

**A CRITICAL COMPARISON OF
THE CONCEPTS OF *MODIMO* [GOD]
IN SOTHO TRADITIONAL RELIGION
AND THE CONCEPTS OF THE CHRISTIAN GOD
AS A MISSIOLOGICAL PROBLEM**

Lucas Mogashudi Ngoetjana

Supervisor: Prof. T.S. Maluleke

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy,
School of Theology
University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg,
2002

DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work. The sources used for the construction of this thesis have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has not been presented to any other university for examination, and is submitted for the first time in the School of Theology of the University of Natal for consideration towards the qualification of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

ABSTRACT

This thesis states that the concepts of *MODIMO* [GOD] (Setiloane 1976) in Sotho Traditional Religion are different to the concepts of the Christian God. The notions of *MODIMO* are panentheistic (all pervading), whilst the notions of the Christian God are monotheistic. The notions of *MODIMO* are impersonal whilst those of the Christian God are personal. The monotheistic notions of the Christian God are Hellenized (p'Bitek 1970). The task of this thesis is to de-Hellenize the notions of *MODIMO*.

The Sotho Traditional Religion attributes of deities emphasize their nature and the pragmatism more than their natural and moral attributes. The notions of the Christian God, on the other hand, are conceived through their moral and natural attributes. In addition, the conceptual content of the attributes of the Christian and Sotho Traditional Religion concepts of deities differ.

This investigation seeks to present the *Sotho* concepts of *MODIMO* as *Basotho* would express them, to unearth the *Sotho* concepts of *MODIMO* and to present them with the concern and the consciousness of the syncretistic fusion (Kgatla 1992) that has inevitably happened due to contact with missionary Christianity and western culture. One feature of this contact was coercion and domination, as missionary-colonizers imposed their Hellenized concepts of the Christian God, as well as imposing the British capitalist mode of production on the African agrarian and pastoral communities in South Africa.

The notion of the cultural superiority of western European culture, in which the missionaries and colonizers were immersed, blinded them. This was because of the 'world' from which they came from. Unfortunately, the Christian God they preached to Africans was a strange deity that had no consideration for African people as 'full' humans. The African concepts of *MODIMO* have been resilient and it is possible to unearth them.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A word of gratitude and appreciation goes to the Africa Theological Initiative (ATI) for granting a doctoral scholarship, which award made this work possible. Knowing that there are many other people who work in the ATI circles, I do not want inadvertently to sideline or overlook anybody. I want to acknowledge by name Mr. Solomon Andria and Prof. K. Bediako, who ensured that the scholarship was granted. Though the ATI has been my major sponsor, the ideas presented herein are mine and not those of the ATI.

Gratitude and acknowledgment are also given to the National Research Foundation (NRF) for their support and monetary contribution. Again, the views expressed in this thesis are not theirs but mine. Further, I want to thank them for the part they played in making this research possible. This acknowledgment includes the systems put in place by the University of Natal for assisting students in their pursuit of higher qualifications and for making sure that their ambitions and goals are met.

I am also grateful to all my interlocutors (people I interviewed and those who engaged me in the process of research), research team members and to all those who took part in group discussions. It is impossible to name them all. Thanks for the cooperation, fieldwork information kindly given and efforts taken to let me be their understudy. I wish to thank especially traditional healer Thaubele Jack Motala for the time he took giving me information.

Appreciation is also conveyed to the staff of the School of Theology of the University of Natal. I thank them for their personal concern for this work. I thank them for giving constant supervision and ensuring that this task was accomplished. A special word of appreciation goes to Prof. T. S. Maluleke who, through his reading, criticism, guidance and personal official supervision of this thesis, has been especially supportive. At the beginning of this investigation, the criticism of Prof K. Nürnberger was also outstanding. I thank him for that.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my wife Rebecca Mmatlou, my daughter Precious Regopotjoe and my son Paul Rekgotjoe, for their patience, support and resilience. I thank them for being unrelenting in both spirit and flesh, for caring and for carrying me. Through the support they gave me they made it possible for me, in my alternating absence and presence at home, to bring this work to its final completion.

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CHAPTER 1

1. THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND METHODS OF RESEARCH

1.1. Introduction

The concepts of *MODIMO* [God] in Sotho Traditional Religion [STR] are different from those of the Christian God. It is the intention of this thesis to give an overt comparison of the deities implicated, i.e. the African and the Christian concepts of God, and thus to demonstrate in each chapter, through various topics and sub-topics, that the concepts of *MODIMO* in STR are indeed different from the concepts of the Christian God.

The assumption of this investigation is that, basically, there is no relation or continuity between *MODIMO* and the Christian God. This means that, historically, STR and Christianity originated as legitimate and separate religions, in themselves playing important roles among their own adherents in different geographical and cultural contexts. But this does not summarily preclude the possibility of there being some conciliation of attributes between these deities, for missiological and theological purposes.

Seeing that there is a postulation of a conceptual difference between *MODIMO* and the Christian God, the logical conclusion is that these deities stand in potential contradiction to one another. This will be demonstrated from the perspective of the observation of how the colonial forces conquered the African people in the process of presenting the Christian God and in the presentation of the content of the Christian God. In their presentation of the Christian God,

It was a serious mistake that the Christian [missionaries] took no account of the indigenous beliefs and customs of Africa when [they] began [their] work of evangelization. It is now obvious that, by a

misguided purpose, a completely new God who had nothing to do with the past of Africa [has been presented] ... Thus there was no proper foundation laid for the Gospel message in the hearts of the people and no bridge built between the old and the new; the Church has in consequence been speaking to Africans in strange tongues because there was no adequate communication. As a consequence, the Church has on her hands communities of believers who, by and large, live ambivalent spiritual lives (Idowu 1970: 12; additions mine).

It is with these two Gods, left in the hands of African Christians and people at large, that we are concerned. The concern of Idowu (1970: 12) that African believers have two Gods to reflect on, is the concern of this thesis, as well as to describe the conceptual content of these Gods. This thesis seeks to demonstrate that the 'old' (including concepts of deities in Africa) is different from the 'new' (concepts of the Christian God). Idowu's (1970:12) lamentation is that there should have been some dialogue between the 'new' and the 'old'. Though that dialogue has not been officially or deliberately undertaken, it has existed. Discussion, as well as inter-religious and cultural exchange between the African and the Christian is ongoing.

The concern of this thesis is to unearth the concepts of the 'old' and to show that it is different to the 'new'. This exercise will be a contribution to African theology of African Traditional Religions (ATR). This thesis will not, I hope, be an exercise in African 'Christian' theology - a form of Christianisation of African Traditional Religions to the corpus of Christian Theology, but a presentation of a theology of Sotho Traditional Religion (STR).

In the southern African experience, where STR is practiced, the Christian God was introduced in various ways. Some missionaries were concerned with the conversion of Africans in an apolitical manner. Some were seen to collaborate more with the forces of political and cultural conquest. One of these experiences of the manner of evangelization is expressed as follows:

It is known for Christian preachers to present 'God's' demands, linked closely to 'God's' power and omniscience, in a form of fear-inducing threats. 'Hell' will be the inevitable consequence for those who disobey, and 'Heaven' the sublime reward of those who did well. People are, in effect, bullied (though the preachers would call it exhortation) into submitting to God's demands (Ntwasa and More 1973: 20).

The above is one way in which the Christian God confronted African people in southern Africa. This image of a threatening deity is irreconcilable with the way in which *MODIMO* deals with people. As it will be presented in appropriate parts of this thesis, *MODIMO* is not conceptualized as a possessor of Heaven and Hell, but as both extraordinary, fearsome and wonderful amongst other things (Setiloane 1976).

1.2. Literature Review

Only a few relevant literary works which inform and impact directly on this thesis will be outlined briefly in this literature review. Other works will be used as part of the construction of this investigation, on the basis of the key works identified and reviewed in this section. Most of the authors who wrote on this subject and the debate thereof are discussed in chapter two. This literature review is intended to give an idea of the contents of the sources consulted whilst developing this thesis. The sources are not exhaustive, but are sources from which much was drawn for this work.

1.2.1. Literature Review of the Most Relevant Works

The first two works considered here as primary are, naturally, The Image of God Among the Sotho-Tswana by Gabriel Setiloane (1976), an African theologian, and African Religion in Western Scholarship by Okot p'Bitek (1970), an African philosopher. For Setiloane, the problem of the conceptualization of *MODIMO* versus the Christian God is that the concept of the Christian God is a devaluation

of the concept of *MODIMO*. He says there is more to tell about *MODIMO* than has been said about the personal notion of the Christian God. *MODIMO* is not a personal God (Setiloane 1976: 84). *MODIMO* - IT - *SELO* - is “an attribution of excellence appearing in praises of chiefs” (Setiloane 1976: 84).

MODIMO is *selo se se boitshegang; sa poitshego, se se tshabegang; se se mashwe* (a fearsome, awful, ugly, monstrous thing) ... None of these adjectives deserves the sense of ‘malevolent’ or ‘malicious’ (Setiloane 1976: 1976: 84).

According to Setiloane (1976: 78) the divine ‘being’ *MODIMO* is not the one said to be living in the heavens as the missionaries like Moffat would construe it. The sky (*Iegodimo*) is the expression of and reference to the numinousness (divineness) of *MODIMO*. *MODIMO* is not ‘He who is in the sky’. The sky is the primary reference and manifestation of *MODIMO*. *MODIMO* is the source of *bomodimo* [divinity] and the whole cosmos.

It is a name wholly suitable, in this sense, for the Christian God. Whatever their misunderstanding, the missionaries have not hesitated to adopt this venerable word, which seemed, as it were, only to await their arrival to reascend to its source, and the natives did not dispute the propriety of their so doing (Setiloane 1976: 78).

On hearing the preaching and the explanation of who the Christian God is, the *Tswana* said it was *MODIMO*, their local currency for DEITY. Later, Moffat concluded that the concept of the Christian God is not that of *MODIMO*, i.e. “‘Morimo’ (sic) does not convey to the mind of those who heard it the idea of God” (in Setiloane 1976: 78).

Having come to that observation, Moffat concluded therefore that the *Sotho-Tswana* do not honor God. According to Setiloane (1976: 79), once again Moffat was mistaken in concluding that the *Tswana* do not honor God. The prerogative

was with the missionaries to describe who, what and how God is. The *Tswana* honored *MODIMO* as the governor of the heavens. *MODIMO* is the one who makes rain, and for that *MODIMO* is honored. Setiloane (1976: 79) is sensitive and critical about the Christianisation of *MODIMO*. The major motivation of Setiloane's research is that:

... while Christian theological study filled out [the] understanding of the western concept of God, that concept seemed increasingly to be alien from the experience of *MODIMO* mediated by [his] own Christian, yet still radically *Sotho-Tswana*, upbringing (1976: 79).

Setiloane (1976: 77) says that *MODIMO* is intangible and has no plural form. *MODIMO* is mystery. The primary qualities of *MODIMO* are mystery and intangibility. *MODIMO* is *Motlhodi* (Creator) of *bomodimo* (divinity) and the whole cosmos. *Legodimo* (sky) is the primary manifestation of *MODIMO*, but this does not necessarily mean that *MODIMO* dwells in the sky (1976: 78).

According to Setiloane (1976: 78-79) "the fact is that there was more to *MODIMO* than the missionaries dreamed of, rather than much less, which they came to think". The identification of *MODIMO* with God was done too early and too prematurely.

... the early identification of God with *MODIMO* vitiates [spoils] any attempt to distinguish the traditional attributes of the latter. How much, now assumed as traditional, is, in fact, Christian accretion (Setiloane 1976: 78, addition mine).

The traditional concepts of *MODIMO* have been weakened through and by the identification of IT with the notions of the Christian God. To a large extent the traditional attributes have been eroded throughout the period of missionary evangelization and colonization of the *Sotho* people.

Among the many attributes Setiloane (1976: 81) attributes to *MODIMO* is that *MODIMO* is *Mme* (Mother). This is the quality of tenderness in the experience of *MODIMO*. *MODIMO* is associated with the earth. "The thunderbolt, appearing to enter the earth, is interpreted as *MODIMO* returning to ITSELF, as a man (sic) comes home on a journey or an animal returns to its lair" (Setiloane 1976: 82).

... IT controls everything, even in the last resort natural disasters and the wickedness of 'boloi' (witchcraft); and IT is itself affected by offences against the natural order. The felling of trees for fire or house-building (a necessary offence), the hiding of an abortion, the exposure of a corpse, cohabiting with a widow before the ceremony of the purification, or the impregnation of a nubile girl - all taboo - are simply examples of the fact that IT is not simply the source of order, but requires that man - (sic) whether by practical or ritual act - shall restore that order when he has disturbed it. Although, to use Western terms, it is difficult to describe this as a pantheistic view, it may well be panentheistic (Setiloane 1976: 82 - 83).

MODIMO wills good to mankind, preserves justice and normally acts through 'Badimo' (Ancestors). *MODIMO* intervenes to draw attention to the breach of taboos and is readily available to individuals in need. The statements that *Basotho* make about *MODIMO* are pragmatic - they are about the issues of the here-and-now (Setiloane 1976: 85).

But, for missionaries who had come to identify holiness with the moral (the moral moreover, as conceived in bourgeois terms), they were incapable of recognizing that the *Sotho-Tswana* found something lacking, something offensive in them. Or if they did so recognize, they attributed the attitude not to their failure in communicating, but to the power of the Devil over ignorant savages (Setiloane 1976: 86).

Some Christian *Sotho-Tswana* still find something offensive and inadequate about the Christian God. Somehow, there is a sense of arrogance and offensiveness in

the way the Christian God is presented by those who call themselves His agents. This was one thing that motivated Setiloane (1976: 85 - 86) to find out the relation between the Christian God and *MODIMO*.

It is in the interest of this investigation to examine other issues which Setiloane (1976: 106ff) says 'disturbed' the missionaries concerning *MODIMO*, including *Badimo* (Ancestors). Amazingly, the *Sotho-Tswana* did not perceive the 'gospel' that the missionaries preached as basically different to and alien from their traditional ways. It was the missionaries who called the ways of the *Sotho-Tswana* 'heathen'. "To them (*Sotho-Tswana*) it was all the works of *MODIMO*. It was the missionaries who dichotomized and drew lines of separation, thereby restricting the activities of God" (Setiloane 1976: 111).

