the way of introducing the use of this important aspect of Methodist burial liturgy at this early stage.

*The Commencement of Mourning*

Mourning is generally the period during which grief is socially expressed through the observance of certain rituals and taboos related to the death of a family member or next of kin. While it is directly as a result of grief caused by death, mourning also has a close association with *sefifi*. Those who are in a state of grief because of loss through death are separated from others through structured ways and taboos. As indicated above, widows and widowers are the most affected. However, as will be shown later, Barolong widows are subjected to more restrictions and the observance of more taboos than their male counter-parts.

Gennep has described the mourners as a special group. He writes:

During mourning, the living mourners and the deceased constitute a special group, situated between the world of the living and the world of the dead, and how soon living individuals leave that group depends on the closeness of their relationship with the dead person. Mourning requirements are based on degrees of kinship and are systematized by each people according to the special way of calculating that kinship (patrilineally, matrilineally, bilaterally, etc.) it seems right that widowers and widows should belong to this special world for the longest time; they leave it only through appropriate rites and only at a moment when even a physical relationship (through pregnancy, for example) is no longer discernible.\(^{406}\)

Mourning is one of the main features of burial rites, and while it affects more profoundly the family that has experienced the loss, it is expressed in ways that also involve the community. Mourning also highlights contradictions inherent in the beliefs about death, life after death, and the care that both church and community are supposedly called upon to show towards the

bereaved. Arnold van Gennep, one of the leading anthropologists in the field of rites of passage, has described the complexity of mourning thus:

Mourning, which I formerly saw simply as an aggregate of taboos and negative practices marking an isolation from society of those whom death, in its physical reality, had placed in a sacred, impure state, now appears to me to be a more complex phenomenon. It is a transitional period for the survivors, and they enter through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society (rites of the lifting of mourning). In some cases, the transitional period of the living is a counterpart of the transitional period of the deceased, and the termination of the first sometimes coincides with the termination of the second — that is, with the incorporation of the deceased into the world of the dead.\textsuperscript{407}

As I shall show later the period of mourning is more strictly imposed upon the widow than the widower. Taboos placed upon her exceed those placed upon her counterpart. The rites of separation that Gennep refers to are more prolonged for the widow than for the widower. What I have stated here was confirmed by informants and it is also my observation and knowledge.

It was important to ask the informants about the commencement of mourning, and the response was the same across the board: it starts immediately after death has occurred and continues for weeks or months after. As soon as the message reaches the wider family, neighbors and friends, appropriate steps to institute symbols of mourning are followed. The role of family, relatives and neighbors is critical in this regard. The effect of grief incapacitates the family to the extent that they are unable to immediately effect the necessary mourning symbols and action. The first mourning action takes place within the house and the yard where death has occurred, that is, at the place where the funeral will be held. The house is prepared to reflect the mood of mourning. Sihlangu’s observation is also true about what happens among Barolong of Mahikeng:

\textsuperscript{407} Ibid., 213-4.
The cleansing of the house consists of items such as emptying the living room of all the furniture so as to give more space for the people coming for condolence, removing all decorations, turning over the pictures in the rooms and removing all calendars from the walls in order that the house should breathe the atmosphere of mourning and distress by making it appear unusual. Even a passer-by may notice it without question.\textsuperscript{408}

It is not only the cleansing of the house that happens. The curtains are removed and the windows are smeared with ashes. However, this practice is slowly disappearing. The removing of furniture in the living room still happens a great deal.

This is a custom that seems to be more associated with convenience than a ritual. As Sihlangu avers, space needs to be created in the living area of the house for people who will be giving condolences at different times of the day. Further, evening prayers held every day in most cases happen in the living area. When the living area proves to be too small for people congregating for the evening prayers, a tent is usually pitched extending from the front of the main house. The practice of removing all decorations and mirrors or turning them around to face the wall is widely observed.

The bedroom of the deceased also receives attention. All the clothes of the deceased are collected and put in one place. Where there is a closet, they are left there for safe-keeping. In cases of poorer families, the clothes are collected into suitcases and bags and kept in a safe place within the bedroom. From that moment on a white candle is lit and stays lit day and night until after the funeral per agreement of the family. The candle is lit irrespective of whether there are electrical lights in the house or not.

If a husband is survived by his wife, the bed is also removed and the mattress is placed on the floor of the bedroom for the widow to occupy until after the funeral. The same applies if it is

\textsuperscript{408} Sihlangu, “Death and Its Effect on the Community”, 97.
a daughter or son who has passed on. In the case of the deceased being the mother, the eldest
daughter or daughter-in-law occupies the mattress. In other families the custom of placing the
mattress on the floor is not adhered to; it seems to be slowly on the wane. However, the elderly
view this as the betrayal of cultural mourning customs. During this stage of mourning the widow
is confined to the house for most if not all of the time. If she has to leave the house, for example
to go to the toilet if it’s outside the main house, she does so accompanied by at least one of the
women sitting with her in the bedroom. In most cases it is the elderly women who accompany
her when she leaves the room. All the consultations with her about the funeral and funeral
arrangements are made with her in the bedroom where she is confined most of the time.

The widower takes his place at the kgotla. A chair is set aside for him and no one is
allowed to occupy it. One of the relatives is assigned to make sure that no one else sits on the
chair. A black piece of cloth is tied around one of the legs of the chair to indicate that it is
assigned for the widower. Unlike widows, widowers seem to have free movement more than
widows. The reason for the difference can only be explained in terms of how patriarchal societies
are prone to restrict the freedom and movements of women compared to those of men.\textsuperscript{409}

Both elderly and young informants when asked whether mourning is still observed
generally in Mahikeng indicated that it is still observed, especially by widows. Elderly
informants were adamant that what they regard as traditional ways of mourning should be
upheld. However, the majority of young people between the ages of 20 and 30 years and young
adults between the ages of 30 and 35 years expressed a different viewpoint; they maintained that

\textsuperscript{409} See Mercy Amba Oduoye and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, eds., \textit{The Will To Rise; Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa} (Maryknoll; Orbis Books, 1992), 61.
some of the mourning symbols should be transformed or abandoned completely.

Mourning is also expressed communally. The role of the community in expressing solidarity with the bereaved family is perhaps a common phenomenon in Africa, and Barolong of Mahikeng are therefore no exception to this practice. However, there are unique ways in which communities express their solidarity with the bereaved family. Sheppard’s study among the Bangwaketse of Botswana captures similar activities found among Barolong of Mahikeng:

During the days leading up to the burial the bereaved are always in the company of comforters and neighbours, relatives and friends come to help with the household tasks. They sweep the lolwapa and the houses, fetch water, bring wood and cook food for the household and the close relatives who are expected to stay at the bereaved household. It is customary for such a comforter not to greet people on arrival, just to enter and sit down quietly; similarly on departure a person does not say the customary “go siame” (OK) they just leave silently. Everyone who comes to sympathise contributes what they can, either a gift of money, flour, oil, sugar etc. for cooking. All such contributions are carefully recorded in a notebook kept by a trusted helper. This formal visiting and contributing following a death is called Matshediso (consolation to the bereaved).410

While Sheppard might have thought these activities only begin days before the actual day of the burial, they commence as soon as the community learns of the passing away of one of their members. It is not only a gesture of giving assistance where it is needed — it is also a way of participating in an effort to relieve the family of the burden of dealing with the pain of loss as well as communal mourning. The loneliness which prevails in the family from the time of the loss is made less burdensome by the presence of family, friends, neighbors and members of the community as they come in to help with the chores and engage in conversations about life in general. It is maintained that it is unhealthy for the bereaved, especially the widow or widower,

to be left alone and to soak in their pain without anyone to talk to. This explains why women of
mature or ripe age and peers join the widow as she is confined to her mattress, to engage her in
ordinary conversation. Similarly, the widower is joined by elderly men and peers in the *kgotla* to
do likewise. The presence of accompaniment during loss is in no way meant to interrupt the
bereaved from contemplation on the loss of their loved one.

The different ways in which widowers and widows observe mourning is mentioned only
briefly in the foregoing pages. More space needs to be devoted to this subject here to analyze
further how the observance of mourning by widowers and widows is structured differently. My
impression is that somehow mourning rituals are the same for those affected. This is reflected in
Gennep’s statement that “During mourning, social life is suspended for all those affected by it,
and the length of the period increases with the closeness of social ties to the deceased (e.g., for
widows, relatives).”

Apart from a plethora of literature on widowhood, in the biblical material and different
cultures of the world (including Africa), my observation and interaction with informants
confirmed that even among Barolong of Mahikeng widows observe mourning differently from
their male counterparts. The degree to which mourning rites are observed by widowers and
widows varies from one culture to another.

Explanations on why widowers and widows go through intense mourning are offered by
a number of authors. Puckle says that:

> In view of the sacred association of man and wife as expressed by the bond of
> marriage, considered as it was as indissoluble and sacramental, we shall
> expect to find mourning of a widow for her husband as bound by special

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411 Arnold van Gennep, “Rites of Passage,” 214.
conventions, and this especially so in days when the thought of a second
marriage for the woman would be looked upon with great disfavor and
suspicion.\textsuperscript{412}

Another explanation as to why widowers and widows go through mourning more
intensely than other members of the family is of a religious nature rather than cultural:

In any community, whatever its particular religion and culture may happen to be, the
celebration of a marriage is a joyous occasion. This joyful note is to be found in the “the
Form of Solemnization and Matrimony”, …yet the crucial declaration, made by each of
the two human beings that are being wedded, contains the phrase “to love and to cherish
till death do us part.” These words are outspoken not only about the painful fact that both
parties to the marriage are going, one day, to die. They are also outspoken about the still
more painful fact that, save for the exceptional possibility that husband and wife may die
simultaneously by some physical accident or by murder, one or other of them is going to
suffer pain of bereavement — a pain that is far more grievous than the ordeal of one’s
own death for a wife or a husband who does truly cherish his or her partner in
marriage.\textsuperscript{413}

Notwithstanding what these authors cite as reasons for intimate participation of both
widowers and widows in mourning, the argument is that ritually speaking widows are affected
more intensely by the liminal period than widowers. I can only surmise that the reason for this
status quo is part of the patriarchal engineering of culture. I believe it is the role of the Church to
address the prevalent burden placed upon widows by culture.