It was the missionaries who created the impression that *MODIMO* is not the Christian God. The current investigation explored that idea and will demonstrate that the missionaries misrepresented the gospel. In addition, Setiloane (1976) does not continue to present *MODIMO* more fully, to the extent of unearthing the many local names of IT among the *Basotho* as a larger ethnic group (= *Basotho ba Moshoeshoe*, *Batswana* and *Bapedi*), to demonstrate the fact that the connotation of *MODIMO* is in fact larger than that of the personalized Christian God.

The major contribution of this thesis (to supercede Setiloane (1976)) is the de-Hellenization of the concepts of *MODIMO*. This will supersede the work of Setiloane (1976) who, although he has dealt with the attributes of *MODIMO* in comparison with and contrast to the concepts of the Christian God, had not aimed at the deliberate de- Hellenization of the concepts of *MODIMO*. Though this work endorses some of the aspects of Setiloane's (1976) views regarding *MODIMO* it also seeks to tacitly criticize him for some of his Hellenization of the concepts of *MODIMO* such as lack of critique that *MODIMO* is the Supreme Being without sensing that this can be a Hellenistic thought. Besides that, this

work will reveal how and where there is a possible conciliation between the concepts of *MODIMO* and those of the Christian God.

For Okot p'Bitek (1970) the problem is that Christian missionaries and African theologians have Hellenized African deities and defaced them. He says:

When students of African religions describe African deities as eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, etc., they intimate that African deities have identical attributes with those of the Christian God. In other words, they suggest that Africans hellenized their deities, but before coming into contact with Greek metaphysical thinking. [This claim must be] rejected as absurd and misleading. And to do this it is necessary to trace briefly the development of the Christian God (p' Bitek 1970: 80).

What p'Bitek is saying is that the Hellenisation of African deities and the influence of African thought about deities without having direct contact and encounter with Greek metaphysical thinking is impossible. The appellations of deities must have the character of their historical, situational and cultural setting because they emerge from such contexts. Each one of the settings should therefore produce a different set of attributes, depending on the issues that were dealt with when deities were conceptualized. That the Africans Hellenized their deities is a form of usurping and smuggling of Greek metaphysical thinking into African thought.

For p'Bitek (1970), the problem of the denigration and degrading of African deities was exacerbated by Hellenisation. It was as if Africans conceptualized their deities under the same situational circumstances as did the Greeks and Christian scholastics. He says African theologians in particular, as it shall be demonstrated in this thesis, have not presented African attributes of deities as Africans would express them. p'Bitek's concern is to de-Hellenize African deities and to present them in terms of African categories of thought. It is thus the task of this thesis to do just that, consciously, in subsequent chapters.

Whilst this thesis does not trace the development of concepts of the Christian God, it examines the way the Christian God was presented. For this investigation it was relevant to describe the world-view from which the missionaries preached the Christian God and the picture they constructed of such a God. For this thesis it was also important to find out who the missionaries were and for whom, or what, they were working. The specific missionaries that will be concentrated on are those of the Berlin Mission Society (BMS) who worked in the area of *Botšhabelo*. This is the area occupied by the *Bapedi*, among whom fieldwork research and interviews on the notion of *MODIMO* was done. The missionary Alexandra Merensky, as one key and influential leader of BMS, was researched. The information about BMS and Alexandra Merensky fits naturally into chapter three of this thesis, which deals with BMS in particular and missionaries in general, as well as their presentation of the Christian God among the *Bapedi*, in particular, and the *Basotho* in general.

Further, p'Bitek (1970: 80 - 87) traces the problem and tendency to clothe deities in foreign garments. He traces how the Apostle Peter wished Christianity to remain a purely Jewish faith (1970: 84). The Apostle Paul included the gentile Christians into Christianity without the need for them to be circumcised and Judaized or to submit to the Mosaic Law. Paul was ready to depart from the demands of Judaism in order to make people of gentile origin Christian (1970: 84). p'Bitek goes on to show that the "catholicization of Christianity led to its becoming Hellenic, because Greek thought, which is metaphysical in form, had proliferated and permeated the Roman Empire" (1970: 84). p'Bitek argues that there was no need to Hellenize Judaism, as is the case with the Hellenizing of African deities, in that it causes problems of translation where languages are incompatible, and even that the Hellenisation of African deities is a form of Christian imperialism (1970: 84 - 86).

Moreover, Hellenisation introduced into Christianity the ideas of immutability, stability, and impassibility as the central perfections of

God. The Christian God was therefore described as the Supreme Being, because no other being could be greater than Him (p'Bitek 1970: 87).

This thesis is equally belabored by this concern of the Hellenisation and distortion of the attributes of *MODIMO*. As was the concern of p'Bitek, the African Christian theologians have fallen into the trap of clothing African deities with attributes of the Christian God, whose Judaistic attributes had already been adulterated by accepting and accommodating Greek philosophy (p'Bitek 1970: 83). In the main, Hellenized African deities are creations of the students of African religion. "They are all (Hellenic concepts) beyond recognition to ordinary Africans in the countryside" (p'Bitek 1970: 88 addition mine).

Chapter two deals with the way African theologians and scholars have dealt with the problems of research into the concepts of deities in Africa in the form of a debate. My contribution to the debate is once more the de-Hellenisation of the concepts of *MODIMO* and the revelation of the image of the Christian God left by missionaries, particularly those of the BMS, among the *Bapedi* and by missionaries in general in southern Africa.

In his book, Concepts of God in Africa, Mbiti (1970) documented the concepts of God held by about 300 tribes in Africa, giving the impression that African concepts of God are the same as concepts of God in Christianity. He also claims that African concepts of God are similar to Biblical concepts of God (1970: xiii). He uses headings and subheadings which are familiar to those attached to the Christian God, such as omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, invisible, self-existent, pre-eminent, and the first and last cause, to quote just a few.

To comment on some of these categories: concerning God's omniscience he says that African people attribute omniscience to God alone. God sees, and hears. Like an organ of hearing, God in Africa is understood as one who detects everything. "God knows all things, through keeping them within His hearing, just as He keeps them within His sight" (Mbiti 1970: 4).

About omnipresence, Mbiti (1970: 7) says, Africans conceptualize the omnipresence of God as mystery. God's presence is geographical and exists in natural phenomena. God is like the air we breathe and is associated with life.

So, like the air we breathe, God's omnipresence encircles men (sic), giving them the breath of life, the means of sustenance, and preservation of life. Life itself is associated with breath and, if God's presence is like air, one can readily see how much people would associate it with life (Mbiti 1970: 7).

About the invisibility of God, Mbiti (1970: 25) says, the eyes of humanity are too weak to see God. Anyone who dares to catch a glimpse of God must die. God is too terrible for human endurance. His essence remains completely invisible. References to God are mythological explanations of the natural phenomena thunder and lightning. "He is invisible and on this concept there is complete consensus from every part of Africa" (Mbiti 1970: 25).

In many ways, though Mbiti (1970) does document some African appellations of God, he always dresses them in Western theological terms, as mentioned above. It seems that Mbiti (1970) is trying to justify the idea that, in any case, Africans do have concepts of God similar to those of Western theology, so that even if the Africans are superseded in many areas of life, at least they have a legitimate religion and similar concepts of God, as presented by missionaries.

In the work of Chidester (1996) Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa, sections on 'From Denial to Discovery' and 'The Unknown God' became of particular relevance and interest for this thesis. He says:

During the eighteenth century European comparativists generally assumed that there were four religions in the world - Christianity,

Judaism, Islam and Paganism, with the last sometimes divided into ancient, heathen and diabolical forms (Chidester 1996: 17).

This assumption, in the mind of European comparativists, categorizes for example Sotho Traditional Religion (STR) as paganism, since it does not fall under Christianity, Islam or Judaism. Since STR was found not to have written literature it was further categorized under the illiterate pagan religion of a diabolical nature (Chidester 1996: 17).

When there was some semblance of religion among the so-called pagans, European comparativists construed that the indigenous peoples or natives had entirely forgotten their ancient religion (Chidester 1996: 17 - 18), meaning that the natives had forgotten their ancient concepts of 'God'. In order to trace the ancient indigenous religions, the comparativists resorted to drawing historical lines and links to relate African religions, for example, back to Christianity, Islam and Judaism. "Forms and functions of religion could thereby be compared without assuming any necessary cultural contact or historical connection between the people compared" (Chidester 1996: 18).

On southern African frontiers, morphological comparisons were practiced as a technique for making strange beliefs and practices comprehensible by analogy with some familiar religion (Chidester 1996: 19).

In other words, indigenous religions were not studied as religious systems in their own right. What was not compatible (e.g. African notions) with 'familiar' religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), would be omitted or would not be considered, in that it would not be in the comparativist's frame of reference. This resulted in the reconstruction of indigenous religions according to the frame of reference of 'familiar' religions. These reconstructions were not adequate in southern Africa, where much of African Traditional Religions (ATR) had not

yet been discovered. These reconstructions did not result in the 'discovery' of indigenous religions and belief systems but in distortions thereof.

About the region of 'Cafreria' (*sensu* Chidester) (i.e. South Africa) it was construed that they were a people without religion. This idea led to the conclusion that the people of 'Cafreria' had no idea of 'God' since it was alleged they had no religion. It was further alleged that indigenous southern Africans had 'no appearance of any religious worship whatever' (Chidester 1996: 19). As a result:

Many parts of the world produced indigenous terms that became part of the international vocabulary of comparative religion. Terms such as *fetish* from West Africa, *totem* from North America, or *mana* from Melanesia. Southern Africa produced no such indigenous terms for the study of religion. Rather, the region's distinction was to mark an absence of religion in the world, long after religion had been discovered in West Africa, North America, and the Pacific Islands (Chidester 1996: 19).

Chidester (1996: 19ff) argues that the discovery of indigenous religion in southern Africa depended on colonial conquest and the subjugation of the African people. Once contained and subjugated under colonial military, missionary and political conquest and domination, the African people were rewarded with the acknowledgment of having some religion.

This gives an impression that the possession of religion, or 'God', gives people the potential and courage to resist colonial and missionary intrusion and domination. Domination of one people by another is equated to the domination of a conquered people's 'God' by the more powerful 'God' of the conquering people.

The concepts of the Christian God presented in this thesis are derived from the activities of the missionaries as people who first proclaimed the Christian God

among Africans. Cochrane's (1987) book, Servants of Power: The Role of English Speaking Churches 1903 - 1930: Towards a Critical Theology via an Historical Analysis of the Anglican and Methodist Churches, was revealing. His is a critical examination of the English-speaking churches' role in the missionary and colonial conquest of the African people. In the process of evangelization and colonization, concepts of God were presented and impressed in the minds of the Africans. Unfortunately, not all the concepts of the Christian God were given a good image by the evangelizing colonial missionaries.

When southern African tribes first looked upon the strange, pale faces of the Europeans, whose nations would come to rule their continent, they surely could not foresee the impact of their arrival. Within short decades the newly-emerging African states and kingdoms were shattered; their chiefdoms were undermined, until many chiefs were little more than lackeys of the colonial administrations; their pre-capitalist economies were variously altered, and later tugged to pieces, though not quite destroyed; their way of life, usually centred on close kinship communities and the values of 'ubuntu', changed irrevocably and often rudely. All of this served the individual success of others, and the values of progress and profit (Cochrane 1987: 12).

The kind of religion and God left in the minds of the conquered is a powerful God - God of Power, or God as Power, Domination, Dispossession, Debasement, Devaluation of traditional life - God of the Powerful, who dispossesses the powerless of their land, labor and leisure. God of invading conquerors, of the missionaries and metropolitan churches (Cochrane 1987: 13).

The task of the missionaries was to evangelize and convert the entire human race. The task of conversion was combined with the advent of civilization and colonial expansion. In many ways, the image and the task of the missionary and the colonizer were inseparable. The missionaries had acted as servants of colonial conquest and expansion and were political advisors to the colonizers. However, not all writers agree with this idea.

“The discord between the missionaries and the colonizers did not often undermine their more or less common view of the economic role of Africans” (Cochrane 1987: 14). Both viewed the African as a person living a wasteful life of laziness and indolence. Both agreed that the African must be taught the value of labor and the discipline of work. Both viewed the African as more befitting an organ of labor in a capitalist economy, than a competitor in the same market. 

The role of the missionaries was one of “... enabling indigenous peoples to enter into and cope with a fateful and irresistible global campaign of free trade and capitalist penetration, or as itself a tool of domination and demand of submission (Cochrane 1987: 14 - 15). In that way, one more image of God and religion left in the minds of the dominated Africans is that of the God who requires total submission.

More will be drawn from Cochrane’s book (1987) and that of Majeke (1952) The Role of Missionaries in Conquest for the construction of this thesis, especially for chapter three.

It is in the interests of this thesis to look into the matter of the content of the concepts of *MODIMO* in STR and in Christianity. The study about the Berlin Mission Society (BMS) has been helpful in enhancing this research. The BMS worked among the *Bapedi* - the *Sotho* people specifically focused upon in this thesis. In revealing the concepts of *MODIMO* and God, the works of Delius (1996), Mminele (1983), and Moila (1987, book review below) have been revealing. These sources are used especially in the construction of Chapter three. The ideas about ‘God’ and *MODIMO* have been derived from what was taught and done during the mission activities of the BMS.

Christianity, as introduced by the BMS among *Bapedi*, was seen to be ‘closely affiliated, in the minds of most *Pedi*, with colonial conquest and a broader assault on established values and practices. Some of the *Bapedi*, though, were

converted to Christianity. The conversion of some *Bapedi* to Christianity formed two camps of religion in the area - Christian and Traditional African.

There were sporadic conflicts, especially between youths from the different religious camps. ... Christians constituted the overwhelming majority in the predominantly mission schools in the area. As a result, Christians dominated the small local educated elite of teachers and clerks (Delius 1996: 26).

What was the theology of 'God' conceived by this emerging African Christian elite? In a nutshell, according to Moila (1987: 158) '... the aim of the BMS was not only to evangelize the *Pedi*, to convert them to become members of the Christian church' but also to bring about 'a new religion, a new faith, a new material culture, a new economy and a new political system. To bring about a new social order, a new philosophy of life and a new philosophy of education'.

The missionaries perceived the church as the instrument of God, the task of which is first to destroy *Pedi* culture, second to institute Western culture and, third, to bring about a true culture which may be labeled Christian (Moila 1996: 158).

The BMS had divided *Pedi* villagers into Christians (*Bakreste*) and Heathens (*Baditšhaba*). The *Baditšhaba* were hesitant to take their children to mission schools. They were suspicious and reluctant to allow their children to attend. The residents were suspicious that Christian education would cause their children to reject traditional initiation and make them rebellious to the customs and traditions of their elders and chiefs.