The contribution of a group of younger informants that I interviewed in Masutlhe was
equally of value to this study. Their critique of some of the rituals befits mentioning here. There
is no doubt that the younger generations do not necessarily understand and appreciate the
meanings and social significance of some of the rituals, primarily due to processes of cultural

\textsuperscript{412} Bertram S. Puckle, \textit{Funeral Customs: Their Origin and Development} (London: T. Werner Laurie Ltd.,
1926), 89-90.

\textsuperscript{413} Arnold Toynbee, A. Keith Mant, Ninian Smart, John Hinton, Simon Yudkin, Eric Rhode, Rosalind
change. Pat Jalland laments the same “fate” about the lack of understanding in the mid-nineteenth century that many associated with “the last Judgment, Heaven and Hell — subjects of profound significance.”414 His conclusion that cultural change alters meanings attached to certain beliefs (and rituals) is a principle that applies in all cultures. There is evidence that to some extent this is not totally the case with Barolong where, as in most African communities, cultural beliefs around death and rituals have endured. The widespread belief in ancestors with its variations is a typical example here.

But not all culture change is bad. In conversations with younger informants, they expressed an appreciation of the values that some aspects of rituals sought to uphold, such as ditatolo which seek to reinforce family, communal and social values. Other rituals such as the mourning dress and the burial period imposed on widows were labeled as unnecessary in the modern day, oppressive and patriarchal. These rituals subject women to confinement while men do not go through the same process.

The recovery of some of the genuine Setswana burial rites was an argument worth raising; one point raised was whether mourning dress was genuinely Setswana, or even African for that matter. Young people argued that the black mourning dress is one of the elements of European culture that was introduced to and adopted by African Christians from the time of the missionary era. Since then its use was widespread and came to be wrongly regarded as African in origin.415

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415 Pat Jalland argues that it is a misconception that “Victoria has been represented as the archetypal Victorian mourner, whose influence on the nineteenth-century mourning behaviour was ‘supreme.’” Jalland explains the misconception. Whatever the reasons, it is conceivable that Queen Victoria’s 20-year chronic mourning period would greatly influence her subjects, even in the mission field. See his “Victorian Death and its Decline,” 230-255.
Libuseng Lebaka-Ketshabile’s research conducted among Basotho women revealed that during mourning, Basotho used what was called *thapo* (a rope or thread) to symbolize mourning by close relatives of the deceased. The widow wore this rope “around her waist underneath her clothing.”\(^{416}\) This was also the practice among Batswana. The symbol of widowhood was not a visible garment as it is today.

When it comes to how mourning should be expressed, it became clear during empirical research that there are two differing positions, with a gap between the elderly and young people. The elderly feel that mourning rituals should be accompanied by a sense of solemnity and serenity, and this was expressed particularly by those in their seventies and older. They believe that the respect for the person who has died has to be expressed through solemnity and serenity in their presence. The younger generation agreed that there should be respect for the deceased and the bereaved family, but their understanding of “respect” differs from that of the elderly. For them respect is not only confined to serenity but also by doing the things that the deceased loved to do as part of his or her expression of the joy of being a Christian. The younger generation of informants expressed their conviction in jubilant singing of hymns and choruses during a funeral of a Christian, especially a young person, as part of paying the last respects to him or her.

*The Funeral Procession*

Burial processions to the cemetery or a place demarcated by the family for the burial proceed from the home where the funeral service was conducted, immediately after the sermon

and the benediction. The procession is led by ministers and some local preachers. However, the processional route is largely determined by the elders of the family in conjunction with the undertaker. The point from where the procession starts and ends is an important traditional ritual. The procession takes a route designated by the elders. Upon conclusion of the service at the place of burial, the procession follows the same route to return home. As part of the rituals, all those who went to the place of burial are expected to return to the home using the same route. While this practice is not adhered to by some (for different reasons), it is still generally observed. This ritual observance is related to *sefifi*, discussed above. To have used a different route before they have ritually washed their hands and feet would mean contaminating other routes in the village, causing those routes to become polluted with the possibility of death. Further, it has the connotation of having not completed the process of burial. The burial is completed when one has gone back to where the burial started, by participating in the ceremony of hand washing that takes place at the place where the burial services started.

*Church Participation*

I have already alluded to the participation of the church in some of the processes of *ditatolo*. This participation varies in degrees at the different stages of the rituals. But the church’s participation is present right at the beginning when the leadership is informed about the death of one of its members. There are instances when the minister’s presence is desired during the last moments of a person in this life.

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417 It would seem that the practice of the processional route originated from the hole in the kraal or in the wall of the hut or *lolwapa*. Those who took the body to be buried in the kraal through the hole made in the encampment of the kraal would have exited the kraal through the same hole after the burial for the ritual to be complete. The same would apply to those burying in the *lolwapa*. It can only be presumed that if it was a child buried inside the hut, there would be cleansing by those inside at the entrance before leaving the hut.
From the side of the membership of the church, the minister is trusted to console the family during such moments. Therefore when death happens during his or her presence, it is entrusted upon him or her or the representative of the church to pass on the message to the faith community to which the deceased belonged. There is no time set for the church to announce the death of one of its members. It does happen, more often than not, that when a church member dies on a Saturday or in the early hours of Sunday morning, or even a few hours before the commencement of the Sunday service, the family would inform the minister or the stewards. The church leadership is informed at this early stage so that an announcement may be made during the church service. One of the reasons for this custom is to ensure that the message reaches as many people as possible before the funeral, and to alert the community of the sorrow that has befallen that particular family. What this means is that informing the next of kin, the church and the community happens concurrently. The chief or his representative in the area and the ward councilor are also informed accordingly.

Elderly informants also confirmed that the church bell played an important role in informing the community that a Christian had passed away. The role of the tolling church bell is also attested to by reference to it in a burial hymn in the Setswana hymn book. The hymn was written by Ezekiel Tamenti, a prominent Methodist hymn writer who was a Morolong of Mahikeng. In the second verse of hymn 352, Mr Tamenti incorporates the role of the church bell in his theology of death and resurrection:

\[
E\text{ re tshipiya tatolo fa e Tanya,} \\
E\text{ latola ditsala dingwe tsa rona;} \\
Mo\text{ nakong ya bofelo loso lo tsile,}
\]

Translation:
When the bell of announcing death tolls,
Announcing the passing away of some of our friends,
In the final moments when death has come,
Jesus, the Lamb of God, Hear us.

Informants aver that the bell would ring at midday, and once heard, church members in the village gathered to come and hear who had died and to pray for the departed soul and the bereaved family. The meaning of tolling the bell at midday should be understood in the context of the significance of that time of the day. In the African conception of time, particularly among Basotho and Batswana people, midday is a uniquely sacred time, a “sacred” hour. It was understood that the ancestors were agents of divinity. While all time was considered sacred, midday was regarded as the time of the ancestors. All work had to be suspended in order to give the ancestors their space to pervade social space. It is a symbolic time set aside for the ancestors, who deserve “intense respect”, and are “most senior of all.”\footnote{Setiloane, \textit{The Image of God}, 31.}

While there is no documentation that informs as to why the church bell was tolled at the time linked to the ancestors, here we see an example of inculturation, whether conscious or not. We cannot be certain that the ritual was a conscious inculturation, but it is interesting to observe that the person who died, particularly one who had lived “a good life after the example of Christ,” would have been perceived to enter the realm of heaven at the time associated with the ancestors whose sacred hour was midday.
Whether the missionaries, who introduced the church bell, understood the significance of tolling the bell at that time of the day, and how the decision was reached to ring the bell at that time of day, are questions whose answers might never be found. Further, it must be considered that tolling the church bell at midday would have drawn the attention of the inhabitants of the village easily when most activities would be at their lowest. If the missionaries and converts were conscious of the significance of midday time and its association to the ancestors, it is also probable that tolling of the bell at this time was meant to give new meaning to this time of the day in association with the death of believers. The moment of the ancestors was now to be replaced by acceptance of the believer into God’s presence and not that of the ancestors.

Whether this would be conceived of by Batswana is debatable, for they could have also understood the tolling bell of the new religion during the time associated with the pervasive presence of the ancestors to be an acceptance and confirmation that those who died, whether they be Christian or not, all belonged to the realm of ancestors.

According to Puckle, the tradition of ringing the bell after the death of a person was part of burial rituals in England. He explains that “Its object was to call attention to the fact that a soul was ‘passing’ into the next world, and asked your prayers.” However, this was not the only function of the “passing bell.” Puckle further explains the other reason for the tolling of the bell: “it was believed that the ringing of the bell frightened the ever-present evil spirits, who

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Bertram S. Puckle, *Funeral Customs*, 82. Puckle’s study will be referred to constantly in parts of this chapter. He provides useful information that compares to a large extent with some of the characteristics of burial rites among Barolong and in most contexts in Southern Africa. While it could be suspected that some of the features that he describes could have found their way into African contexts through the missionaries, there is no definite confirmation that it was all through missionary influence. Some of the similarities, as will be observed in this chapter, seem to be due to the nature of patriarchal societies. This fact will become evident when we examine mourning customs.
would be making a special effort at the moment of death to obtain possession of the soul.”

Clearly, both in the culture of the evangelizers and the evangelized, the tolling of the bell had connections to their cultural milieus.

People in Mahikeng do not seem to have any sort of explanation as to why the tolling of the bell disappeared. Puckle’s conclusion about the disappearance of the ‘passing bell’ seems to be the only plausible explanation for the situation in Mahikeng. About England he writes: “Today, it is true that the passing bell might toll unheeded — if it could be heard at all, above the hooting of motors or the grinding machinery — and few would stay a moment at work or pleasure to ‘wing’ a kindly thought to a soul passing to Eternity.”

Most funeral services take place at the homes of the deceased. However, when a funeral service is arranged to take place at the church, society stewards, especially the elderly ones, volunteer to ring the church bell where there is one. The Methodist Church as it were does not have in its burial liturgy the tolling of the bell, nor are there any guidelines on the manner in which the bell should be rung on the occasion of a funeral.

However, observation has revealed that on the occasion of a funeral service the bell is tolled in a unique fashion, different from the way it is done on a Sunday morning. The bell is tolled a few minutes before the funeral procession enters the church premises and once or twice after the procession has entered the church, just before the service commences. Puckle makes reference to the Scottish tradition that was called the “soul bell,” which helps clarify this way of tolling the bell during a funeral service. He says that according to this tradition, “It was possible

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421 Ibid.

422 Ibid., 84.
to tell by the sound of the ‘soul bell’ if it was rung for an adult, or for a child, for in the former case the tenor was sounded and in the latter, the treble.” He goes on to explain that “It was, moreover, customary to distinguish the sex, by tolling three times for a man and twice for a woman, followed, after a pause, by a stroke for each year corresponding to the age of the deceased.” What resonates with what seems to have been a common practice in Mahikeng, and perhaps in other Methodist Churches elsewhere in Southern Africa, is what has been explained above, namely that, a bell is “seldom heard till the procession is in sight of the church, when its solemn note at minute intervals denotes the arrival of the body for burial.” It is therefore not amiss to conclude that the tradition of tolling the bell in connection with death and burial was introduced during the missionary era, although in a modified fashion, and became part of the tradition of the African Mission Churches. In places like Mahikeng the tradition is not observed strictly due to the many funeral services that are conducted at the homes of the deceased. Nevertheless, older informants concur that the tolling of the church bell played a role in alerting the community that one of their members had died.

The church does not only announce the death of its members. Deaths of persons related to church members are also announced, whether they are affiliated to the Methodist Church or any other denomination, so long as their names are brought to the attention of the leadership of the church. It is the practice that after the names of the deceased are announced, a moment of silence is observed, preceded by the singing of a verse or two of a relevant funeral hymn.

423 Ibid., 82-83.
424 Ibid., 83.
Evening Prayers

The participation of the church before the day of the burial is significant, especially during evening prayers. The order of services during these services is somewhat informal, in the sense that no specific formal liturgy is used.\footnote{Compared to other Protestant denominations, Methodism allows creativity and is less rigid in following its official liturgies.}

A careful analysis of the importance of the evening prayers reveals the importance of these services from the perspective of the African worldview. While traditionally in the past the burial took place after two or three days with rituals that catered for that context, Christianity and the circumstances of modern times seem to have introduced another element to burial rites. Evening prayers are more than for offering condolences to the bereaved — they also play the role of ensuring a good send-off for the deceased. The speeches during the evening services demonstrated this fact. The deceased is addressed in the first person and is often praised for the good life he or she has lived in the service of Christ and his/her fellow human beings. Messages of condolence and prayers are not only therapeutic; they also have the element of initiating the spirit of the deceased into a peaceful life of future existence. There is almost what seems like an intentional effort residing in the subconscious to make sure that everything that pertains to the burial leaves healthy memories, assuring those who stay behind that their loved one has no regrets about his or her faith and the community to which he or she belonged. Everything from the time of the passing away and the burial should be a celebration of entry into what John Wesley called Paradise.
Bringing the Corpse home for Burial

On Friday afternoon or the afternoon following the day of the funeral, the body of the deceased, which has been kept in the mortuary, is brought home in the afternoon. The body has to reach home before sunset for it is regarded a taboo for a corpse to arrive home after sunset. Involvement of the church during this process is undefined. Informants, some of them preachers, explained that in some cases the family requests to be accompanied by a local preacher to fetch the body from the mortuary. The role of the preacher would be to offer prayers at the mortuary before the body is led into the hearse. According to informants, this is the exception rather than the norm.

The usual practice is that the local preacher waits at the home for the arrival of the body from the mortuary. Once the hearse has arrived at the home where the funeral service will be held, the body is carried into the house. At this stage the local preacher walks in front of the body reciting the words of the burial liturgy: “I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives in me shall not die eternally.”

Once the body has been placed appropriately in the room that has been prepared for that purpose, a hymn is sung and prayers offered. Some preachers choose to offer a brief word of comfort to the family and those who have come to ‘receive’ the body. These proceedings are generally conducted with great serenity and solemnity. The benediction is pronounced and notices made about the vigil and other important information about the funeral service the following morning. Once the body is in the room two candles are lit. One candle is placed at the head of the coffin and the other at the feet.
The informal practice of leading the corpse into the house by the preacher upon arrival is an important burial ritual among Barolong. They maintain that the body of the deceased is still among the living who have the responsibility of making sure that it is embraced by the community and ceremoniously brought into the house for the last time where the deceased lived. The moment of the last appearance of the body of the deceased in his or her home evokes pain and griefs. The role of the church during that time is to continue to offer the message of assurance of the comforting presence of God and hope in a future life with the Living Christ.

*The Day of the Burial*

The day of the burial is a significant moment that encompasses all the rituals that mark the final separation between the living and the deceased person. For Christians it is an occasion when the community of faith gathers together to “console the bereaved and commend the deceased to God.” 426 But it also a time when the whole community, Christians and Non-Christians alike, take part.

The official burial liturgy of the church is read fully on the day of the burial. As I have noted earlier all the other engagements of the church relative to the events surrounding death are not guided by formal official liturgy: they are entirely dependent on the person who leads the services. However, there is a generally accepted pattern of worship which has come to be followed by Methodist preachers and leaders of the organizations within the church.

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The Preparation

It is the practice in Mahikeng for funeral services to start at 7am, be it winter or summer. At the start of the service the coffin is brought outside the house after a hymn and a short prayer in the room where the coffin was kept overnight. The coffin is led by the minister or officiating local preachers who recite the words “I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall not die eternally.” The coffin is placed in front of the house, or at an appropriate place arranged by the family. The coffin is placed in the east-west position, which is also maintained when the coffin is kept in the house overnight. The significance of the east-west position is associated with the resurrection, but is also connected to the Tswana-African worldview that maintains that the east represents new life, while the west represents the dawn of darkness and the termination of life.427

Eulogies

It is a common practice in Black Methodist Churches that funeral programs are finalized in consultation with the local minister (or the local church leadership). This is to ensure that funeral programs are not unnecessarily long and are representative of the funeral norms of the church. As in most funeral programs, eulogies are a dominant feature. These happen during the services of the church for burial.

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427 This belief system is evident in the manner in which a traditional healer or a herbalist digs his or her herbs. They face to the east and not the west. At the very least they will face north. While this belief would be regarded as superstitious by the modern mind, in the Tswana cosmology sequences in nature such as the rising and the setting of the sun communicate certain meanings, from which lessons for life are drawn and life is ordered.
This study has paid attention to the content of the speeches that are made during funeral services. The contents reveal some interesting concepts that reflect beliefs mentioned earlier, such as beliefs in the afterlife and ancestors. What was more intriguing is that the themes that surface during some of the eulogies reflect popular theology, as opposed to the theology that is prominent in funeral sermons that speaks to the promises of God to those who die in the Lord and life eternal that God prepares for all those who respond to God’s love.

One feature that emerges at funeral services is what one could call grassroots theology. This is a theology that is neither orthodox, that is, nor systematic, nor learned from books. The “grassroots” theology often reflects a mixture of the doctrines of the church and the African worldview of the individual rendering the eulogy. Most speakers refer to the death of an individual as “God’s death,” that is, a death willed by God or a death that has occurred at God’s wishes. Such faith utterances are made even when in private and informal discussions - people express bewilderment and doubts about the probable cause of the death.

After narrating how they have experienced the deceased in this life, speakers express their belief that God will grant him or her eternal peace. Most eulogies conclude with addressing the deceased as if he or she was physically attentive to what is being said: utterances like 

*tsamaya sentle* – go well; *o badumedise fa o tsena ko o yang teng* – greet them when you arrive at your destination; *O seka wa re lebala fa o tsena koo* – do not forget us when you reach your destination. In the case of a husband or wife of an elderly person one often hears words like, *re tla go tlhoka, o sekawa re latlha* – do not forget us, we will need you.

The significance of these utterances points to a belief in the afterlife which God prepares for all. They are also a reflection of people’s belief in a continued relationship with the deceased.
It is obvious that inferences are made here to the existence of the deceased in the realm of ancestors. At this stage though, no reference is ever made to the deceased as ancestor. The reciting of the deceased’s totemic praise song is another important element pointing not only to “grassroots” theology but also to the elements of the African worldview relative to death and burial.

My conclusion is that reciting the deceased’s totemic praise song during the church burial service has come to be seen as a confirmation of the church’s recognition that the deceased has not only joined the company of the Triumphant Church but also the company of the clan. These two aspects would seem to present a contradiction to orthodox theology. However, for Barolong Methodists the scenario does not present a conflict of beliefs.