In the case of boys, parents argued that they needed to be educated and to know some English language in order to be able to communicate with Whites, should they some day become laborers for capitalists in the emerging South African cities such as Johannesburg and Kimberly. African parents argued that girls need not

be educated, since they had no need to go far away from home to work for Whites (Delius 1996: 28).

Education in BMS mission schools was mainly religious and about manual labor. What Christian male converts learned about was the Protestant ethic of labor. The mission schools prepared Christian converts to be good laborers for the White capitalists in the emerging industrial cities of South Africa. Concerning the concepts of God, missionary education communicated a 'God' who has willed that Africans work for Whites and be content with their laborer status in the reign of the Christian God under White rule.

Besides the two primary references, other authors have been considered. One of them is Hood, who, in his book Must God Remain Greek? (1990: 126), says that African Traditional concepts of 'God' need not be formulated according to the attributes imposed on the concepts of God in Africa by European missionaries and theologians. He argues that the concepts of 'God' in Africa are other than what the missionaries and European anthropologists and travelers say they are. He says:

... if polytheism is belief in and worship of many gods, as contrasted with many spirits of divinities; if animism is believing animals, birds, and inanimate objects have souls; if fetishism is worship and veneration of charms, trees, sticks, and so on; if heathenism (from German; referring to the wasteland and heath where outlaws and vagabonds lived) means someone outside the pale of the great monotheistic world religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam; and if idolatry (Greek: *eidola*, an image copied from the actual god or the Greek world of forms) means worshiping material objects identified as God or gods - if all this is so, then these terms do not accurately characterize Africans' basic understanding of God or supreme deity in their traditional religion (Hood 1990: 126).

If Hood (1990: 126) rejects all these terms, which are in many cases given and labeled as the African understanding of 'God', then the African understanding of 'God' should be something neither monotheistic nor polytheistic, and yet genuinely an African understanding of deity. In other words, in this thesis we are looking forward to the African contribution to conceptualizing *MODIMO*, without the Judaeo-Christian and Greek conceptualizations.

Ellwood (1983) traced the history of religion on the planet earth. He says religion has taken four stages of development to date. The beginning was the Hunting Age; followed by the Agricultural Age; then the Ancient Empires Age and now the Modern Age. He speculates about the characteristics of religious practice and religion for each stage of human civilization. It was in the Ancient Empires stage that the idea of a single, supreme God emerged. These ideas have matured and are now manifesting themselves more clearly in strong monotheistic terms in the modern age, such as in Christianity and other monotheistic religions.

Corresponding with the development of human social growth, Ellwood (1983) speculates that there has been a parallel development in religious thought about 'God'. As society developed, so did concepts of 'God'. The stages went from panentheism to pantheism, followed by polytheism and ultimately with the present monotheism. Ellwood (1983) argues further that, even within the Christian monotheism, there are divisions of theological position and conceptualization. He mentions Tritheism, Trinity and Modalism as forms of theological and conceptualizational divisions within Christian monotheism.

One more idea is that of Mönnig (1967), who, in The Pedi, writes that *MODIMO* is not a personal name. He notes that though *MODIMO* is not a personal name, the *Bapedi* call *MODIMO Kgobe*, who is perceived as a male and has a son named *Kgobeane* (Mönnig 1967: 45). Further, he says that *MODIMO* is associated with elements of nature such as rain, wind and lightning (Mönnig 1967: 45 - 47).

Moila says that *MODIMO*, for the *Pedi*, is the source of all dynamic power. *MODIMO* is “infinitely beyond human prediction, comprehension and influence” (1987: 180). Moila continues to say that the *Pedi* conceive of ‘God’ as a loving Father who cares for all His children and is approached directly and personally (1987: 180).

To many *Pedi* Christians, awareness of the nearness of God and his concern with the personal circumstances of believers is an essential feature of their faith. Thus they understand the Christian God in terms of existential experience underlying the *Pedi* notion of *Modimo* (God) (Moila 1987: 180).

The *Pedi* believe that ‘God’ is completely in control of all things. To the *Pedi* ‘God’ cannot be resisted “Thus, acquiescence is one of the main characteristics of *Pedi* Christianity (Moila 1987: 181). The *Pedi* have accepted the self-disclosure of *MODIMO*, and believe that *MODIMO* is a personal power. The *Pedi* believe that ‘God is the author, owner, Lord, source of all life and death, giver of absolute law and final judge. ‘God’ demands exclusive loyalty, obedience, service and is redeemer from sin (Moila 1987: 181).

It needs to be noted that Moila (1987) is using the words *Modimo* and God interchangeably. His concern, unlike this thesis, is not to make a distinction between *MODIMO* of Sotho Traditional Religion and the Christian God as far as the content of their concepts is concerned.

According to Moila (1987: 184), the ‘God’ of *Pedi* Christianity is moralistic, legalistic, literalistic, pragmatic, therapeutic, and syncretistic. *Pedi* Christianity is emotional and other-worldly. *Pedi* Christianity consists of ‘Biblical Christianity’, Western Christianity, and traditional *Pedi* values and practices.

Another author, Kato (1975), comments on the study of ‘God’ in Africa. He criticizes the works of African theologians. Kato (1975: 69f) feels that Christian

conversion requires the eradication of African Traditional Religions, and that if 'the true God' was present in Africa before the advent of the missionaries, what did the missionaries come to do? He feels that the missionaries came to evangelize African people for the reason that they had no true religion or true God.

Kato (1975: 70 - 71) is not happy with the assumption that African notions of God can be given clear theological descriptions and that many items in traditional life and practices cannot be taken as a *praeparatio evangelica*. He says:

Some dubious concepts have been given clearer description in Christian theological terms. The rationale behind all this is to convince the world that the African has always known and worshiped the true God ... (Kato 1975: 71).

Kato (1975: 71) warns that it is rather too ambitious to think that one can know a people's concept of God without having spent a long time living with them, and knowing their language, culture and customs thoroughly. He says one must know the full context of a people before one can start commenting about their concepts of 'God'.

1.2.2. The Robing of African Deities with Hellenistic Attributes

Mbiti (1970), amongst others, fell victim to the Hellenisation of African deities. His "Concepts of God in Africa" is a glaring example of the Hellenisation of African deities. He finds equivalents to the attributes of the Christian God in African deities. He is actually looking for the Christian God among African people, rather than presenting African notions of deities as Africans would express them so as to make a contribution to notions presented by the Christian theology of God. Nevertheless, here and there he does show that Africans have more attributes for deities than the Christians and he treats them as minor exceptions.

Edwin Smith (1926) describes African deities in strange terms. He says African religions are a form of dynamism, spiritism and polytheism. He does acknowledge that this 'dynamism' is also theistic, but this theism, he observes, is clouded by 'ancestor' worship. This fact is reiterated by McVeigh (1974) who studied African deities based on Smith (1926). Parrinder (1961) is in the same fold as Smith (1926) and McVeigh (1974). Among the appellations mentioned by Smith (1926), Parrinder (1961) adds that African religion is fetishist, animist and pantheistic.

Westerlund (1985) says these descriptions of African deities and religion as fetishist and animist were criticized by African theologians. His argument is two-fold. On the one hand he divides African scholars of religion and African theologians as being separate from African philosophers. He says that ideas concerning African deities were influenced by the political situations within which they were studied. He brands African philosophers as having politicized the studies and says that African theologians were sympathetic towards the good work begun by missionaries. Westerlund (1985), on the other hand, does not commit himself to any conceptualization of African deities.

What Stanley (1990) prides himself on is that the missionaries did very well. He says "Many of the first generation of African nationalist leaders were products of Catholic and Protestant mission schools and theological colleges" (1990: 16), quoting Jomo Kenyatta, Albert Luthuli and Kenneth Kaunda. He says that, by and large, this generation of nationalist leaders remained broadly sympathetic to Christian principles while being severely critical of many aspects of missionary paternalism" (Stanley 1990: 16). The concern of this 'current study' is the very paternalism (which Hellenized) in regard to the concepts of the Christian God imposed on African concepts of deities.

As for Walls (1996: 69), his idea is that the Christian faith is continually changing, not only in content and character, but also where it is centered, and that Christian theology has always emerged from where the majority of Christians are in terms

of numbers and their Christian praxis. He says “The adoption of Christianity often accompanied substantial social change and was often part of the mechanism of adjustment to social change” (1996: 68 - 69). Today, Walls (1996) says, the majority of Christians live in Africa and so that is where the future of Christian theology resides. The inference is that the concepts of God are, inevitably, continually changing and that African concepts of God and African theology will be the dominant Christian theology of the 21st century.

In modern times, in southern continents, the acceptance of Christianity by primal peoples has again gone hand in hand with entrance to a literary culture, and often with an international language to match the broadened horizons (Walls 1996: 69).

That Christianity entered the southern continents with a literary culture, means the concepts of the Christian God were also communicated in writing. The primal peoples that Walls (1996: 69) talks about had to learn how to read and write and that would assist them in conceptualizing the Christian God communicated in writing. This also means people who conceptualized deities in oral cultures were to alter their means of conceptualization and to begin to conceptualize things in written form.

By the Christianisation process people of southern continents were brought into the sphere of literary and international communication. This process favored the growth of vernacular literature. Most peoples of the southern continents received their first literature in the form of Christian scriptures which, translated into the vernacular, served a sacred purpose and “gave way to a recognition that scriptures and liturgy belonged to the vernacular ...” (Walls 1996: 69).

In other words, even the Christian concepts of God would be communicated in the vernacular. But, according to Walls (1996: 70), this was different to the birth of Christianity in Northern parts of the world where literacy was already a form of conceptualization.

Generally speaking, the story of southern Christianity has been different. In primal societies in quite diverse parts of the world, the Christian preachers found God already there, known by a vernacular name. Often associated with the sky, creator of earth and moral governor of humanity, having no altars or priesthood, and perhaps no regular worship, some named Being could be identified behind the whole constitution of the phenomenal and transcendental worlds. More often than not, that name has been used in Scripture translation, liturgy, and preaching as the name of the God of Israel and of the Church (Walls 1996: 71).

Having said that Christianity found 'God' in the southern continents, and that 'God' had a vernacular name, Walls (1996: 71) turns around and says "the coming of Christianity has not been - as in northern Christian experience - bringing God to people, so much as bringing him near. This means that the 'God' found in southern continents was far away, or aloof. 'He' had to be brought near. This seems to affirm that God was found there whilst rejecting the idea that the 'primal people' had a clear concept of their own God.

As was the concern of Setiloane (1996) that, with the introduction of Christianity, many African people found themselves in two religious systems, Walls (1996: 75) would not like to create this situation. He would like the African way of life (faith) completely integrated with the Christian life (faith). So he alerts us to the fact that

... a simple substitution of culturally new for the culturally old is neither sufficient nor possible when the mental and moral fabric of society is torn; or when people must live in different worlds of discourse at the same time; or when they are faced with moral and social obligations which belong to different orders, and when those obligations conflict with each other; or when they believe (or half believe) in different universes of power. If there is to be no wound, if people are to make clear moral choices and do so in the faith of Christ, they must be able to

integrate their worlds, to knit together the new and the old (Walls 1996: 75).

In the process of this attempt to knit together the old and the new, it happened, in most cases, that the African deities were robed in foreign garments. This was the complaint of p'Bitek (1970). I find a typical Hellenization of African deities in Fuller's (1994) book A Missionary Handbook on African Traditional Religions. This is what he says:

Generally, God is considered to be omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. He is far away in the sky, but also in touch with man. People worship gods and ancestors more because they affect them more on daily basis, but they know God is always there and some mention him or call his name as a witness ... We can see that in many ways, the traditional ideas about God agree with what the Bible reveals about Him. He truly is a Spirit, eternal, invisible, omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent, in the heavens. God is ruler, the provider, the judge (Fuller 1994: 16, 17).

1.2.3. The Critiques: The Politicized

One author that has been helpful and has been much used to construct most of chapter three of this thesis is Majeke, though she wrote in 1926. Her basic argument is that the whole question of Christianisation and the concepts of God is about colonialism and subjugation of people in the name of religion. For her, missionary enterprise, British imperialism and colonization were indivisible aspects of one project of the exploitation of the 'New World'. In the words of Fred Price (1990) in his book Race Religion and Racism: the Perversion of the Gospel for the Subjugation of a People, he writes that the interpretation of Biblical passages concerning race relations has been a deliberate propagation of the suppression of Black people, misusing the Scriptures. Writers like Cochrane (1987), Delius (1996) and scholars of religion like Chidester (1992) are of the same opinion. Chidester (1992) says that Africans were said to have no religion

so that they could be conquered and subjugated as brute beasts which had no human feelings or faculties worth mentioning. As soon as they were made to submit to Christianity and colonization, the Africans would be rewarded by recognition that, somehow, they do have some religion and a vague and faded idea of God.

In the encounter between Africans and the Christian mission, according to the Comaroffs (1991), there was a cultural exchange. Africans were not passive victims of circumstances but were active in resisting the new, encroaching Western forces, including Western religion, politics, land distribution and use, trade and commerce. For the Comaroffs (1991), the problem between Christian mission and Africans was the struggle for territory. In their view, what was experienced was the 'Battle of the Gods', and a 'long conversation'. The 'long conversation' and the negotiation for territory and power continue to this day.

For us to understand some of the issues clearly we need to look at the frame-of-mind with which the missionaries, who were the primary communicators of the concepts of the Christian God, operated. In this exercise the theological formation of the BMS will be spelt out. In general, missionaries operated with certain theological and political assumptions. These preconceived assumptions prevented them from comprehending the political and religious world of Africans. The missionaries' background impacted on the conversation between the concepts of *MODIMO* and concepts of the Christian God. This is not to excuse the wrongs nor to justify the actions of the missionaries. In the same manner, where there is any good that the missionaries did to Africans it must be given due recognition, especially as pertains to concepts of deities. This aspect will be pursued in chapter three.

1.3. Research Methodology: Ethnomethodology

1.3.1. What is Ethnomethodology?

In this section the meaning of ethnomethodology is explained and I also describe how the interviews were conducted. The apparatuses used are also described. Also included is the reason for the use of this method and I also introduce the interlocutors and research assistants.

Ethnography, as a method of research, forces the researcher to enter the world of the people investigated. It involves the people researched in asking their own questions and structuring their own answers. In this way, answers are not manipulated by the prepared formal questions. The environment in which research is done is as natural as possible and is not threatening to the subjects.