What I refer to as “grassroots theology” is absent in the official liturgy of the church. The Methodist burial liturgy makes no reference to the deceased person except indirectly during the committal when the deceased’s name is mentioned.

_Sermon_428

One of the characteristics of the Protestant Reformation was emphasis on the centrality of preaching. The sermon came to be a critical part of a Christian worship service, with the pulpit occupying a prominent place in the sanctuary. This tradition continued through the Evangelical Revival and Evangelical Christianity to the present day. Generally the use of liturgy in the

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428 It is a common occurrence nowadays that the preacher does not get ample time for preaching. This is primarily due to unnecessarily long burial programs that feature main speakers who take most of the time leaving very little time for the preacher. All the informants pointed to the lack of enough time given to the preacher as a weakness at most funerals today.
MCSA can be described as “low church” in comparison to the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglicans. Therefore in the MCSA preaching occupies a prominent place.

It is not surprising that funeral services in the MCSA have retained and cherished this tradition. During the evening prayers before the day of the funeral, preaching and singing occupy the better part of the one-hour services. Then on the day of the funeral it is expected that the preaching part of the ritual crown all that is performed. It is the centerpiece of the ritual activity on the occasion of the funeral, the singing being the handmaiden. What follows is an analytic summation of the twenty (20) sermons that I listened to during the research.

The dominant themes that emerged from the sermons that I listened to were around what John Wesley referred to as social holiness or scriptural holiness. By social holiness John Wesley meant that Christian life is incomplete if it is only meant love for God without love for the neighbor. In relation to this Methodist theological conviction, the theme of “Ubuntu” is often implicitly re-sounded as the true quality of being Christian. The application of the Gospel to the deceased Christian life is often in reference to his or her faithfulness to God through his or her commitment to the life of the church, neighbors and the community. The life that the deceased lived in faith becomes a witness to the listener as an example of a true life of faith in Christ.

The Methodist burial liturgy is fully employed on the day of the burial. A word on the Methodist Setswana burial liturgy is appropriate here. It is not certain when the Wesleyan Liturgy was adopted for use in South Africa, but it is most likely that it was introduced by the first Wesleyan missionaries, although none of their records make reference to its use in the early beginnings of their missionary labors. What is more than certain is that Wesley’s liturgy was adopted for use in South Africa; see the English, Xhosa and Tswana hymn books as evidence.
The Setswana Burial liturgy resembles in great measure that of John Wesley referred to in chapter 3. Wesley’s liturgy of 1784, which is still being used today, to a great extent contains Methodist beliefs and teachings about death. However, an important question should also be asked: at what stage could this have been introduced to Batswana? In the absence of any specific information about the introduction of the Wesleyan liturgy to Southern African and to Barolong in particular, I can only estimate that the Methodist liturgy first reached Southern Africa in 1816 when Barnabas Shaw, the first Wesleyan Missionary to South Africa, reached the shores of Cape of Good Hope.\textsuperscript{429} He would have used this liturgy in his ministration to the congregation of the English soldiers in the Cape and as he crossed frontiers into the interior. From here on other Wesleyan missionaries would have used the same liturgy as their work expanded in the various part of their missionary field.

Appendix A shows the liturgy used by Methodist people in Mahikeng and all Tswana-speaking congregations of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. The purpose of this is to compare the Methodist liturgy with the original Wesleyan version. The left-hand column is John Wesley’s original version of the burial liturgy. The Setswana burial liturgy is almost a replica of Wesley’s burial liturgy. There has been no formal liturgical inculturation or contextualization in the Setswana liturgy of burial. Where the two versions differ, it is indicated with a note in bold. The right-hand column of the table represents the earliest revised version of the British Methodist Church. The readers’ attention is drawn to the vast difference between the two columns, and where the Setswana liturgy is located in that equation.

Then, the important question is: what should distinguish the Methodist Church from other churches as far as burial rites are concerned? It is my contention is that the Methodist liturgy and doctrines of death and life should distinguish it from other churches. Ultimately the inquiry into how the gospel is being inculturated in this context should rest heavily on what the Methodist Church professes to believe in and the rites it employs.

*Reading of messages*

At all the funerals that the researcher attended for observation, a time was allowed on the funeral program for the reading of *melaetsa* — messages. This takes place after the sermon. The literal meaning of *melaetsa* is a message given to a person by another to give to another person. Most *melaetsa*, while they convey condolences to the bereaved, are also addressed to the deceased. Expressions such as *Re lebogela godiso ya ga ga* — we are grateful to you for having brought us up and caring for us as your children; *O re ngwegetse* — you left us unexpectedly. The literal meaning of *O re ngwegetse* is “you left secretly without alerting us.” Other expressions commonly used are: *Re tla nna re go gopola* — we will always remember you and *O se ka wa re lebala fa o tse na ko o* — don’t forget us when you get there. This message in particular implies the expectation that the deceased is on a journey to join the company of those who are alive beyond the grave. It calls upon the deceased to ask the ancestors to always remember their kin who remain in the physical world. All in all these expressions reveal the desires of family members and kin to stay in relationship with the deceased. They also reveal the belief in the afterlife. *Melaetsa* have become an important part of Barolong burial rites. It must be noted however that when there is not enough time for the reading of the messages, only the message from the widow or widower and children will be read. It is considered important that
the message from the family be read since it expresses their last words to the deceased, at least during the funeral service.

*Singing during the Funeral*

Singing of hymns and contemporary choruses pervade the church’s participation in burial rites. They are regarded as an important part of the burial ritual. When it comes to the manner of singing at funerals, especially on the day of the burial, the understanding of serenity and solemnity is different in the younger and older generations. The majority of the older generation believes that singing should not be loud and should not be accompanied by any musical instruments. For the younger generation, jubilant singing and the use of African instruments are part of a hopeful send-off. They argue that the Western world uses the piano and other musical instruments during funerals — why not use indigenous instruments that express African spirituality?

Notwithstanding the sentiments of the elderly, who prefer solemn singing, the style of singing at funerals and during evening prayers during the week have largely taken on the spirit of the African way of singing. These changes were spontaneous — they are not the result of some conference resolution giving a directive as to how the Africanization of styles of worship should take form. They are a matter of “enacted theology” Explaining what this theology entails Daneel asserts that it “can hardly be described as systematized, written theology based on abstract reflection as is common in the West. Instead, it is an enacted theology, written in song and dance, in rhythm of dance feet, in serving hands of healing and exorcism, where worship and
proclamation give expression to the presence of God. This “enacted theology” is evident during funerals of Methodist members. While there are official Methodist hymns for funerals where theological themes are sound and sequential, there are choruses that the congregation spontaneously sings. This spontaneous singing usually takes place during the filling of the grave with soil by men.

The original composers of these choruses are not known. They seem to be a result of collective African Christian creativity. Evident in these choruses are expressions of a popular theology prevalent across different denominations in Mahikeng. They are not only in Setswana but also in Sesotho and Nguni languages. This is an indication that the choruses are sung beyond Mahikeng and representative of a popular theology among Christians in Southern Africa. Their rhythmic melody propels a systematic stamping of the feet, the beating of the drum or generally a small cushion that looks like a small pillow called biti — “the beat.” It plays the role of the African drum and facilitates the harmonious stamping of the feet and movement of the singers. Theological themes evident in these choruses are often a combination of biblical images about repentance, death and heaven and do not exhibit dogmatic or conventional theological sequence of any form. The two examples of some of the choruses sung during funerals suffice to illustrate the point just made. The first example is that of an isiXhosa chorus:

\begin{verbatim}
Ndodana yami edukileyo buyela kimi ekhaya
Ngimile apha eJordane
Abanye baya wela
Abanye bamile baqele izoono zabo
Abanye baya wela; baya wela-wela
\end{verbatim}

\footnote{430 M. L. Daneel, “Holistic African Theology — Enacted Theology in Rural Zimbabwe” in \textit{Center for Global Christianity and Mission}, Number 3, (September - October 2007): 1.}
Translation:
My lost son return home to me;
I am waiting here at the Jordan.
Others are crossing over;
Others stand by to confess their sins
And they too cross over the Jordan

In this chorus is the invocation of the story of the Prodigal son as recorded in Luke 15: 11-31. The focus of the chorus is on the Prodigal son’s father who waits for him to return and welcomes him home. Theologically, it can be summarized that reference to the Jordan symbolizes the crossing over into a land of promise and new life. Death is likened to returning to God, but confession of sin and a contrite heart are necessary to inherit eternal life.

The second example is that of a Sesotho chorus:

Modimo o re file sebakanya se, le motsotsonyano o — God has granted us this time and this moment.

The line is followed by a transition to another line that seems totally unrelated to the previous one.

Le nna ke tla ba teng ha ba tsena ka kgoro — “I will also be there when they enter through the Gate.”

The meaning of these two lines refers to God’s grace that sustains us every day and every moment. It is the same grace that gives one the confidence to make it possible to enter into the gate of “the New Jerusalem.” Also what is implicit in the chorus is an appeal to live according to God’s will in order to inherit the Kingdom of heaven. The themes of God’s grace and confidence of entering heaven are intertwined.

In Methodist circles singing in the African style has become an important element of burial rites. In large measure, jubilant singing among Methodists has been affirmed by
the dictum that “Methodism was born in song.” One of the informants, a woman in her mid-forties, from Tlhobologo village, Mahikeng, believes that: “When there is lack of jubilant singing at a funeral, in our African way of doing it, the pain of losing a loved one is even greater.”\textsuperscript{431} This sentiment is against the backdrop of solemn singing perceived by some elderly people to be the “Christian” way of singing which they regard as symbolic of mourning and grief. However, for most Barolong, jubilant singing lessens the weight of the pain and creates a sense of appreciation of the life of the deceased and the impact he or she has had on the life of the faith community. The moment of jubilation also creates a sense of experiencing a foretaste of the New Jerusalem spoken of in Revelation 21, where there is no pain and suffering.

Jubilant singing stands in contrast to the missionary era where on many occasions missionaries discouraged dancing and singing, which would have been loud, in preference to the European style of singing that was serene and quiet. The manner in which Africans sang and danced to their traditional chants was considered heathen and unchristian, and efforts were made by the Wesleyans to discourage it. Remnants of this thinking are still evident today, especially among the elderly.

When it comes to how mourning should be expressed, it became clear during interactions with informants that there are two differing positions, namely that of the elderly and that of young people. The elderly feel that mourning rituals should be accompanied by a sense of solemnity and serenity. They maintain that in jubilant singing, the sense of experiencing death as an event that cannot be accepted as a normal part of life is lost.\textsuperscript{432} They believe that respect for

\textsuperscript{431} This was the opinion of Caroline Mooki, A resident of Tlhobologo Village, Mahikeng.

\textsuperscript{432} Also see Smart, \textit{Death and the Decline of Religion in Western Society}, 142.
the person who has died has to be expressed through solemnity and serenity in their presence, which should also be expressed through “mournful singing”. This sentiment was expressed more fully by Mrs. Sebekedi, a staunch Methodist. She commented that: “This noisy singing takes away the dignity of funerals. It is a new thing and should not happen during my burial.”\textsuperscript{433} It is the norm that a desire such as that of Mrs. Sebekedi is honored, but only during the official proceedings of the funeral. Once the coffin has been lowered into the grave, it is almost impossible to stop funeral attendees from bursting into joyous singing — it is more so in the case of people like Mrs. Sebekedi who have been faithful to the church and a source of strength to many. Their send-offs are celebrated with great joy and praise.

\textit{The Unveiling of Tombstones}

Pat Jalland has this to say about the role of the grave in England during the Victorian period:

\begin{quote}
The grave in the cemetery became a site for remembrance and for meditation for many Victorian families, helping to evoke a sense of closeness to the deceased and to perpetuate their memory. Much care was taken in the choice of an appropriate tombstone to mark the burial place and provide the site for future remembrance, especially on anniversaries. Visiting these graves was a vital source of consolation for many bereaved, especially when the new garden cemeteries outside the city centres provided a peaceful rural setting.\textsuperscript{434}
\end{quote}

Jalland’s historical overview of the significance of the grave and the use of a tombstone to mark the site of the grave is similar to the current Southern Africa context. The reasons that he cites for the visitations to the cemetery would equally make sense to an African in Southern Africa and the subjects of our study. But one can only go as far as Jalland’s explanations go to

\textsuperscript{433} She was interviewed on December 17\textsuperscript{th}, 2009 at Tloung Village, Mahikeng.

accept that these visitations are all that he says they are. To go beyond the explanation he offers would require a “thick description.”

While the reasons that Jalland has enumerated for the visitation of graves by the Victorian English are commensurate with Barolong’s reasons for erecting tombstones and visiting the graves of their loved ones, there seems to be something more to what they do. At one of the funerals I attended, after which there was immediately the unveiling of the deceased’s tombstone, a senior local preacher, Ntebogang Matlholwa, who conducted the service said: “Ba gaetsho, letlapa e tlanna se suposa gore motsadi o amuwa a sule” — “beloved, this tombstone will become a symbol that a child is able to breast-feed from his or her parent even though the parent has died.”

This is a profound Setswana expression that captures the relationship that continues to exist beyond death. The preacher went on to exhort the children never to forget that their mother, though dead, is alive and that the tombstone will ensure that they do not forget where they have laid her. At another unveiling of a tombstone, Everest Booi was much more explicit and did not mince his words. He declared: “Beloved, we as Africans believe in ancestors and there is no point in denying it.” On both occasions the response from the congregation was affirming. There were no objections raised after the two services regarding the message. I attended a number of unveiling of tombstone services, whose message content did not differ that much from the two cited above.

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435 A number of Methodist Churches in White communities in South Africa have gardens of remembrance within the premises of the church. I am made to understand that this is where, at times, ashes are scattered by families after the cremation of their loved ones. Walls of remembrance are also erected where families put plaques in remembrance of their deceased family members. Most of what Jalland states seem to apply in the case of the gardens of remembrance.
What emerge in the services of the unveiling of tombstones are the themes of remembrance, community cohesion and sustaining the link between generations. The concepts of Sasa and Zamani as expounded by Mbiti seem to make sense more profoundly in the community during the unveiling of tombstones. The tombstone or any other form meant to identify the place where a family member has been laid serves to take the surviving relatives into the past, with which they can go into the future. To do that, says Ross Mooki one of the informants: “It’s like going all by yourself having forgotten the rest of your people.”

Dignity at Funerals

During field work and interaction with informants, the theme of the need for funerals to be dignified was raised on several occasions. A number of elements were mentioned that characterized what people believed would entail a dignified funeral. The first element of a dignified burial is the respect that should be given to the deceased person. One of the younger informants, Mheedi Molefi, put it this way: “When someone is alive they have the right to be treated with respect and the same should pertain when they are no more — before burial and after because they never cease to exist.” This statement is telling as far as belief about the afterlife is concerned and has bearing on the belief that the ancestors have to be respected. The understanding of respect for the one who is being buried is culturally expressed through observing the correct burial rituals or fulfilling the wishes of the deceased person about how the burial should be conducted.

The behavior of those who have come to attend the burial also defines whether a burial is dignified or not. Cooperation among family members about how the burial will be conducted and

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436 He was interviewed on December 15th, 2009 at Tlabologo Village, Mahikeng.
between all the stakeholders taking part in the burial arrangements (for example, between the church and the family) are all part of ensuring that a burial is dignified. The manner in which the church conducts the burial contributes towards what is characterized as a dignified burial. At the core of it, a dignified funeral is about the harmonious relationships among all those involved in preparing and actualizing the burial, so that all those who have departed get the proper send-off that they deserve.

*Easter Memorial Services.*

Easter memorial services are held every year during Easter church services. During the years 2005 to 2008 I observed that memorial services were held on the evening of Easter Friday. The theological significance of conducting services on Friday evening is not clear. What is apparent is that a memorial service during Easter is connected to the death of Christ and his resurrection. The deceased are remembered and their families, kin and the Christian community are comforted. The lives of the deceased are remembered and celebrated as part of the triumphant church. In this regard Mogoba’s statement resonates with the reasons for memorial services during Easter. He says “Africans, as a rule, have a total belief in the resurrection of Jesus and His continued life among us. Easter is not a time to rationalise about the plausibility of the resurrection; it is a celebration of the victory of Christ over death.”

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437 Among Barolong Methodists and in all black congregations of the MCSA, Easter services are big occasions for celebrating the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Hundreds to thousands of people congregate over the Easter weekend for these services. The service of the seven words of Jesus on the cross and the Sunday morning resurrection service are the main highlights.

438 Mogoba, *Convicted by Hope*, 5.
Memorial services are at times attended by family members and friends who were not able to attend the funeral of their deceased member. Therefore the memorial service is a type of a “funeral service” for them. In a sense it is a therapeutic moment, but also a symbolic moment where they are able to fulfill one’s duty to say farewell to the deceased. Further Easter memorial services reinforce the theme of community that cuts across and transcends boundaries between those who died as members of the church in good standing and those who were not. The names of all those whose burials were conducted by the church are called out. At the end of this process a sermon is delivered that emphasizes life in Christ beyond in the grave and hope of the resurrection of all.

Cleansing Ceremonies

Informants confirmed that the rites of cleansing are still widely observed. They serve to purify the negative force of sefifi. The cleansing serves to defeat the evil effects of death and to restore proper relationships of the living with the deceased. It is important to note that the cleansing ceremonies take place after the burial. The deceased, with the Christian send-off, is now understood to be in paradise or in heaven where there is no pain or death, in the land of the ‘living dead’. The living must therefore restore the relationship with the deceased, who is now no longer a threat to the living. From an anthropological perspective, Van Gennep alludes to cleansing ceremonies by stating that: “The rites which lift all the regulations (such as special dress) and prohibitions of mourning should be considered rites of reintegration into life of
society as a whole or of a restricted group; they are of the same order as the rites of reintegration for a novice.”

Conclusion

In the case of Barolong, the ritual complex of funerals is the outcome of the interaction between Christian beliefs and the African cultural milieu. The scenario is easily felt in places like Mahikeng, where the coming of Christianity (as was demonstrated in Chapter Two) was not completely alienated from the tribal authorities.

However, it is also evident that there are still customary burial practices and values associated with them that still persist. Some of the burial practices have been modified, in part due to Christianity and modernization. Be that as it may, Barolong Methodists have reworked Methodist burial practices to make sense in the context of their understanding of the Christian meaning of life, life after death and the resurrection and their African cultural milieu. There are also aspects of Barolong customary rites of burial that co-exist with those of the Christian Church. The “Old and New” exist side by side.

Inculturation and contextualization cannot be ruled out as among the strong drivers of the dynamism which, although gradual, is continually shaping church practice. Sometimes changes in practice are regarded as desirable by some and undesirable by others. What is evident, though, is that the “harmonious” relationship that exists between culture and church practice and the assimilation that have taken place so far are not guided by the church with intentionality. They have been ad hoc and accidental.

439 Arnold van Gennep, “Rites of Passage,” 214.

The evidence has so far illustrated a subtle marriage between cultural practice and church practice. There are distinctive ritual practices that are clearly a result of developments within the church (like night vigils, praying at the grave before the lowering of the coffin, and singing around the grave) and others that spring from the broader African cultural milieu. The two have learned to exist side by side, whether viewed by the church as negative or otherwise.