Ethnomethodology is the fieldwork method. Fieldwork is about investigating situations and relationships that constitute people's daily lives (Sanders 1999: 47). Field work is also called naturalistic research - research that takes place within the natural setting of the social actor (Mouton: 1988: 1). Mouton (1988: 12) calls field work qualitative research. He says that:

... qualitative researchers prefer to use unstructured or informal interviews, i.e., interviews which employ a set of themes and topics in order to form questions in the course of the conversation (Mouton 1988: 12).

Though it is inevitable that the researcher has certain themes, and even questions, in mind, though these may not be written down, the interlocutors are given the freedom to determine what types of themes and questions would be of interest and importance to the research conducted. This is one advantage of ethnomethodology; i.e. that the agenda of the researcher is limited and is subjected to the felt questions of the interlocutors. The aim of the researcher is negotiated with the interlocutors.

According to Agnew and Pyke (1982: 45) ethnomethodology is a 'go-and-see' method - the 'eyeball' technique, which is the core of field work method.

The essence of this science sieve is the observation, description and interpretation of events as they occur in nature or naturally . . . This method requires no manipulation, no controlled experimentation, but, rather, the careful observation of episodes as they take place in their usual surrounding (Agnew and Pyke 1982: 45).

The current research was conducted in the manner proposed by Mouton (1988) and Agnew and Pyke (1982) . There was no laboratory environment, no control of the course of events as they unfolded. I observed the natural behavior of people in the field as they performed traditional religious rites and ceremonies. Observations were done during discussion sessions with research assistants, people and groups which were interviewed and observed in ordinary societal activities.

1.3.2. Conducting Unstructured Interviews

Unstructured interviews were conducted with individuals and groups. These interviews were meant to unearth the concepts of *MODIMO* among the *Sotho* people. Most people interviewed came from the *Pedi* - a subsection of the *Sotho* people (which includes the *Tswana* and the southern *Sotho*). The interviews were conducted mostly in the Northern Province (recently renamed 'Limpopo' Province), South Africa. Information was verified by cross-checking the responses with other interviewees, and through group discussions. The exercise was concerned with 'understanding' rather than 'explanation'.

The researchers who make use of unstructured interviewing are therefore concerned with understanding (*verstehen*) rather than explanation; with naturalistic observation rather than controlled measurement and with the subjective exploration of reality from the perspective of an insider, as

opposed to the outsider perspective that is predominant in the qualitative approach (Schurink 1988: 137).

The advantage of this method, especially as regards the nature of problem I am probing in this research, is the reconstruction of reality from the perspective of the insider. This method allows the exploration of other avenues of research that emerge out of the conversation. Another advantage is that the insiders bring forward questions and insights which might not be captured by a structured interview.

The disadvantages are that this method can be time-consuming. The researcher may collect vast amounts of data which are not relevant to the actual subject being researched. This makes the ordering of facts very tedious and makes interpretation very difficult. Such data needs the personal attention of the interviewer - the researcher himself. This method requires that, in many cases, the interviewer be somehow an 'insider' in order to capture the cultural and linguistic nuances. Fortunately, the researcher involved was an insider. In an unstructured conversation

... the interviewer limits his own contribution to the interview to an absolute minimum. His role is to introduce the general theme on which information is required, motivate the subject to participate spontaneously, stimulate him through probing, and steer him back tactfully to the research topic when he digresses (Schurink 1988: 140).

1.3.3. The Asking of Unstructured Questions

Agar (1980: 90ff) proposed that one uses what he calls 'Whyte's typology of informality'. This is a way of asking questions which allows the interlocutor to talk. This allows for questions from the interviewee plus the narrative of the interlocutor's life history. This method is ethnographical in the sense that it allows spontaneity and the meaningful participation by the researcher as well as

the interviewee. "The life-history approach encourages the informant (sic) interviewee to talk about his or her own life in a chronologically ordered way" (Agar 1980: 90-91, 106).

As the person speaks, some areas of the research theme come up spontaneously. Those facts are noted and are tape-recorded. I was able to extract a lot of the information needed out of the narratives of the interlocutors. What I needed to do was to:

... encourage the informant (sic) to keep talking, by word or gesture. Next comes a simple reflection back of the informant's last statement. [They](the interlocutors) say something, and you simply repeat it as an invitation to elaborate. Then there is a 'probe' on the last remark. You ask some specific questions about the last statement, inviting elaboration in a specific direction. And so it continues, through probes on earlier material up to an interviewer-requested change in the topic of interview (Agar 1980: 91).

At times the continuation of the story was encouraged by a short moment of silence. This gave the interlocutor a chance to catch his breath and then to continue where he has stopped. This was also a moment when the story could be redirected naturally to the topic of research. What was also helpful in such moments was to turn to a different, unrelated, topic which would reconnect back to the main narrative. At the same time the researcher has an opportunity to relate their part of the stories. This creates an atmosphere in which the interlocutor is not interrogated but is involved in a natural, mutual, conversation. As the interlocutor tell the story along the themes of the research, the researcher also tell the story along the same lines. The interview is conducted like a natural conversation.

The main difference between the way in which ethnographers and survey interviewers ask questions is not, as is sometimes suggested, that one form of interviewing is 'structured' and the other is 'unstructured'. All

interviews, like any other kind of social interaction, are structured by both researcher and informant. The important distinction to be made is between standardized and reflective interviewing (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: 112-3)

Together with my field assistants, all we did was this reflective questioning and mutual sharing of stories. Not forgetting that we also had an idea of the areas we wanted to cover, or thought must be covered, and these were introduced when our turn came to tell our stories. In our spontaneous reflective interaction with interlocutors, we were conscious that at times our unstructured questions reflected and related to those relevant to the areas of research.

Ethnographers do not decide, beforehand, the questions they want to ask, though they may enter the interview with a list of issues to be covered. Nor do ethnographers restrict themselves to a single mode of questioning. On different occasions, or at different points in the same interview, the approach may be non-directive or directive, depending on the function that the questioning is intended to serve (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: 112 - 113).

I discovered that, in a comfortable and suitable occasion and situation during these lengthy ethnographic talks, all sorts of issues would be commented upon. Uninterrupted by the interviewer, the interlocutors spoke for time on end. Old people derive pleasure from a well-conducted interview, which does not permit the making of value judgements during the proceedings. The knowledge of the interlocutor is not challenged there and then. The interlocutor gains confidence and talks more when researcher shows respect and appreciation for the information they receive.

As proposed by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 116 - 121), we interviewed the people in their own territory, in their homes and gardens and at friendly social gatherings. In so doing they were much more relaxed than they would have been in some other place. In asking questions and reflecting with interlocutors in

group discussions, and in the group reporting sessions of the research teams we formed, such as the *GaPhaahla* Teachers Research Team, we also observed that group interviewing made the interview situation less intimidating. We were thus able to overcome the problem of the 'silent' or monosyllabic response interview.

In this way we had access to inside information, and experienced the world and the thoughts of the [interviewees], with their ideas and answers being given and collected in a refreshing and insightful manner. When we came to the comparison between the ideas of *MODIMO* and the Christian God, most participants moved from mere description to analysis and critique of how the Christian God was introduced to their regions by missionaries. Tape recorders were used to collect information from individuals and group discussions. Cameras were also employed to gather information in pictorial form. The following discussion is about the description of the apparatus used. I shall end by raising the main questions concerning the research in the form of assumptions.

1.3.4. The Participant Observation Research Method

For this part I have drawn from the method proposed by Agnew and Pyke (1984). They suggest that the participant observers are researchers who are directly involved in the socio-cultural life and activities of the group or community within which investigation is undertaken. Whilst social activities are happening, and researchers take part, the researchers gain first-hand experience of participating. Simultaneously, the researchers strive in their observation to be as objective as possible. In other words the researchers try not to make value judgements like 'good' or 'bad', 'wrong' or 'right', 'beautiful' or 'ugly'. The researchers prevent their own biases, opinions, values, and beliefs from coloring their observation (1984: 49).

Agnew and Pyke warn that the possible distortions a researcher may cause are brought about by his past experience. The mood of the time when the observation

is done also adds to the possible distortion of the observation. One's interpretation of observation adds to the potential for distortion. Human fallibility makes the possibilities for distortion even greater. Researchers must be conscious of any misleading opinions, beliefs or attitudes they harbor (1988: 48).

The ethnographer participates, overtly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: 2).

This happens most naturally when the investigator lives with the people. Time has been made in this investigation to make sure that the ethnography is done accordingly. We tried to make findings factual and valid. In order to minimize the problems of reactivity and suspicion, we were complete participants.

A complete participant gets access to the inside information and experiences the world in ways that may be quite close to the ways other participants experience it. In this way greater access to participant perspectives may be achieved (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: 97-98).

The method of participant observation as proposed by Hammersley (1983: 56) and Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 97 - 98) is also supported by Lewis (1976: 24 - 26). According to Lewis the participant observers must immerse themselves in the community, and must know their language. In my own case Northern Sotho (*Sepedi*) is my first language and my mother-tongue. The same applied to all my fellow participant observers. I made time to visit the communities of *GaPhaahla* (my own rural village) and *GaMashabela* (an adjacent village) for a total of 12 weeks each year from 1996 to 1999. Besides that, I go to visit my parents there over many holidays.

Lewis advises that researchers must follow what is going on around them, and must record with accuracy and subtlety. The recording must not disturb the flow and volunteering of information from willing interlocutors. As researchers we had to learn to use both electronic and manual research implements and facilities in a way that no one in the community should feel threatened or suspicious. I did most of the writing in my private time, as Dziva (1997:235) would advise, and used the tape recorder during discussions, as Lewis (1976: 24) advises.

Dziva (1997: 224) is also concerned about the depth of intrusion that researchers make in the communities they are investigating. He is also concerned about keeping a critical distance and acting together with the communities in all that they do. In the words of Lewis, ethnographers must 'mix' with the local people; become the 'life and soul of the party' and seize the essence of the life around them. Ethnographers must identify with the community; must go to places, homes and functions; which I personally did. Lewis also advised that researchers should choose a community whose present circumstances render them acutely interesting for theoretical reasons (Lewis: 1976: 25 - 26).

1.4. Apparatus Descriptions

1.4.1. Tape Recorder

Every time we went out, we equipped ourselves with tape recorders and cassettes. In all the first encounters with the interlocutors, we assured them of the confidentiality with which we would handle sensitive information. We made sure that they understood that the material would be used in the compilation of this thesis. We got their approval to use the tape recorders to capture information.

We used the methodological suggestions which Agar (1980), Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) propose regarding the use and the analysis of information from tape recorded cassettes. Accordingly, the recordings, all of which were in *Pedi* and *Sotho-Tswana*, were transcribed verbatim. The

first transcribed scripts were in *Pedi* (Northern Sotho), since the majority of the interlocutors spoke Northern Sotho. The Northern Sotho scripts were then translated into English. We had two sessions of three months' length to interview, report back and discuss. The first and the second round tape-recorded information was contained in twenty eight cassettes.

The transcripts were read in their entirety several times so that I was immersed in the details of the stories related. Through listening to and appropriating this material, I found that there were conceptual, behavioral, cultural and educational gaps between myself, in particular, and the information gathered. I felt so much lacking and susceptible to Christian biases, which I had to look at critically. I tried either to suppress or avoid or expose these biases, if at all possible. I had to accept my biases as a way of realising that they were there, instead of trying to hide them.

We have been personally involved in all tape recording sessions and participated actively in performing our part in catalysing the discussions. But at times we left the discussions follow the topics which the interlocutors felt were important. All this data we listened to again and again, and tried to make sense of it. From listening to them we picked up unsaid nuances. We compared information from all the various group discussions for validation, verification and vindication through cross-checking.

Through the process of ethnographic research we learnt that this research was not supposed to be an imposition on the people. It was a learning process. According to Frostin (1988: 220) the researcher should not impose a modern thought pattern on the analyzed body of texts before rendering justice to its internal logic. In other words, we had to allow the interlocutors to expose their knowledge according to the time when it was conceived. In other words, the researcher must not come with a baggage of modern knowledge which is blindly imposed to traditional knowledge. Traditional knowledge is authentic in its own right.

The oral information we gathered with the team, the reading I have done and the audio material we generated were the texts from which I needed to extract the ideas about *MODIMO*. More importantly, the internal logic I came to understand as I read is that, when speaking about deity in STR compared to deity in Christian religion, we (the interlocutors included) seemed to have spoken about two different phenomena.

The advice of Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 137) was followed; that, through the process of analysis, ethnographers must gain familiarity with their data, must use the data to think with, must observe interesting patterns, look for the unusual, for contradictions and for inconsistencies.

1.4.2. The Use of the Camera

With the permission of individuals and groups, photographs were taken of relevant people, things and activities. I have photographs of Traditional Healers in action, of families performing traditional rituals, of the places where Ancestors reside, and of plants and animals representing Ancestors. These photographs are a record of where we have been, whom we met and what we saw and did.

1.5. Introduction of Research Teams

1.5.1. *GaPhaahla* Teachers Research Team (GTRT)

In a rural setting such as *GaPhaahla* the custodians of information, both traditional and modern, are the school teachers and elderly people. Among other people and groups who teach communities, such as parents, ministers of religion and so on, the teachers enjoy the most respect. School teachers are a significant group from whom to collect reliable information in rural settings. They are confident and articulate, and are respected by both the elderly and the young. They are the most acceptable and trusted individuals. Thus it became imperative for me to organize teachers to help with this research.

In the GTRT team there were six female and two male teachers. All of them were born and bred at *GaPhaahla*, had studied and taught Northern Sotho and had been trained as teachers in the Northern Province. All were more than 40 years old. Three of the female teachers held Bachelor's degrees in Arts and one male teacher, an Honours degree in History. The other male teacher, was a community leader who officially connects this particular community of *GaPhaahla* with the local Chief, Phaahla, and is of the Chief's own family - Mr. Adam Maoto.

1.5.2. University of the North and Stoffberg Theological Seminary Research Team (UNSTSRT)

The second team of researchers was composed of post-graduate students of theology. These students were taking courses at the University of the North and at Stoffberg Theological Seminary. This team was selected from students who had done some research work on the issue of the concepts of *MODIMO* in Sotho Traditional Religion. Their research covered the *Pedi* [Northern Sotho] areas from Pietersburg up to *Bolovedu*. Together with their lecturer, Mr. Matome Rathethe, this group had produced work in this area of research. By virtue of being interested in the same field of knowledge, this was naturally a significant group to collaborate with.

We had group discussions with both the teachers and the theology students. I gave them my preliminary writings and the initial conclusions of my work. I gave them a brief to read my work, to critique it, to research areas they discovered needed more research and verification from the communities. They had to give some feedback information gathered in writing to me and to discuss it during our group discussions and joint reporting times, so that other members of the group got the opportunity to interact with the material collected. In this way I made it possible to get the 'insider perspective', as Dziva (1997: 235) suggested: "...in order to understand some elusive aspects of African traditional religions, it may be necessary to depend on the insider perspective".

1.5.3. *Madupe* Herbalist Traditional Healers Association (MHTHA)

Another influential group of people in rural settings are the Traditional Healers. The institution of Traditional Healers has been outstanding in keeping cultural and traditional knowledge, rites, customs and beliefs. This group had, over the years, unashamedly upheld belief in Ancestors. Belief in Ancestors is stronger than belief in *MODIMO*, in STR, in a sense that communities relate to Ancestors more often than *MODIMO*. Because of the belief that Traditional Healers are closer to Ancestors and to *MODIMO*, this was a group not to be marginalized.

Through the guidance of Traditional Healer *Ngaka* Thaubele Jack Motala, an organized group of Traditional Healers was discovered. They called themselves the *Madupe* Herbalists and Traditional Healers Association (MHTHA). We organized several group interviews and discussions with them. I was an understudy of *Ngaka* Thaubele Jack Motala. Some of the group discussions we had with MHTHA was honoured by the presence and participation of the President of MHTHA, *Ngaka* Hitler Letswalo.

1.5.4. Other Interlocutors

Other interlocutors we interviewed were individuals whom we met at random. Some were our own family members and elderly people. Some were individuals we were told could be helpful concerning the information we were seeking. Some were people we met and made friends with in traditional social activities. Most of them, to a large extent, volunteered information passionately. We were always introduced to them by people who knew them very well. The views of these people, as well as of those who were engaged in formal group discussions, have been used in the creation of this thesis.

1.6. Literature Research

It is generally accepted in philosophy of science today that no scientific finding can be conclusively proved on the basis of empirical research (Mouton 1988: 191).

Other forms of research, especially the ethnographic types such as the qualitative and observational method, must be undertaken. Documented material has been taken into account to clarify and augment this investigation. Though the documented evidence may not have come to the same conclusions as did the fieldwork, it serves the purpose of this investigation.

Literature research is indispensable in this investigation. My reading has gone beyond theological documents. I have also inquired into anthropological documents. In fact, there is much common material on the STR's culture, social systems and so on, in both anthropology and theology. But we must not lose sight of the fact that we are solving a doctrinal problem on the question of *MODIMO* within the field of systematic theology, and more specifically in the field of African Theology.

1.7. Assumptions

1.7.1. How are the Concepts of *MODIMO* in STR Different from the Concepts of God?

This investigation assumes that there is a conceptual difference conditioned by the circumstances, situations and mode of communication in which the deities are conceptualized. There is, therefore, a conceptual difference between the concepts of *MODIMO* in STR and the God of the Christian religion. Deities conceptualized in different contexts cannot have the same content or meaning.

1.7.2. Where can the Concepts of *MODIMO* be Found?

The concepts of *MODIMO* are many and diverse. They can be understood more clearly when found in the general study of the notion of religion, especially African Traditional Religions. More specifically, the concepts of *MODIMO* can be found among the *Sotho* people and in the study of Sotho Traditional Religion.

1.7.3. What is the Nature of *MODIMO*?

MODIMO is more of a *deus absconditus* (a hidden God), and yet panentheistic. On the other hand, *MODIMO* is a moral agent and moral giver to *Sotho* traditional people. This assumption will be dealt with below, where various ways of using the word '*Modimo*' are discussed.

1.8. Delimitations

This work will concentrate on the critical comparison between the concepts of *MODIMO* in Sotho Traditional Religion (STR) and the concept of the Christian God as a missiological problem. The assumption to be proved is that there has been a mis-communication and an imposition of the Christian God onto *Sotho* people. The kind of Christian God communicated to the *Sotho* people was incongruent with that of the indigenous people.

This work will not take into account the issues which are not necessarily and directly connected with the notion of *MODIMO*. For example, the question of witchcraft is of major concern among the Northern Sotho at present, but will not be considered. Nevertheless, if there are aspects of witchcraft which relate to *MODIMO* they will be taken into account, but not the subject of witchcraft as a theme on its own. Below is the outline of chapters.

1.9. Outline of Chapters

Chapter one introduces the problem. It contains a review of literature. The method of research is detailed in this chapter. This chapter also contains the assumptions and the delimitation of this investigation.

Chapter two covers the survey of the observations and the debate concerning the concepts of 'God' in STR. The debate is entered into by pioneer African Christian theologians against missionaries, colonial administrators, travelers and Western anthropologists. This is followed by the input of other African Christian theologians and African scholars. It ends with the southern African experience of the introduction of the Christian God.

Chapter three contains the missionary background and the concepts of the Christian God they communicated in southern Africa. This chapter serves to reveal who the missionaries were and what they did, in negative and positive terms, in reference to the concepts of the Christian God they communicated.

Chapter four outlines the background of the *Sotho* world-view. This chapter deals with the Sotho religio-social structure and ethics. In this chapter I deal with the cosmological and ethical context in which the concepts of *MODIMO* were conceptualized.

Chapter five presents the concepts of *MODIMO* in STR. This chapter also contains a critical comparison of the concepts of *MODIMO* in STR and those of the Christian God.

Chapter six contains the statements of the affirmation of the concepts of *MODIMO* in STR. This chapter also outlines what needs to be done, in regard to what has been discovered. It contains the demonstration of areas where the concepts of *MODIMO* are irreconcilable with the Christian concepts of God. In this chapter the areas of common ground, and possible entry points for dialogue

and conciliation between the concepts of *MODIMO* and the concepts of the Christian God are outlined. Finally, it includes the summary of the thesis.

CHAPTER 2

2. AN HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE OBSERVATIONS AND DEBATE ABOUT THE CONCEPTS OF GOD IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter I examine the appropriation of African Traditional Religions (ATRs) into Christianity, firstly by missionaries, colonial administrators, Western European travelers and immediately thereafter by Western anthropologists, and some liberal Western theologians. I also explore the responses by African Christian theologians and the counter-responses by African scholars of religion and other respondents from other disciplines, such as anthropology and so on.

The debate about the concepts of 'God' in Africa was begun long before this present study. The study of the place of 'God' in African Traditional Religions (ATRs), in the encounter with Western European missionary Christianity and colonization needed the understanding of African world-views about religion and politics. This process was not an apolitical exercise. The contest for the knowledge of the landscape, the peoples, the religions and the political systems of Africa was a conscious exercise of European missionary Christianity and a program of colonization and the scramble for Africa.

My special focus is on how the concepts of deities have been appropriated from an historical and a theological perspective. I am aware that other themes, such as witchcraft, salvation, sin and so forth, have been of interest to theologians and scholars of religion. In this particular thesis I want to select the theme of 'God' once more. The southern African Christian theologians are yet to make more contributions to this debate. African theologians need to map out the agenda for African theology

and its relevance to the unfolding religio-cultural, socio-economic and political life and the quest for liberation in southern Africa.

2.2. 'God' in Africa: Africa as an 'Object' Studied by Outsiders

In this subsection I begin with the observations of the study of ATRs and Africa by 'outsiders'. The following comments describe how Africa was depicted by missionaries and colonial administrators.

In Rattray 's (1916: 17 - 23) studies, he acknowledged the presence of a Supreme Being in ATRs. Taylor (1963: 24) observed that Africans desire the 'Ultimate' God, though he acknowledged 'God' being recognized among Africans, but this was as though 'God' in Africa is not the 'Ultimate' one as 'God' would be conceptualized in European Christianity. From Taylor, we deduce that there was 'God' in Africa, who was either another different Deity from the Christian one, or 'God' in Africa was an incomplete deity.

Taylor acknowledged that some African tribes do worship 'God'; that some have no shrines; that sacrifices could be detected and yet that all this was not sufficient. Apparently, 'African ecclesiology' was strange and different from 'Euro-Christian ecclesiology' which had churches and altars as places of worship.

Taylor (1963: 245) maintained that African concepts of 'God' were influenced by missionary adoption of vernacular names to designate the God of the Bible, and that this cemented the concept of 'God' as supreme creator in Africa . In other words, the African concepts of 'God' were unlike those of the God of the Bible. The translation of the Bible into vernacular languages dressed the supposedly 'inadequate' concepts of 'God' in Africa with the alleged 'adequate' concepts of the 'God' of the Bible. In other words, ATRs learned from European Christianity that 'God' is supreme, creator and worthy of Christian worship.

On the other hand, Tempels (1959) was of the opinion that 'God' in ATR is the same deity as that presented in Christianity, that divinities and spirits are mediums linking 'God' to humans and that 'God' was at the most pronounced as vital force. In other words, what missionaries declared was not new in Africa.

Smith (1950: 22) contended that the African 'High God' may not be the 'God' of a 'strict monotheism'. 'Strict monotheism' I would imagine constitutes One and only true 'God', who is not like other 'Gods'; before this 'God' all others non-'Gods', or they are all false Gods. In Pritchards' (1956: 107) view, 'lesser spirits' are refractions of 'God'. The notion of 'so-called 'lesser spirits' is found in West African and some southern African cosmologies. 'Lesser spirits', here, could be nature spirits, Ancestors, divinities and other African so-called functionaries of 'God'.

Lienhardt (1961: 29) studied the *Dinka* people's notions of 'God'- the *nhialic* (= 'God', in Dinka thought). According to Lienhardt (1961: 29) the *nhialic* is not identical to the Western notion of 'God'. In other words, the Western notion of 'God' is different to the *Dinka* notion of God. For Parrinder (1954), West African religion does have a concept of 'God'. Yet, in contrast, according to Chidester's (1992) observation, the missionaries, colonial administrators and Western anthropologists declared that Africans had no concept of 'God' before they were conquered and brought under colonial rule.

When Africans were totally under the control and domination of missionary Christianity and colonial administration, Africans were rewarded with some faded concept of 'God' (Chidester 1992). When Africans rise up to retaliate against missionary Christianity and colonial rule, they would once more be declared a people with no 'religion' or concept of 'God'. Whether the Africans had concepts of God or not was dependent on the opinion of the missionaries and colonizers. In this I observe that, on one hand, it was said that Africans had a glimpse of 'God' and, on the other, they had no concept of 'God'

2.2.1. The Responses of African Christian Theologians and Other Scholars

Okot p'Bitek's (1971: 1 - 2) response was that the reports of the missionaries and colonialists were meant to justify colonialism in Africa. Magesa's (1998: 28) response to these missionaries and colonialists' reports was that they were a paternalistic condescension prejudiced by nineteenth-century scholarship, typical of a colonial mentality. According to Comaroff and Comaroff (1991: 200), missionaries and colonialism as demonstrated through observations of African deities were about the absorption of indigenous peoples into the capitalist mode of production emerging in Western Europe, with a particular focus on British mercantile industrialization.

With the rise of mercantile capitalism in northern Europe during the sixteenth century, authentic and reliable knowledge about human beings became a commodity that was valued for its utility in the work of trading or fighting with unfamiliar people all over the world (Chidester 1991: 1). Knowledge about ATRs and peoples of Africa, including their political and social systems, was needed for the European colonial strategy of conquering and converting Africans. Mudimbe's (1988: 20) response was that the missionaries and colonialists' studies and reports about ATRs and Africa were speaking neither about Africa nor Africans,

... but rather justify the process of inventing and conquering the continent and naming its 'primitiveness' or disorder; as well as the subsequent means of its exploitation and methods of its 'regeneration' (Mudimbe 1988: 20).

In my understanding, according to Mudimbe (1988: 20), studies of ATRs and Africa was about 'naming'; a construction of ATRs and Africa in terms of missionary-colonial administrator-Western-anthropologist-thought. The picture of Africa and ATRs drawn was 'Africa and ATRs in the image of Europe'.

For Idowu (1873: 353) the study of ATRs was a misguided exercise or purpose which led to the unfortunate introduction of a completely new God who (seemingly) had nothing to do with the past of Africa. In my reading of Setiloane (1976; 1989) the problem with missionaries, colonial administrators and Western anthropologists was that they did not understand the nuances of African culture and language and thus devalued the currency of *MODIMO* (= 'God' in *Sotho-Tswana*).

After the whole process of Christian mission and colonization, Mugambi (1992: 36) says: "... mission schools taught that all people were created in the image of God, and at the same time the Europeans considered themselves fuller humans than the Africans". In other words the studies of ATRs by missionaries and colonialists was about the dehumanization of Africans. In other words, the picture of ATRs and Africa drawn by missionaries and colonial administrators was unrecognizable to Africans.

2.2.2. 'God' in Africa: African Theologians and African Scholars' Propositions

African theologians and scholars denounced the picture of Africa drawn by missionaries and colonial administrators. What picture of ATRs and deities did African theologians draw?

Danquah (1944: 89), in his book The Akan Doctrine of God, proposed that *Nyame* (God in *Akan* religion) is the Great Ancestor. Though Danquah does show that the *Akan* have a clear concept of 'God' apart from Ancestors and divinities, he makes a proposition that 'God' is the Great Ancestor after the *Akan* royal dynasty. For Danquah, Ancestors are merely mediators. He asserted that *Akan* religion is monotheistic. He rejected the idea that *Akan* religion was 'ancestor worship'.

Kenyatta (1938), in his work, Facing Mount Kenya East, said that the *Kikuyu* believe in one God = *Ngai*; giver of all things; giver of rain; the creator. He also rejected the

notion of the withdrawn God. Kenyatta (1938), was of the opinion that the *Kikuyu* communicate with *Ngai* at birth, initiation, marriage and death. In other words, he proposed that the *Kikuyu* observed all rites of passage from birth to death to be related directly to *Ngai*. He also rejected the idea that *Kikuyu* religion is 'ancestor worship'. He proposed, rather, that the *Kikuyu* religion consisted of 'communion with ancestors'. The attitude of the *Kikuyu* to *Ngai*, on the one hand, is of awe and, on the other hand, of anamnesis to ancestors. *Ngai* was not confused with ancestors.

On the other hand, Mbiti (1978) is of the opinion that African religion is talking about one and the same God as the Bible. Mbiti (1978) has found similar natural, moral, intrinsic, eternal and ethical attributes of the Christian God in the deities of many African communities. For Mbiti (1991: 29), the God of the Bible has been at work in Africa and is one and the same deity ever known and worshiped by Africans in their various communities. Mbiti (1991) reiterates that missionaries did not bring God to Africa but that God brought the missionaries to Africa. In addition, Mbiti (1970: 58) says, every African community recognizes one God and one supreme being for all peoples - African and Western Christian. He says that concepts of God in Africa sprang independently out of the African reflection of God.