I suspect that when Barolong Methodists go to a funeral they expect a certain routine, although they do not necessarily pause to reflect upon its significance; it is simply part of what is expected. Divergences are not necessarily registered in the psyche of Barolong Methodist, and the same applies for the denomination. Official positions neither acknowledge nor negate the cultural rituals that are observed during a funeral conducted by the church. It is only when something unusual happens that questions are asked about whether this or that is Methodist or “part of Barolong tradition”. This kind of awareness is valid, but does not necessarily ask questions about inculturation and contextualization or address theological and pastoral implications of the practices adhered to. It is my conviction that it is only through intentional dialogue and engagement that authentic inculturation and contextualization can genuinely take place.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

This study explores the contextualization of burial rites among Barolong within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. The findings of the investigation show that the MCSA has not undertaken formal contextualization of burial rites among its Barolong members, and that the Methodist service book generally follows that of British Methodism. Nevertheless, informal adaptation to Barolong culture has taken place.

The historical genesis of Methodism among Barolong, through the work of Wesleyan missionaries in the 1800s, shows that in Mahikeng Methodism became a strong movement largely in the hands of local leadership. Mahikeng became the “headquarters of Methodism” in the western areas of South Africa. Indigenization of Christianity took place in a church that was led by members of the royal family who valued many of their traditional ways of life, while at the same time maintaining allegiance to missionary theology and styles of worship. While the legacy of missionary theology and styles of worship are still visible today, this study has shown that Barolong Methodist practices reflect significant inculturation of Methodist burial rites.

The contextualization of burial rites has always been part of the life and mission of the Christian church. The Book of Common Prayer by Thomas Cranmer in medieval England in 1549, which included among other liturgies the adaptation of former evening and morning prayers for the departed that were developed over the centuries leading to the rise of Protestantism, was a response to contextual challenges and needs. Methodist burial rites

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441 In Chapter One it is pointed out that David Bosch’s definition of contextualization is used in this study. He maintains that contextualization consists of two dimensions: the liberation and inculturation aspects. The term inculturation is used here as a dimension of contextualization. The term Africanization is also used as part and parcel of inculturation; see Chapter One of this study.

442 It is not clear as to when the first Methodist liturgy in Setswana was printed. What is documented is that the first printing of the Bible in Setswana began in 1839 in Thaba Nchu where Rev. Archbell was the missionary.
developed by John Wesley in 1784 and subsequent editions by the British Methodist Church all point to the fact that contextualization of burial rites has always been a missional priority of the Christian church.

This study has illustrated that Methodism among Barolong of Mahikeng conforms to the tradition of the Christian church as to the inculturation of burial practices. Among Barolong Methodists of the MCSA, Africanization has taken place informally, without either control by the clergy or standardization of practices in the service books of the denomination. The study has identified a number of areas where this informal contextualization is already taking place, the first being the evening prayers at the home of the deceased. Barolong Methodists introduced evening prayers at the home of the bereaved family after death is announced. These evening prayers are a significant pastoral ministry that the church offers to the bereaved family. In conducting these evening prayers, the church also gathers the community together to express condolences and support for the family during their time of loss. The MCSA has not given formal affirmation, guidance and recognition to this important part of the rites of burial of its members. The pattern of the order of service that has evolved out of the creativity of members of the church who conduct these services has not been formally incorporated into the official rubrics of Barolong Methodism.

In the preceding chapter it was noted that when a person dies at home and the body is taken from the house to the hearse, portions of the Methodist burial liturgy are recited: “I am the

443 In 1982 the Conference of the MCSA appointed a commission to “define Africanization in relation to the functions of the Church with particular reference to worship, teaching, preaching, sharing the gifts, building the body, and Christ in the world.” See Minutes of Conference 1982, 221. In my recent conversation with Rev. Dr Mogoba, who was the convenor of the committee, he explained that the work of this committee did not go too far, but it was able to influence the revision and publication of Sepedi (Northern Sotho) service book which included a service for the unveiling of tombstones.
resurrection and the life, says the Lord; he who believes in me though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall not die eternally.” It was observed that this portion of the liturgy is also recited when the corpse is brought home from the mortuary on the afternoon prior to the day of burial. The practice of bringing the corpse into the house upon arrival from the mortuary, followed by conducting a short prayer service thereafter, are important parts of the burial ritual among Barolong Methodists. Equally important is what has been referred to in the preceding chapter as “the preparation.” The formal Setswana Methodist burial liturgy does not make provision for a prayer by the minister or local preacher in the room where the corpse is laid overnight, before it is carried to the place where the funeral service will be held. The informal provision for a hymn and prayer at this point marks the beginning of the final journey of the deceased from his or her physical home toward the home of the Church Triumphant. This symbolic moment of the beginning of the disappearance of the physical presence of the deceased from among his surviving family members is a significant moment for the bereaved. Extempore prayers said during this time usually include supplications like “God we call upon you to journey with your servant as he or she finally leaves his or her temporal abode.”

How do these practices relate to inculturation? Here is seen the Africanization of Methodist burial rites by Barolong Methodists. Among the Nguni-speaking people of South Africa, especially the AmaZulu, the deceased person is addressed when he or she leaves his or her home or the place where the body has been kept. The person is addressed or spoken to, telling him or her that they are leaving the house to go to a mortuary, or back home from the mortuary, or home to the cemetery. In each case, the deceased is spoken to explaining what is
happening as if the person were alive. They are addressed in the first person. It is believed that the person’s spirit is alive and present and needs to be informed about what is happening to them.

The custom of addressing the deceased is not found among Batswana. However, they use expressions like *motho ga a tswe ka setu* and *motho ga a tsene ka setu*, both of which mean: a person does not enter nor leave the home without saying anything. Another expression is *motho ga a didimalelwe* – one cannot remain silent in the presence of another person. In the African worldview these expressions in the first place seek to communicate the deepest conviction that communication with another human being — present in this life or not — is an important part of existence. Therefore, when a person is deceased, communication with him or her does not cease. Secondly, the expressions distinguish human beings from animals (to which it is impossible to speak).

Therefore, in the researcher’s view, the reciting of parts of the burial liturgy by Barolong Methodists when a deceased person is moved, as discussed above, meets a need to “fill a vacuum” created by the absence of the traditional rite of burial that caters for communing with the deceased. This assertion is not to suggest that the Christian faith is used to blindly endorse a cultural practice or desire which is unchristian. Rather, the recitation of prayers at key moments in the burial rites should be seen as cultural accommodation. It is through the creativity of Barolong Methodists that this informal ritual provides an important ministry to the bereaved family where their loved one does not leave their company in silence.

An informal inculturation is also seen in the graveside prayer just before the interment. Barolong regard the grave as an important place where the deceased will be laid – the place of the remains of one who sooner or later will be regarded as an ancestor. In the African worldview
the grave is a place of reverence. Customarily the grave would be sprinkled with appropriate herbal medicine as a symbol of “setting it apart” for burial. This practice has been transformed by the Christian faith with emphasis on the power of prayer. Thus, instead of using herbal medicine Barolong Methodists have replaced this “sprinkling of the grave” with prayer asking for God’s blessings upon it, before interment with prayer. The notion of “setting the grave aside” or consecrating it is evident in the prayers said at this point. Those who are called on to pray for the grave always mention that the grave is not “an ordinary house” though “built with human hands” — it is a place where the deceased will await the day of the resurrection.

Related to the “consecration” of the grave is the singing of the Apostles’ Creed during the lowering of the body into the grave after the committal. Firstly, I regard the sing of the Creed as an expressed desire by Barolong Methodists for the deceased not to “depart in silence” without “being spoken to.” In one sense the congregation sings with the departed Christian, whose remains now disappear from their sight. The continued communion between the living and the departed will continue to be sustained and kept alive by their common relationship in Christ on both sides of the grave. Secondly, in the researcher’s view, the most important statement about the singing of the Creed is that the action points to one of the most creative and profound theological significations with which Barolong Methodists enrich Methodist burial rites. This is a moment when the whole community of faith, together with the bereaved family, affirms their faith in the Risen Lord and belief in the assurance of the resurrection of those who believe in Him and the truth of Life Everlasting. This form of mutual enrichment and transformation between Christian teaching and Barolong worldview should be appreciated and incorporated into the formal burial liturgy of the MCSA.
The unveiling and dedication of tombstones has for a long time been an important part of the life of African members of the MCSA. I believe this phenomenon demonstrates the value which the African members of this church attach to remembering their living-dead, and the importance of ensuring that generations to come can identify places where their ancestors were laid to rest. I am of the opinion that the practice of unveiling tombstones is grounded in the biblical and theological understanding of life after death by African members of not only the MCSA but also of most AMCs.

The lack of the existence of a liturgy for the unveiling of tombstones is therefore another example of the lack of paying serious attention to cultural issues and the worldview of the African Christian. My feeling is that because the unveiling of tombstones was not part of the European Methodist liturgy that was adopted for use in the Southern African context, it automatically meant that it was not regarded as an important part of the worship life of the church that needed to be developed for the African context.

What is disconcerting is that the absence of an official liturgy creates a situation in which the risk of an uninformed theology is highly possible. It is left to the local preachers to determine, without any reference or direction, how these services should be conducted and what theology should inform the message and the manner in which they are conducted. Nevertheless, the creativity of ministers and local preachers in conducting the unveiling of tombstones should also serve as a resource for crafting a theology and official liturgy of the church. I believe that a careful analysis of scriptures, sermons preached at the unveiling of tombstones, speeches

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444 It is only recently that the MCSA has considered revisiting vernacular liturgies for burials and to develop liturgies for the unveiling of tombstones. These efforts are, however, very slow and lack being informed by engaging local communities. It is hoped that this study will make a contribution towards these efforts.
delivered at such occasions, and the order in which these services are conducted, should form the basis upon which the necessary theology and liturgies could derive their direction. The critique or affirmation of these activities should be used to inform the contextualization of what has already proved to be an important part of being a Christian in the Southern African context.