Idowu (1962: 18, 192) affirms that *Olodumare* God in *Yoruba* religion is creator; is supreme over all divinities and ancestors. The supremacy of *Olodumare* is never in doubt. *Olodumare* made the created order through divinities. *Olodumare* is the origin and foundation of creation; is eternal and is taken for granted in *Yoruba* religion. In other words, *Olodumare* has an axiomatic existence; is not questioned; is key in the *Yoruba* belief superstructure.

Idowu (1962) too, rejected the notion of ancestor veneration as definitive of *Yoruba* religion. On the other hand, he affirmed that Christian natural attributes of God apply in African religion. He argued for the universality of God, i.e., that there is one God who is universal for all humanity. Idowu (1962) is a proponent of one African

religion (in one Africa. Addition mine) and that this universal 'God' is moral as well. For Idowu (1962) as is with Mbiti (1978), there is a similarity between Christian and African concepts of God. Idowu (1962), like Setiloane (1976), but unlike Mbiti (1978), *lamented two Gods left in the hands of African believers*. Idowu (1962), like Mbiti (1970), believes there should be and is continuity between the Christian and African concepts of 'God'. Unlike Idowu (1962) and Mbiti (1978), as it shall be shown in this thesis, I am concerned about accentuating that the African notions of God are continuous with Christian notions; and on the other hand that the African notions of God have a potential to be used as stepping stones towards the 'higher' (Christian) understanding of God.

Nyamiti's (1987) contention, in his book African Tradition and the Christian God, was that Africans were capable of reflecting on God and that not only could western Christians learn much from African notions but also that Western Christians could learn from the Africans. Nyamiti (1987) holds a position of mutual inter-religious dialogue and reciprocal enrichment between the African and Christian notions of God. Neither of these two religions should enjoy a privileged advantage over the other.

Setiloane (1976: 80ff, 83ff) says *MODIMO*, whose name was tabooed, is one; is 'Ancient of days', is of the forefathers, is 'Master of all'. *MODIMO* addressed as IT is appropriate in *Sotho-Tswana* religion. IT is the giver of rain and harvest, and rain and harvest are from this source (*MODIMO*). According to Setiloane (1976), *Badimo* (ancestors) are ranked lower. His 'alibi' is that missionaries misunderstood *MODIMO* and *Badimo*. *Badimo* are in-charge of the good ordering of society and have to do with respect and the conservation of traditions and customs. *MODIMO* is the all pervasive DEITY.

The concern of this thesis is whether the concepts of the Christian God are different to the concepts of 'God' in Africa. I am also concerned whether there is a universal

God for all humanity. Actually, the topic of the critical comparison of the concepts of *MODIMO* in STR and the concepts of the Christian God, questions the proposition and the position of the notion of a 'universal God'. Whether there is or should be a continuity between Deity in Africa and the Christian God is another concern. African theologians referred to in this section have no unified opinion.

2.2.3. The Criticism of African Christian Theologians and Scholars by 'Outsiders' and Other African Scholars

Why did African theologians criticize 'outsiders', i.e., missionaries, colonial administrators and Western anthropologists? Why did African theologians not present a unified picture of deities in ATR? Westerlund (1985) says that African Christian theologians and nationalists were influenced by the political context of their time. In other words, Africans were inspired by pan-Africanism, African nationalism, negritude ideologies, negative reporting of travelers, anthropologists, missionaries and colonial administrators. African theologians were, in other words, not presenting researched notions of 'God' but were correcting the distorted picture drawn by missionaries and colonialists. By implication, the notions of 'God' as Africans hold them should still be presented.

This situation (in African political context) necessitated disapproval of the Western version of African Christianity and notions of 'God' in Africa portrayed by the outsiders. There was a pressing need to have an African Christianity that was unified, as there was a need to have a political African nationalism and pan-Africanism to resist the threat of Western colonialism. This need was prompted by the limitations of Western anthropologists and missionaries, who gave a repugnant picture of ATRs and who distorted the African political, religious and social systems. Besides a need for a unified African Christianity, there was a parallel need to portray a unified African Traditional Religion (ATR), i.e., one religion for one Africa. This proposed

‘unified religion’ would have been a buffer of counteraction and resistance to the ‘one’ Christian religion.

Another criticism against African Christian theologians was that their ideas were clouded by their Christian commitment and allegiance. Much as African Christian theologians did not like the writings, reports and ideas of the missionaries and colonialists concerning their depiction of ATRs, they still wanted Christianity to thrive in Africa. They were committed to the Christian religion. This influenced their attitude, approach and methods of studying ATRs. Somehow, African theologians’ lack of criticality and empirical astuteness was compromised by their sympathy to missionary Christianity.

African theologians were prepared and committed to take missionary Christianity forward and to continue the Christianization of Africa. African theologians, some of them, as Christian priests, would carry on from where the missionaries left off. African theologians were not offering an alternative message to Christianity nor an alternative Deity to the Christian God. In p’Bitek’s (1971) thought, they would continue to dress African deities in Western Hellenic garments. In his words: p’Bitek (1971: 41) “African theologians dress up African deities with Hellenic robes and parade them before the Western world”.

African theologians in their response to missionaries and Western anthropologists’ writings about Africa and ATRs were ideologically driven. Apart from the context of the rise of African nationalism, African theologians were committed to do ‘Christian theology’ as an ideological driving force or ‘propaganda’ even ‘as an ‘apologetic’ of Christian mission. African theologians did not study ATR in its autonomous right as a religion. They did not present, for example, concepts of African deities as Africans would express them or study ATRs with no intention of Christian evangelization. This reduced African theology to being a form of Christian evangelization of Africa.

African theologians added to the reduction of ATRs in that they studied ATRs in the light of Christianity. In other words, Christianity was the yardstick for 'true' religion. ATRs were subjected to the apparent 'higher' standards of Christianity. Christianity was the norm and ATRs were the deviant, if not 'false' religions. Western Christianity and culture was made a standard by which African religions were measured (Shaw 1990: 345).

African theologians "study African traditional religions not as historians of religion nor as anthropologists, but as Christian theologians" (Bosch 1984: 21). As Christian theologians they produced a Christian theology about ATRs and not the 'theology of ATRs' (Westerlund 1993: 45). African scholars (and Christian theologians) are theologically inspired instead of being scholarly - seeking objectivity (Westerlund 1993: 45). The difference is that 'African theology' is a 'Christian theology' and it is not representing ATRs' religious thought forms. Another accusation unleashed against African scholars and African Christian theologians is that,

African scholars studying African religions have not broken any new ground either in the methods of carrying out research or in their interpretations of the data collected. The most active ones today are Christian priests, and they appear to rely a great deal on published sources. These works must be subjected to thorough and critical analysis before we can use them as authorities (p'Bitek 1971: 69).

African theologians "... favored a normative as opposed to a non-normative approach, failing to distinguish between sermons and lectures, and parishioners and students" (Hackett 1988: 43). In addition to that, Horton (1993: 191) criticizes African theologians by saying that since they had put on 'Judaeo-Christian' spectacles, they have not presented us with genuine notions of ATRs. African theologians promoted ideologies of continuity between Christian notions of 'God'

and African notions of deities. They have over emphasized monotheism over other salient realities in African cosmologies.

The over-emphasis of monotheism could have been provoked by a so called 'strict' Christian monotheism which needed to be countered by an equally 'strict' and 'strong' African monotheism. In the process of the 'battle' of 'monotheisms' a distortion has resulted in that other pragmatic and essential aspects of ATRs appeared to be marginal and less important.

Westerlund (1985: 33 - 36) adds that, educationally, African theologians were influenced by their Christian theological studies. From the influence of Western systematic theology they placed 'God' at the apex of ATRs' and Ancestors at the bottom, thus giving the impression that Ancestors played a minor role.

African theologians were engaged more in the Christianization of ATRs than in representing ATRs (Westerlund 1985; 1993: 19). Westerlund (1993: 46) criticizes African Christian theologians and African scholars for over-emphasizing the similarities more than the dissimilarities between, for example, concepts of deities in ATRs and concepts of the Christian God or comparison between ATRs and Christianity.

Rosalind Shaw's (1990: 343) criticism was that African theologians were prompted by the defensive spirit to advocate 'sameness'. The same was Cox's (1998: 348) criticism. The same concern was raised by Westerlund (1985; 1993); that African scholars over-emphasized similarities at the expense of differences between Christianity and ATRs.

Cox (1998: 27 - 28) advises that African theologians need to adopt a phenomenological approach in their study of African religion without abandoning theological aptitude and astuteness. There is a need for sound African Christian

theology as much as there is a need for sound ATRs' theology. For this to happen, when studying ATRs, Christian assumptions and prejudices, must be consciously put aside as much as is humanly possible.

Bediako's (1992) notion of African religions as 'primal religions' gives the impression that African religions are forerunners to Christianity and, therefore, that ATRs must be succeeded, superseded and fulfilled in Christianity, thus removing the right of ATRs to stand in their own legitimate right. This is a reduction of the status of ATRs among other religions. As it is said, African theology has been a movement of reductionism. This is how Ndlovu (1997: 23) describes this reductionism,

The descriptions and interpretations of African Traditional Religions (ATRs) given by many African Christian Theologians can also be described as inadequate, prejudiced, and derogatory (Ndlovu: 1997: 23).

A further reprimand goes against the notion of ATRs as *preparatio evangelica*. Ndlovu (1997: 24) finds it patronizing to subordinate ATRs to Christianity. He proposes that ATRs are viable religions which in themselves do offer salvation. (Preemptively, my contention would be that, it is beyond the scope of ATRs to speak of salvation as conceptualized in the Christian religion). That ATRs as a *preparatio evangelica* is a form of patronization.

The patronizing attitude fosters the tendency to subordinate ATRs to Christianity. ATRs are not perceived as viable religions through which humanity can gain salvation. Too often, ATRs are seen as a preparation for Christianity or an appendage of Christianity (Ndlovu 1997: 24).

Further, African theologians were criticized for gross, hasty generalizations; accused of moving rapidly from the particular to the universal, resulting in a distorted representation of ATRs (Ray 1976: 26). African Christian theologians ignored

salient details and minute differences between ethnic communities and thus distorted their peculiarities (Platvoet 1996: 172). African Christian theologians neglected specific cultural and social contexts (Esichei 1993: 384; Ndlovu 1997: 26) and, their defence of ATRs (when they did so), still resulted in distortions of the very ATRs they defended (Westerlund 1993: 89). For example, it was exaggerating to say that 'Africans are notoriously religious' (Mbiti 1972); that the African cosmology is totally religious. This gives an impression that Africans can offer nothing besides on matters of religion. On the other hand, this means Africans attach religion to everything in life.

Further, African Christian theologians were accused of hiding embarrassing African practices, such as witchcraft, 'human sacrifice' (burial of subjects alive with their chiefs), oppression of women, and of overstating the alleged importance of the 'supreme being'. African Christian theologians were accused of not being practitioners of ATRs themselves and, thereby, have rendered themselves as outsiders. Further, mistakenly, says Ndlovu (1997: 26), "ATRs are portrayed as rural and tribal religions which do not change, in spite of the rapid innovations (sic) in the social, economic, and political lives of many Africans" (Ndlovu 1997: 26). In other words, it was a mistake to think that ATRs were not dynamic and have always been adapted to serve well the changing contexts of African communities. It is a mistake to think that ATRs are incapable of adapting to the new economic and political life of Africans, whether it is rural or urban.

According to Green (1996: 126), "One cannot understand African religious beliefs without also accepting the fact that such beliefs were subject to change under the influence of worldly events". The latter statement was the same as Ndlovu's (1997: 26) criticism against African theologians. To Olupona (1991: 110, 175 - 176), African Christian theologians have been too occupied with traditional religion, rather than with social change (in a multi-religious encounter). Much as African theologians were influenced by the social changes of their times, some of which was brought

about by missionaries and colonialism, they did not consider that the same social changes affected ATRs.

2.2.4. 'God' in Africa: Criticism of African Theologians by 'Second Generation' African Theologians and Scholars

By 'second generation' African theologians and scholars, I refer to those who came into the field of study of ATRs and African theology after the missionaries had drawn their picture of Africa and ATRs, and after African Christian theologians such as Mbiti (1972), Idowu (1969) and Setiloane (1976) had made their responses to the work of Christian missionaries and colonialists. These so-called 'second generation' African theologians and scholars were very critical of the way ATRs were studied, both by African Christian theologians and missionaries. By the time the 'second generation' began their work, the theme of 'God' was already established and given a prominent place in the study of ATRs. This section will not necessarily exhaust all the comments and the works of 'second generation' African theologians and scholars, but will comment on the works of Olowola (1993), Ikenga-Metuh (1981), Magesa (1988), Ndlovu(1997), amongst others.

Olowola (1993: 11) says "modern scholarship now recognizes that a concept of God as supreme being and creator is virtually universal in traditional Africa". It is with that concept of the 'supreme being' that this thesis, once more, is concerned. Many African communities (and African theologians), especially those in southern Africa, have not yet expressed the concepts of their deities. It remains a challenge for us to unearth these concepts, with Christian notions set aside as much as it is humanly possible.

Awolalu (1979: 3) says, "the existence of the Supreme Being is taken as a matter of course". Whether or not 'God' *exists* may not be the question we want to deal with now, but what 'God' looks like, which is the matter of contention at the moment. As

things stand, it has been established that most African communities accept the existence of 'God'. The problem is that African deities are obfuscated by the concepts of the Christian God. As long as the concepts of African deities remain deliberately confused and suppressed, this debate and discussion is one sided and is in favour of the established claims. African religion cannot be counted as something that can be invoked for the understanding of particular African problems regarding the place of religion in the continent as long as it is termed 'traditional'. The terms seems to confine African religion to the 'rural' and the 'primitive'.

Magesa (1998: 45) comments "the supremacy of God above the created order is the starting point. African Religion never questions nor debates God's ultimate importance". It is not the supremacy of God that is in question, as would be the case in Western systematic theology. The issue is the distortion of African deities; the apparent structuring of African religious cosmology as if it was conceptualized in Western systematic theology, where God is placed at the top or apex of the structure.