In the light of the areas of informal inculturation outlined above, that are already taking place among Barolong Methodists and which are responsive to the pastoral needs and aspirations of Barolong Methodists, this study recommends that the official rubrics of Barolong Methodism be aligned with the informal contextualization already visible in contemporary Barolong Methodist burial practices. It is evident that contemporary practices reflect the pastoral needs and aspirations of Barolong Methodists, and they are not in conflict with the official theological teaching of the MCSA on life, life after death, and the resurrection.

Further, the study recommends that the MCSA be proactive and consider which aspects of traditional Barolong burial practices still need to be formally critiqued and transformed in the light of Christian theology, and aligned with the official burial practices of Barolong Methodism. It is my contention that taboos and cleansing rituals associated with widowhood are some of the features of Barolong burial practices that need critical assessment of their negative socio-cultural impact, particularly on widows, and the need to transform them.

Finally, this study recommends that given the multicultural context of the MCSA, the denomination should embark on an intentional program of equipping its ministers and lay-workers for contextualizing the Gospel in a multicultural context. Such equipping should train and encourage church workers to document narratives of their experiences and observations in cross-cultural settings in relation to the different aspects of ministries, such as burial rites. These
narratives should be used by the official church as sources of information on where and how the 
church should modify the formal liturgy. I believe that this recommendation is in line with the 
MCSA’s Mission Charter which, among other calls to mission, commits to “Training Ministers 
for the African context.”

I call upon the MCSA to take to heart Sidbe Sempore’s call to the African Church to 
remember calls for African Theology in the 1960s and 1970s (a time he refers to as the Romantic 
Period). He reminds us that during this period:

We experienced the need for struggles and slogans to make clear our determination to 
take charge of the future of our church. We needed to decolonize ourselves spiritually, to 
shake off the psychological yoke which kept us bowed before the theological 
“imperialism” of the West. We no longer wanted our theological bread to come to us 
ready-cooked in European and American ovens. From being mere consumers we wanted 
to become producers of theology, our own theology. Therefore we had to demand loudly 
the right to put our own label on what we produced.

Evidence does not seem to show that much has happened formally within the AMCs as far as the 
inculturation of liturgy is concerned since the time Sempore made this clarion call. It is about 
time that the MCSA revisits Sempore’s call for Barolong Methodism.

The lack of the formal adaptation of Methodist burial rites among Barolong Methodists 
could be an indication of an endemic struggle of the MCSA to make the importance of 
contextualization in African contexts a priority. It is recommended that the MCSA invest 
financial resources to facilitate a process whereby the official rubrics of Barolong Methodism are

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445 The Conference of the MCSA sitting in Johannesburg on 30th August 2005 adopted a Mission Charter 
outlining critical areas of mission for its context in Southern Africa. The Mission Charter was the outcome of a 
Mission Congress held in Umtata in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. For the full text of the Charter see 
Appendix C.

446 Sidbe Sempore, “Conditions of Theological Service in Africa: Preliminary Reflections,” in Christianity 
aligned with contemporary practices. The adaptation of religious practices to the cultures and needs of its people is an important part of the life and mission of the church. Efforts of the local church to inculturate the ministry of the church need to be supported by the mother body.

In conclusion, the MCSA should take pride in the fact that in the twenty-first century it is an autonomous church with its own theologians of both African and European descent, some of whom are genuinely committed to a church that is truly African. I say this recognizing that for a long time the denomination has been under the authority of European leadership. The legacy of that time has not entirely given way to calls for an African theology brewed in African pots. However, Methodist theologians and practitioners need to be cautious of what Dana L. Robert has called “colonial lament.” In the context of contextualization, I see this “colonial lament” as a kind of paralysis which seems to imprison the church in a mentality that refuses to break away from missionary theology and colonial polity. The irony of it all is that in some quarters of the church, especially the indigenous black section of the MCSA, practices that arose out of missionary theology and polity are sometimes uncritically defended by maintaining that they are part of our “Methodist tradition” or “are part of our culture.” Statements such as these can only be interpreted as advocating blind adherence to tradition rather than a mutual transformation of Methodist and Barolong traditions.

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APPENDIX A

JOHN WESLEY - 1784

The Order for the Burial of the Dead

The minister meeting the corpse, and going before it, shall say:

I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die. John 11:25,26.

I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin. Worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another. Job 19:25-27.

We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we carry nothing out. The Lord Gave and the Lord hath taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord. 1Tim 6:7, Job 1:21

Setswana Liturgy adds: Psalm 39, before the next one.

Then shall be read Psalm 90

Then shall follow the lesson taken out of the fifteenth chapter of the first epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians.

1 Cor. xv. 20 (1Cor 15:20-58)

Setswana Liturgy adds the following:

i. Singing of a hymn
ii. Sermon or Prayer

At the grave, when the corpse is laid in the earth, the minister shall say:

Man that is born of woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up and is cut like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.

In the midst of life we are in death; of whom may we seek for succour, but of thee o Lord, who for our sins are justly displeased.

Yet O Lord God most holy, O Lord Most mighty, O Holy and most merciful Saviour, delivery us not into the bitter pains of eternal death.

Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts; shut not thou merciful ears to our prayers, but spare us, Lord most holy, O Lord most mighty, O holy and merciful Savior, thou most worthy Judge eternal, suffer us not at our last hour for any pains of death to fall from thee.
COMMITTAL

When the body is laid in the earth or on the catafalque, the people standing, the Minister says:

Setswana adds the following (which is also contained in the 1975 English Service Book of the MCSA — see Appendix B):

EITHER

Forasmuch as our brother has departed out of this world and Almighty God in his great mercy has called him to himself, we therefore commit his body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust (OR, to the elements, ashes to ashes, dust to dust), in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen

OR

Forasmuch as our brother has departed out of this life, we therefore commit his body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust (OR, to the elements, ashes to ashes, dust to dust), trusting the infinite mercy of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(The following are contained in John Wesley’s burial liturgy of 1784, Setswana and English Service Book of 1975).

Then shall be said
I heard a voice from heaven, saying to me, writes; From henceforth blessed are the dead who die in the Lord: even so saith the Spirit for they rest from their labours.

Then shall the minister say
Lord have mercy upon us
Christ, have mercy upon us
Lord, have mercy upon us.

Our Father, who art in heaven; hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven: Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us; And lead us not into temptation; But deliver us from evil. Amen.

The Collect
O merciful God, The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life; in whom whosoever believeth shall live, though he die: and whoever liveth and believeth in him, shall not die eternally: We meekly beseech thee, O Father, to raise us from the
death of sin unto the life of righteousness; that when we shall depart this life, we may rest in him; and at the general resurrection on the last day, may be found acceptable in thy sight, and receive that blessing which thy well-beloved Son shall then pronounce to all that love and fear thee, saying, Come, ye blessed children of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world. Grant this, we beseech thee, O merciful Father, through Jesus Christ our Mediator and Redeemer. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us evermore. Amen.
APPENDIX B

METHODIST SERVICE BOOK — MCSA, 1975
(An adopted version of the 1936 Book of Services of British Methodism)

The Minister, meeting the body and going before it, says one or more of these sentences, the people standing:

I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall not die eternally.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

I am the good shepherd . . . My sheep hear my voice and I know them . . . and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.

Because I live, you will live also.

In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

To thee, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in thee I trust.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor requite us according to our iniquities.

If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again,

that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

Our Saviour Christ Jesus abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

2. A hymn may be sung.
3. One of these prayers may be said:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, the Lord of life, the conqueror of death, our help in every time of trouble, comfort us who mourn, and give us grace, in the presence of death, to worship you, that we may have sure hope of eternal life and be enabled to put our whole trust in your goodness and mercy, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
Heavenly Father, whose love is everlasting, help us now to turn to you with reverent and submissive hearts, that, through the steadfastness and encouragement that the Scriptures bring, we may have hope, and be lifted above our distress into the light and peace of your presence; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty God, our refuge and strength, you have given us a High Priest who understands our human weakness. Help us therefore to trust in him and come with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace in time of need, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Ministry of the Word

4. The minister may say
We are met in this solemn moment to commend ….. into the hands of Almighty God, our heavenly Father. In the presence of death Christians have sure ground for hope and confidence and even for joy, because the Lord Jesus Christ, who shared our human life and death, was raised again triumphant and lives for evermore. In him his people find eternal life. Let us then in humble trust hear the words of Holy Scripture.

5. This Psalm is said or sung:

Psalm 130
Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord!
Lord, Hear my voice!
Let thy ears be attentive
To the voice of my supplications!

If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with thee,
that thou mayest be feared.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is plenteous redemption.
And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.
6 One or more of these Psalms may also be said or sung: Psalm 23

Psalm 23

The lord is my shepherd,  
I shall not want  
He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me besides still waters;  
He restores my soul.  
He leads me in paths of righteousness  
For his name’s sake.

Even though I walk through the  
valley of the shadow of death,  
I fear no evil;  
For thou art with me;  
Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me  
In the presence of my enemies;  
Thou anointest my head with oil,  
My cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall  
Follow me all the days of my life;  
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Psalm 103: 8-17

The Lord is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.  
He will not always chide,  
nor will he keep his anger forever.  
He does not deal with us according to our sins,  
nor requite us according to our iniquities.  
For as the heavens are high above "the earth,  
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;  
As far as the east is from the west,  
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.  
As a father pities his children,  
so the Lord pities those who fear him.  
For he knows our frame;  
he remembers that we are dust.  
As for man, his days are like grass;  
he flourishes like a flower of the field;  
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.  
But the steadfast love of the Lord is 
from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear him, 
and his righteousness to children's children.