For example, as Owolalu (1979: 16ff) says, "early writers misunderstood *Yoruba* religion'; *Olodumare* is not remote; divinities do not hold more attention than *Olodumare*; *Olodumare* is worshiped; divinities are a means to an end and not an end to themselves; yet, *Olodumare* and divinities are co-existent". Setiloane (1976) has said, *MODIMO* is panentheistic - meaning that *MODIMO* permeates all things, and that does not necessarily put *MODIMO* at the apex of the *Sotho-Tswana* religious structure.

According to Ikenga-Metuh (1981: 33ff), commenting on 'God' in *Igbo* religion, divinities are conceptualized as equal to 'God'. For this to be clarified he coins the term the 'unicity of God', and does not use, or avoids the use of, the concept of monotheism so that in this 'unicity' the disposition of 'God' as well as those of the divinities are put on an equal footing, though each of them is distinguished from the others. It is clear among *Igbo* that 'divinities' are not 'God'.

Quarcoopome (1987: 70) adds to the debate and search for the traditional ATR thoughts by saying that traditionalists have rejected the idea that Africans worship ancestors. The early pioneer African Christian theologians Mbiti (1970), Idowu (1969) and Setiloane (1976) have also refuted this idea of ATRs as 'ancestor worship' religions. Quarcoopome (1987: 70f) says the divinities are in a father-son relationship with 'God'. Here, Quarcoopome, seems to use Christian categories (Father-son relationship). This may not be so in many other ATRs.

Divinities are functionaries of 'God'. Divinities derive their power from 'God'. As Setiloane (1976) would say, *Badimo* (Ancestors) do not have a *Bomodimo* (divinity) of their own; they derive *Bomodimo* from *MODIMO*. 'God' and the functionaries exercise a theocratic governance of the world (Quarcoopome 1987: 70). On the other hand, Ndlovu (1997: 25) also criticizes early African theologians. He says:

The claim that God is worshiped in African traditional religion has no empirical basis. As a matter of fact, this claim is borrowed from Christian theology which depicts the Judaeo-Christian God as a benevolent Being who deals with humanity through intermediaries which include angels, prophets, and saints (Ndlovu 1997: 25).

According to Ndlovu (1997: 25), *Mvelichanti* (sic) ('the First to Appear') is remote; is rarely consulted; has no rituals; whereas there is a strong bond between ancestors and the living, and the living have no direct relationship with *Mvelichanti*.

As is the concern of Ndlovu (1997: 25), I would also have a problem with the application of the term 'worship' to Ancestor anamnesis. I would also have reservations about the term 'prayer' as applied to communication with or speaking to the Ancestors. Since Ancestors are 'departed' parents, conversation with them should be unlike conversation with 'God' or *MODIMO*. Besides the application of words such as 'worship' and 'prayer' to ATRs, the specific concern of this thesis is

the application and the appellation of the term 'Supreme Being' to ATR, especially when applied to STR.

2.3. The Problem of the Appellation 'Supreme Being'

It was the early church fathers Justin Martyr, Theophilus, Tertullian, Clement, Origen and Augustine who Hellenized the conception of the Jewish deity *JHWH* into the Supreme Being, who was dressed with the attributes of omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience and eternity, and thus altered the original concept of this deity. What does the notion of a 'Being' mean to African people?, asks p'Bitek (1971: 60 - 61). Setiloane (1986: 21) has already repudiated the attributes mentioned and said it is a Western and Christian description of a deity.

Moreover, Hellenization introduced into Christianity the ideas of immutability, stability, and impassibility as the central perfections of God. The Christian God was therefore described as the Supreme Being, because no other being could be greater than Him (p'Bitek 1971: 61).

We have been raised with the idea that there is only one true universal God, only to find that, that is not necessarily the case for:

It is now known, however, that the conception of a Supreme Being is not universal. The central truth of Thervada Buddhism is the nirvana, the abode of peace beyond the round of births, but not about a personal God. In Hinduism there are two levels of truth: truth about the Absolute, and truth about the world, and the latter has only a provisional and secondary significance (p'Bitek 1971: 61).

The notion of one supreme being is not necessarily held by all people universally. "Humans do not discover God by themselves' (sic). They are taught about God by

others. These teachings about God are part of the socialization process. And, since socialization processes are biased and culture based, all teachings about God are inevitably biased and culture based” (Mugambi 1992: 39).

In the process of missionary colonization the African deities were conceptually misrepresented and, eventually, conveniently dressed in Hellenistic clothes which were already accepted as part of Western culture and Christian religion now propagated by Christian colonizing forces, whose aim was to subsume the Africans into the same mode of thinking as their capitalist masters. This problem was identified by several scholars. One of them is Dziva (1997: 24) who identified a doubt whether belief in a significant Supreme Being was part of African Traditional Religions. Dziva (1997) went on to raise a doubt as to whether the *Shona* people had a belief in one God - *Mwari*, since there were as many as twelve shrines of this *Shona* deity (Dziva 1997: 26).

Remarkably, there are those African philosophers, such as Kamalu (1990: 43), who in all sincerity affirm that the concepts of ‘God’ as ‘One’, ‘True’ and ‘Supreme Being’ have had their origin in Africa, even in ancient Egypt. This affirmation further distorts the African local concepts, which are being marginalized and extinguished from the theological and religious arena. Kamalu (1990: 43) confuses the issue even more by way of generalizations when he speaks about Africa, as if Africa is genuinely, culturally and religiously, one. He says: “There is clearly only one Supreme Being in African Religion, but the many aspects of the Supreme Being are represented by the divinities” (Kamalu 1990: 43).

Kamalu (1990: 43f) gives the impression that the local concepts of deities are dimensions of the one Supreme Being. This may not be the case, as this thesis will later show. The point is that we should, as much as possible, listen to what the locals say ‘deity’ is, and what *MODIMO* is, in the context of STR. Besides that, to impose the notion that Africans think of deities as ‘beings’ could be premature and

misleading. For instance, Mafokoane speaks of *MODIMO* in STR consistently as ‘the unknown one’, meaning it is not possible for humans to know *MODIMO*, though, in African culture and thought, among the *Bapedi* in particular, it is equally not possible to dismiss *MODIMO* as nonexistent (Interview: 19th December 1996). For instance, among other scholars, Weitz (1988: 56) also says the essence of the said Supreme Being is His existence; that means:

God is demonstrably simple, one, perfect, omniscient, omnipotent, infinite, eternal, good, immutable, and both immanent and transcendent. He is also but not demonstrably known to be by faith three persons in one essence (Weitz 1988: 56).

The complication that Weitz’s (1988: 56) assertion makes, is by the contradiction in the definition. The contradiction is in the thought that God can be demonstrably simple and yet not demonstrably known. How, then, is it known that God is demonstrably simple if God cannot be demonstrably known? Such philosophical and theological dilemmas have not been adequately addressed, even within the Christian religion. In other ways it is those nations, like the British colonial power which the missionaries were working for, who have a mind-set (Bediako 1997) that they themselves are superior which conceives that their God is by definition also superior. Another problem, although expressed in corrective ways is that:

... it is surprising that in approaching the study of the divinity in Africa, Western scholars have always begun by looking at the African ‘Supreme Being’ through the prism of Christian soteriology. They have not for a moment thought that in cultures other than our own the God of Abraham, the God of Moses, and the God of the Christian era could easily blend into a single being who, abolishing the temporal perspective, manifests according to several modalities (Zehan 1979: 15).

But how, then, if not by faith and theologization is the manifestation of the Christian God captured in human minds and situations? Why then should one theological enterprise condescend to all others and declare itself supreme? Beyond what Zehan (1979: 15) is saying, even in the historical continuum of the understanding of the 'Gods' (*EL*; *JHWR*; Jesus; Supreme Being) of the Christian religion, i.e. the development of the concepts of God of the Christian religion, there has not been a natural blending between the God of the Israelites and that of the Christians.

How much can we hope that there would be continuity between the God of Israel and that of the *Sotho*, at least without strife, distortions and conceptual dislocations and dispositions? Where, then, could the *Sotho-Tswana* have conceived their deity as Supreme Being as p'Bitek (1971) would ask, if there was no previous historical and theological encounter between the two cultures, their philosophies and their deities?

In other words, I allege that there is no continuity between the Christian God and *MODIMO* or African deities. Because, concepts of deities are about perceptions, attitudes, prejudices, concepts and culture, all these being dynamic and developing as people think about and discuss them. More so if people from different religious, cultural, and political backgrounds engage each other on these issues and seek to exchange insights. Thus, the missionary-colonizers and Western anthropologists were more likely to misunderstand than to understand what was going on in African communities, because they were in the mode of a foreign religious frame-of-mind. For example, Pauw (1960: 12) says that:

It is probable that the Tswana traditionally believed in a Supreme Being, whom they called *Modimo* [God]... *Modimo* as a single Supreme Being; sometimes the word is used to denote an ancestor spirit or even a living person whom one honors greatly (Pauw 1960: 12- 13).

Somehow, Pauw (1960: 12 - 13) was getting closer to the point that in *Sotho-Tswana* religion, there are several ways of speaking about *MODIMO* and sometimes it needs the exposure of an insider like Setiloane (1986) to capture the finer nuances and different applications when the name *MODIMO* is mentioned. Pauw (1960: 12 - 13) got a glimpse of the understanding that *MODIMO* stands for many things in such a way that to speak of a single Supreme Being cannot fit the *Tswana* concept of IT, and yet Pauw (1960) still imposes the concepts of a Christian God as he still insists that the *Tswana* believed in a single Supreme Being.

Pauw (1960: 12), having seen that the word *MODIMO* does also refer to *Badimo* [Ancestors], continues to say that he does not separate the notion of *MODIMO* from what he calls doctoring, medicines and sorcery. As I see it, Pauw (1960) does not bother to analyze or to discern, to seek to understand the different ways of the usage of the word *MODIMO* among the *Sotho-Tswana*, and it could be that his impatience with Africans hindered him and got in his way of understanding things deeper and better.

It is in the same manner that Turner (1981: 14) records the 'concept' of God among the *Ndembu* people of Zambia. The problem is not whether the *Ndembu* people believed in God they called *Nzambi* or not, but that Turner (1981: 14) would describe that as an *otiose* 'High God', who created the world, left it to its own devices, and that this *Nzambi* was never worshiped in prayer or in rite. Turner continues to say that *Nzambi* is vaguely connected with weather and fertility and that the 'ancestor spirits' intercede with and mediate between *Nzambi* on behalf of the people and their families when they are smitten with misfortune. But, all these notions of 'mediators' and 'interceptors' are Christian appellations imposed on African people.

Further, Turner (1981: 14) thought of *Nzambi* as a male deity, as missionary-colonizers would assume. As for *MODIMO*, it is neither male nor female and yet fatherly and motherly. This will also be explored further at the appropriate place in

this thesis. Tempels (1959:15), generalizing about African people, which would include the *Ndembus* of Zambia, would inclusively say:

It is today generally admitted that, among primitive peoples, it is the most primitive of all who have maintained the most pure form of the concept of the Supreme Being, Creator and Disposer of the Universe (Temples 1959: 15).

Tempels (1959: 15) is imposing on people he calls 'primitive' - this problematic term - the idea of a pure 'Supreme Being'. It is the task of this thesis deliberately to unearth the local attributes of what people believed in, especially the STR, so that the concepts of *MODIMO* in STR need not assume the attributes of a strange God. The idea of a 'pure' deity, if it was found in STR for instance, needs to be tested.

Okot p'Bitek sends the right signal when he says that students of African Traditional Religions need not articulate their thoughts through concepts which befit Christian categories of thought, nor to look for equivalents in Christian religion, such as myths of origin, prophets, saviors, judgement, heaven, hell and so on. What he says is that we Africans have a contribution to make in the study of world religions. We have our own concepts of things religious, and that is what we must expose, in order to represent our people fairly (1970: 63). He says:

The aim of the study of African religions should be to understand the religious beliefs and practices of African people, rather than to discover the Christian God in Africa (p'Bitek 1970: 111).

This must be taken seriously and an about-turn must be made. African religions cannot go on with assumptions which Haule (1969: 63) and Bhebe (1979: xii - xiii) make that the '*Bantu*' (sic) and *Shona* respectively have a notion of a Supreme Being whom they called *Mwari* (God). Bhebe continues to say that the *Shona* claim that

Mwari is a concept of a 'High God' (sic) which the *Shona* got from the *Sotho* and *Tswana*. My problem with Bhebe is that he does not produce sufficient etymological, historical or theological proof that the *Shona* did, indeed, get their concept of *Mwari* from the *Sotho*. Besides that, Dziva (1997: 24) has given a different version of *Mwari* and revealed that *Mwari* had about twelve shrines erected around Zimbabwe and nothing is said of *Mwari* being transported and exported from the *Sotho-Tswana*, who themselves have no shrines of *MODIMO*. Where, then, did the *Shona* people get the idea of shrines from?

Kamalu alludes to the point that the personalization of the 'Supreme Being' was conceptualized so as to aid human comprehension (1990: 42). To my way of thinking, the notion of the personal deity has been an unhelpful imposition and has not aided human comprehension. Humans are now struggling to undo that concept - the concept that Divinity is a person, a human. In fact, I believe that it is only fair to say that at least another way of speaking about *MODIMO* is that, IT is not a human, IT cannot be a person (Mafokoane 1996, 19th December: Interview).

Okot p'Bitek says Western scholarship has not studied African religions and concepts of deities in their own right (1970: 102). I would add that even African theology has been concerned with Christianity in Africa and with Africa which has 'become Christian', rather than with the reappraisal of African religions in their own right. African Christian scholars themselves Hellenized the African deities. They attempted to make African deities intelligible to Europe (p' Bitek 1970: 105f). On the other hand, the aim of the Christian evangelistic mission was to condemn, destroy and annihilate the 'pagan' Gods and to replace them with the Christian God. Ehret (1972: 47) says:

The oft-repeated comment by Europeans and European scholars that such-and-such an African people had very vague, inconsistent or sketchy

beliefs about the High God or some other aspect of religion, reflected not African deficiency but European ethnocentrism (Ehret 1972: 47).

That Africans conceived of a High God was a form of ethnocentrism. It was the naming of Africans from the European perspective. It was not the Africans themselves who said deity is 'One, High and Supreme'. Okot p'Bitek (1970: 64) says:

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

When they were confounded with a flood of the names of *MODIMO*, for example, they decided to opt for an empty concept, that of *MODIMO*, and to fill it with Christian attributes. The most popular carriers of this imposition of the notion of the Supreme God were the missionary-colonizers. So, what we have critiqued is the applicability of the Supreme Being, the Supremacy of that deity and the 'beingness' of it, in terms of African conceptions of deities. All the Christian missionaries' attributes of the Christian God were unintelligible and laughable to Africans. Now I would like to look at the unintelligibility of missionary concepts of the Christian God.