7 One or more of these passages of Scripture are read, the people being seated.

John 14: 1-6, 27

'Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way where I am going.' Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.'

1 Peter 1: 3-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, un-defiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls.


Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.
But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' You foolish man!

What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body.

I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

'Death is swallowed up in victory.'
'O death, where is thy victory?
'O death, where is thy sting?'

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.

Romans 8 28, 31b-35, 37-39

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.

If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

8. *These or other passages of Scripture may be used: Psalm 90, 2 Corinthians 4: 16-5: 10, Revelation 7: 9-17, Revelation 21: 1-7.*
9. A sermon may be preached.

10. The Apostles' Creed may be said

    I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
    I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
    He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
    and born of the Virgin Mary.
    He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
    was crucified, died, and was buried.
    He descended to the dead.
    On the third day he rose again.
    He ascended into heaven,
    and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
    He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
    I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of
    saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life
    everlasting. Amen.

Thanksgiving

11. The Minister says

    Let us pray.

    Praise and honour, glory and thanks be given to you almighty God, our Father, because in
    your great love for the world you gave your Son to be our Saviour, to live our life, to bear
    our griefs, and to die our death upon the Cross.

    We praise you because you have brought him back from death with great power and
    glory, and given him all authority in heaven and on earth.

    We thank you because he has conquered sin and death for us, and opened the kingdom of
    heaven to all believers.

    We praise you for the great company of the faithful whom Christ has brought through
    death to behold your face in glory, who join with us in worship, prayer and service.

    For your full, perfect and sufficient gift of life in Christ all praise and thanks be given to
    you forever and ever. Amen.

12. This or other prayers may be said

    Eternal God, in your wisdom and grace you have given us joy through the lives of your
    departed servants. We thank you for them and for our memories of them.
We praise you for your goodness and mercy that followed them all the days of their lives, and for their faithfulness in the tasks to which you called them.

We thank you that for them the tribulations of this world are over and death is past, and we pray that you will bring us with them to the joy of your perfect kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

13. A hymn may be sung.

Commendation

14. The people standing, the Minister says:
   Let us pray.
   Merciful God, you have made us all and given your Son for our redemption. We commend our brother (* ) to your perfect mercy and wisdom, for in you alone we put our trust. Amen.

* Baptismal Name

15. The Lord's Prayer: Our Father ...

16. When the whole service takes place in a crematorium chapel the Minister proceeds immediately to the Committal.

17. Otherwise the Minister may say:
   May the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

18. The Minister going before the body to the grave, or at the crematorium, may say one or more of these sentences:

   As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

   The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

   Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction.
To this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

We know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens.

**Committal**

19. *When the body is laid in the earth or on the catafalque, people standing, the Minister says:*

Forasmuch as our brother has departed out of this life and Almighty God in his great mercy has called to himself, we therefore commit his body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust (OR, to the elements, ashes to ashes, dust to dust), in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen

OR

Forasmuch as our brother has departed out of this life, we therefore commit his body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust (OR, to the elements, ashes to ashes, dust to dust), trusting the infinite mercy of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

20. *Then the Minister says:*

I heard a voice from heaven saying, From henceforth blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; even so, says the Spirit; for they rest from their labours.


Merciful God, our heavenly Father, who made your I Jesus Christ to be the resurrection and the life, raise we pray, from the death of sin to the life of righteousness that when we depart this life we may with this our brother be found acceptable to you; for the sake of your S Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God world with end. Amen.

*These prayers may also be said:*

Father of all, we pray for those whom we love, but see no longer. Grant them your peace; let light perpetual shine upon them; and in your loving wisdom and almighty power work in them the good purpose of your per will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty God, Father of all mercies and the giver of all comfort, deal graciously with those who mourn, that they may cast every care on you and know the consolation of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all evermore. Amen.
APPENDIX C

THE CHARTER OF THE MISSION CONGRESS

ADOPTED BY THE CONFERENCE OF THE
METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA
IN JOHANNESBURG ON THE 30th AUGUST 2005

Where there is no vision the people perish.
Where there is no passion the vision dies.

God has given us the vision of

"A Christ healed Africa for the healing of nations."

As members of the Methodist Family our challenge is to share more deeply God’s passion for healing and transformation.

We believe the Holy Spirit is guiding us to continue the pilgrimage which has led us through Obedience 81 and the Journey to the New Land to the present day.

We recognise the importance of the local church and rejoice in the many Circuits and Societies where life-giving mission is taking place.

In trust and obedience we commit ourselves anew to the four imperatives for mission in our time:

1. A deepened Spirituality as individuals and a Christian Community.
2. Justice and Service in Church and Society.
3. Evangelism and Church growth which build up the people of God.
4. Empowerment and Development which give dignity and new purpose to those who have been deprived.

We resolve to take intentional and sustained action to implement these imperatives in such areas as:

1. The Healing Ministry.
2. Deepening our understanding of African and other Spiritualties.
3. Co-ordinated programmes for Christian Education, information and communication.
4. Building meaningful relationships that transcend racism, sexism and all other forms of discrimination.
5. A vigorous response to the crisis of HIV and AIDS
6. Informing our prophetic ministry by research into socio-economic issues.
8. Sacrificial giving.
9. Becoming a church in solidarity with the poor.
10. Providing training in evangelism
11. Training Ministers for the African context.
12. Implementing Anti-Bias training.

We invite the people of God throughout Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland, to join us as we put ourselves at God’s disposal to carry forward God’s mission in this sub-continent.

Let us each renew our personal commitment to Jesus Christ and seek to grow in grace and in love for God, one another and the world.

Let us ensure that our mission of healing and transformation is holistic, embracing all the imperatives for mission.

Let us participate in God’s mission in ways that are appropriate to our local contexts and in partnership with the wider church and community.

Let us celebrate our diversity and the gifts God has given to each of us; support each other, challenge each other and pray for each other.

Finally, we encourage every Circuit to set aside the last Sunday in May each year to celebrate what God is doing among us and to commit ourselves once again to our high calling in Christ.

God bless this Africa which is our home.
   Give us grace to follow
      Jesus the healer,
      Jesus the peacemaker,
      Jesus the Saviour of the world,
      Jesus the Lord of all life.
   Restore us and make your face shine on us
      That we may be saved.
APPENDIX D

LIST OF INTERVIEWS


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Montshiwa, Sech (Ms.), village elder, traditional herbalist, member of the royal family. 2004. Tlhabologo, Mahikeng. September 18.


Seremo, Jacob (Mr.), society steward, local preacher, village elder and member of the chief’s council. 2005. Interviewed by author. Tape recording. Tontonyane, Mahikeng. September 23.
Seremo, Leungo S. (Mr.), society steward, local preacher, primary school teacher. 2009. Interviewed by author, January 9. Tlhabologo, Mahikeng

Seru, Maletsapa (Ms.), retired biblewoman, village elder, and member of the royal family. 2004. Interviewed by author, September 18.


APPENDIX E

BURIAL RITES QUESTIONNAIRE(S).

The following questions are designed to collect information on traditional burial rites practices.

Announcing Death
How was death announced to:
Next-of-kin and community?
Children of the deceased?
Were there any changes effected inside the house of the deceased?
What happened to the clothes of the deceased immediately after his/her death?
What happened to the clothes of the deceased after his/her burial?
Were there any rituals performed?
If any, what was the significance of these rituals?

Ritual Associated with the grave
Who marked the place where the grave was to be dug?
Who dug the grave?
When did the digging of the grave take?
Were there any rituals performed for the digging of the grave?
Who performed these?
Were there any rituals performed after the burial?
Who performed these?
What was the significance of these rituals?

The following questions focus on practices that related/relates to the relatives of the deceased
What is the meaning of “sefifi” (uncleanness caused by one’s association with the deceased)?
What is significance of wearing “thapo” – mourning dress?
Who wears it and when?
Who performs this duty?
When is “go apola thapo” – (the removal of the mourning dress)?
After how long is it removed?
Who performs this duty?
Are there any rituals for the removal of the mourning dress?
What is the significance of “go beola”- (removing of the hair as sign of mourning)?
On who is the ritual performed?
Who performs the ritual?
Do people on mourning dress have freedom of movement?

Places and Times of Burial
Were there different burial places and times for:
Chiefs, their wives and children
Adults
Children
People who died because of:
  Lightening
  Drowning
  Suicide
  War
  Stillborns
  Other causes.

Twin brother/sister, etc.

What burial rituals were performed?

Were children allowed to attend funerals?
How long did it take before the corpse was buried?
What was used to wrap the body for burial?
Who was responsible for this task?
Were corpses buried with any items?

What direction did the corpse face upon leaving the house?
Why?
What direction did the corpse face upon entering the grave yard?
Why?
What direction did the corpse face inside the grave?
Why?

The Funeral

Who attended the funeral service?
Who led the funeral proceedings?
Who was the key person during funeral proceedings?
Were there any meals prepared for those who attended the funeral?
Were the meals prepared and eaten in a special manner?
If so, what was the significance?

The following questions are designed to collect information from persons/families who have had death in the family. The difficulty with these questions is that they might tend to imply that the respondents are treated as subjects rather than as informants.

Was there a special person to mark where the grave was dug?
Did anyone in the family wear the mourning dress?
How long did they wear it?
Was there a special ceremony to end the mourning period?
Was the church involved and how?
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