2.3.1. The Doctrines of the Missionaries were Unintelligible

In this sub-section I deal with problems concerning the introduction of the Christian God by the missionaries among the *Basotho*, which demonstrates further that foreign concepts of deity were brought in among Africans and, in comparison to the concepts held by the locals, the indigenous people could not believe what they were hearing. The point at which the missionaries seem most to have misunderstood the

Sotho-Tswana is concerning the concepts of 'God' and how divinity manifests itself to humanity (Setiloane 1976: 104).

So, [MODIMO] was known as the 'beginning and cause' of human, animal and even world existence, but not as a 'human being' and even less a 'father'. It is the missionaries who injected into the [MODIMO] concept of Batswana the idea of 'person' (being) and 'father'. Their monopoly control of African education has ensured their success in passing on this erroneous doctrine from generation to generation (Setiloane 1986: 23).

This means there was a sense of belittling *MODIMO* by speaking openly and freely about IT and by representing *MODIMO* as a 'person' that humans could have a relationship with and treat like one of them - father, friend, or someone they could have physical connection with. According to p'Bitek, the missionaries 'with greatest sincerity' battled to teach the Africans the 'true' doctrines which were so unintelligible to those among whom they labored (1970: 85). Some missionaries were discouraged in the process. Some were resilient and convinced of their final victory in the quest for the 'civilization', Christianization and colonization of *Basotho*. So, Setiloane asks: "If *MODIMO* was to be equated with God of the missionaries, did this not involve a serious devaluation of traditional currency?" 1976: 85). Indeed, in the minds of the *Basotho*, *MODIMO* was being humiliated by the unintelligible doctrines of the missionaries. Setiloane continues, saying:

... the image of God among the *Sotho-Tswana* is not, and cannot be the same as that presented by Western Christian 'orthodoxy' of missionaries. It is shot through and through with the *Sotho-Tswana* understanding and presents the Christian world with a claim for deeply serious theological attention (Setiloane 1976: 225).

In addition to their unintelligible doctrines, Setiloane says that the missionaries had substituted the Word of God (1976: 136). In other words, the missionaries as they were experienced, had set themselves above the Word of God. They presented themselves as 'God' and only through them, their interpretation of the Word of God and how they related to people, could the Christian God and Christian 'civilized' manners be seen.

There was no way in which *Basotho* could see the Christian God except through the missionaries as mercenaries and as images and samples of that deity. There was also a general belief that the missionaries had some protective and magical power and that they themselves were Gods. These missionaries must have looked like funny mythical creatures riding horses, carrying guns and the Bible and teaching strange doctrines (Setiloane 1976: 13617f). It is lamented:

By a miscarriage of purpose the church has succeeded in preaching to, and in teaching Africans about a strange God whom they have somehow come to identify as God of the white man. But what has happened to God as known to their forebears - God who is the foundation of their traditional beliefs? He remains still with them. And so we have left them with two Gods in their hands, and thus made them people of ambivalent spiritual lives (Setiloane 1976: 3).

These are the consequences we have to face: Consequences of dealing with two Gods, the indigenous God on the one hand and the mission Christian God on the other. Additionally, according to p'Bitek (1970:60), the missionaries were at pains to make a religious connection with what the Africans had known so that Christianity was not viewed by Africans as a foreign, white man's religion but as something of their own. But if that was the case, why were they not listening to and learning from the Africans? Why did they learn the local language if it was not for mutual and reciprocal communication and discussion about the 'divine'?

Typical of the missionaries, Smith (1929: 15) relates his sermon he had preached to the people of 'Northern Rhodesia' (Zimbabwe). In my view, the deities of the people he was preaching to meant nothing to him. He said to the *Shona* people:

You know what I teach; you know how I have tried to bring you out of the twilight of ignorance concerning God in which you and your fathers have walked; I am here to offer you a new way of life; when will you accept?
(Smith 1929: 15).

This shows the frustration experienced by missionaries. The unintelligibility of the doctrines of the missionaries was exacerbated by the fact that they were unaware that they were swearing at people, rebuking them and their Ancestors. The sooner the missionaries could have learnt that they were culturally vulgar and politically dangerous to the Africans, the sooner they could have commenced doing their work relevantly and have taken a different teaching approach. Moreover: "The churches and mission schools taught that all people were created in the image of God, and at the same time the Europeans considered themselves fuller human beings than the Africans" (Mugambi 1992: 36).

For instance, STR does not teach that humans are made in the image of *MODIMO*, and yet African people are known to exercise respect for humans and to treat people humanly. This is what Africans are known for - treating people with sincere respect and taking deities seriously, not jesting about them. For those Africans who took the Christian God, with all the absurdities that surrounded 'Him' and the controversies which missionary-colonizers generated, writers like p'Bitek argue: "It also seems to me that the new God of Christianity was taken by many African peoples as just another deity, and added to the long list of the ones they believed in. So, that many African Christians are also practitioners of their own religions" (p'Bitek 1970: 113).

As Setiloane (1976: 78) expresses it:

It was much later that Moffat was to conclude that '*morimo*'[sic] did not convey to the mind of those who heard it the idea of God; and the whole of the narrative at this point suggests that he and the *Tswana* were continually talking at cross purposes. The fact is that there was much more to *MODIMO* than the missionaries dreamed of, rather than the much less they came to think (Setiloane 1976: 78).

2.4. The Study of God, African Peoples and ATRs for Reasons of Conquest

Within this chapter dealing with the debate concerning the concepts of 'God', I would like to look at the motive behind the study of 'God' in Africa by Western anthropologists, travelers and missionaries. Writers such as Majeke (1952), Platvoet (1996), Bourdillon (1996) and Westerlund (1991) make comments. The discipline of anthropology emerged as a response to the need to study Africa for reasons of conquest and control (Majeke 1952). This statement is corroborated by Platvoet (1996: 110) when he says:

Precisely because of colonial needs, the study of African traditional societies and religions by anthropologists expanded greatly till 1960, and improved in academic quality, but it was within the limits set by paradigmatic perceptions and theoretical models congenial to the pragmatics of the European colonial empires (Platvoet 1996: 110).

What were the colonial needs which demanded the study of ATRs? The foremost of colonial needs was the scramble for annexation of land. The annexation of land went together with the exploitation of water resources and the occupation of grazing and 'unoccupied' or 'unused land'. The colonial needs were the mineral and human resources of Africa. The most strategic of colonial needs was intelligentsia. There was no way that colonialism would have had total conquest of Africa and its peoples without the necessary intelligence. The most useful group of people to give such

intelligence to colonial masters and colonial administrators were the missionaries and the African Christian converts (Majeke 1952).

In order to elaborate on the assertions of the previous paragraph, the next subsection of this chapter will give the account of the 'role of missionaries in the conquest of Africa', and what was experienced in southern Africa. This region of southern Africa is selected as one that has experienced the fulness of reasons for the emergence of studies such as anthropology, social anthropology and the religious scenario of Africa. On the other hand,

Social anthropologists have for long been prominent in the phenomenological study of African religions. Although some scholars within the discipline have taken a positivist approach, which seeks to explain religion rather than interpret it, there have been many anthropologists who are sympathetic to religion, and who have tried to understand religion from the point of the participants (Bourdillon 1996 : 139)

The positivist approach and the phenomenological approach tried to give an empirical account of ATRs and the African social settings but more had to be done, as Westerlund adds, "... anthropologists have been criticized for overlooking, or at least not paying enough attention to, both the importance of the belief in God in African religions, as well as the importance of religion in general" (1991: 17).

By this time already, in contrast to Westerlund (1991: 17), what I call the 'second generation' African theologians and scholars had indicated that over-emphasis of the selected theme of 'God' or 'religion' was an alleged and problematic major preoccupation in the study of African people. This 'problem' almost caused Africans to be understood as religious 'zombies', with no sense of the difference between the divine and the mundane, and with no differentiation of the sacred from the secular.

I want to continue to highlight why so much of the study of ‘God’ was done in Africa. I want to look specifically at the role of missionaries in this endeavor. The area of the fieldwork done in this thesis is the Northern Province (now called Limpopo Province). The missionaries who operated in that region were from the Berlin Missionary Society (BMS). One of their key leaders who is of relevance to this thesis was Alexander Merensky. The Berlin Missionary Society was not serving under British colonialism. It was not a colonial mission, but it cooperated fully with the colonizing forces in the region under study.

What missionaries did in the *Sotho-Tswana* regions was the same in method and cooperation with the colonial forces in southern Africa, even among the *Bapedi* of the Botshabelo district of the Limpopo Province. In this thesis when I refer to missionaries among the *Bapedi* I specifically mean the BMS and generally mean missionaries who operated in southern Africa, especially South Africa.

2.5. The Experience of Southern Africa in the Light of the Berlin Missionary Society (BMS)

2.5.1. Brief History of the Berlin Missionary Society

“The Berlin Missionary Society (BMS) was constituted on 29 February 1824 when a group of pious laymen founded a ‘Society for the advancement of protestant missions among the heathens’” (www.geosites.com/Heartland/Meadows/7589/berlin_en.html p. 1) A slight difference in terms of translation of the original name of BMS is that Mminele (1983: 12) translates ‘protestant mission’ as ‘evangelical mission’ i.e. “Its original name was ‘*Die Gesellschaft zur Beförderung der evangelischen Missionen unter den Heiden*’ (Society for the Promotion of Evangelical Missions Among the Heathen).

In 1829 the BMS started sending missionaries to South Africa. Due to financial problems facing it, it had support and sympathy from missionary societies in Pomerania and East Prussia and help from the King of Prussia (www.geosites.com/Heartland/Meadows/7589/berlin_en.html p.1). Some missionaries from the area where the BMS was founded were already working in South Africa under missionary societies such as the London Missionary Society and the Rhenish Missionary Society.

The fieldwork section of this thesis was largely done in *Botšhabelo* district in the Limpopo Province. This area was evangelized by the BMS around 1860. The leaders of the BMS in this mission field were Alexander Merensky and Grützner. Their first mission station was called Gerlachshoop. This was the first mission station founded by Merensky and Grützner among the *Bakopa* (*Bapedi*) in the Transvaal (sic) on the 14th August 1860 (Mminele 1983: 22). “Many further stations followed later and this area became the main focus of the BMS in South Africa (www.geosites.com/Heartland/Meadows/7589/berlin_en.html p. 1).

Among the many stations founded by the BMS were *Kgatlatlou* Mission, established on the 28th August 1861; *Phatametsane* Mission Station (8th June 1863), *Ga-Ratau* Mission Station (11th May 1864). These mission stations provided elementary education in reading and writing. Bible knowledge and Hymn singing were the main subjects (Mminele 1983: 24).

Alexander Merensky, the leader of the BMS was born on the 8th June 1837, in Panten, Selisia of Germany (Poland). He studied surgery and nursing. He was a person of unshakeable religious zeal and will power. He arrived in South Africa in 1858 and did missionary work among the *Pedi*, who nicknamed him *Phakiša* (Be quick; hurry up). Merensky was known as a hard-working person (Mminele 1983: 31 - 36).

2.5.2. The Persecution of BMS Mission Converts

The impact of the presence and activities of BMS resulted in divisions between the chiefs and their subjects, and between the *Pedi* Christian converts and the unconverted Africans. A rift began to show between the chiefs and Merensky. Gradually, Merensky was seen to be selling out the *Pedi* communities to the colonial intruders, both of the British administration and the emergent Boer Republics. In most cases, Merensky ruled in favor of the colonialists, from whom he wanted military protection.

The main aim of the BMS was the same as that of almost all Missionary Societies, namely 'evangelization', and the inculcation of habits of industry, learning, discipline and soberness among the 'heathens' (Mminele 1983: 13).

... the aim of the missionaries (BMS specifically implied) was not only to evangelize the *Pedi*, that is to convert them to become members of the Christian church, but to bring about a new religion or faith, a new material culture, a new economy, a new family structure, a new political system, a new social order, a new philosophy of life, and a new philosophy of education (Moila 1987: 158).

The BMS perceived the church as the instrument of God. The task of the church was seen as, first, to destroy *Pedi* culture; second, to institute Western culture and; third, to promote a 'true Christian culture' (Moila 1987: 158). The quest for the destruction of *Pedi* culture was seen as a means of paving the way for the introduction of Western culture and Christianity. The *Pedi* culture was perceived as too evil to be a means of communication of the Kingdom of God. There was no way, in the eyes of the BMS, for *Pedi* culture which was so 'imperfect' to be integrated into 'Christian' culture to form a single harmonious system (Moila 1987: 158 - 159).

This approach of the BMS caused cleavages among the *Pedi* communities. The Chief Sekhukhuni attempted to prevent the situation whereby *Pedi* Christians became disloyal and disobedient. Sekhukhuni was met with recalcitrance and stubbornness.

When Sekhukhuni realized that the Christians were still steadfast, he outlawed them and ordered them to leave his country. Martinus Sebushane was heard saying, 'You ... are driving us out of this country today, but know that the Word of God will come back here at Thaba Mosega (Mminele 1983: 26).

The persecution reached a climax on 15th November 1864. *Pedi* Christians were summoned to a big meeting at Thaba Mosega. The small group of Christians appeared, amidst Sekhukhuni's warriors, at this 'Great Council of Blood'. Publicly, Sekhukhuni mentioned that he did not trust the missionaries (BMS). He told the meeting that the missionaries were liars and thieves who had 'stolen my people' and that missionaries were going to make themselves chiefs in his country (Mminele 1983: 26).

The Christians were made to drink some medicine which was meant to cause them to vomit the 'blood' which, it was alleged, they were made to drink in their secret assemblies with Merensky. The persecutors were fully convinced that it was this blood which made Christians to be unyielding (Mminele 1983: 26).

From then on, *Pedi* Christians were outlawed. On the 7th February 1865, Merensky called these outlawed *Pedi* Christians to meet him on the farm of Willem Jacobs. This group accepted Johannes Dinkwanyane as their chief. About 130 Bakopa *Pedi* Christians under Joshua Rammupudu joined this group from Thaba Mosega. Merensky arrived with his wife and their baby girl, Pauline Mamotšhabo Merensky.

This group called the place *Botšhabelo* (Place of Refuge). These *Pedi* Christians became refugees in their own country (Mminele 1983: 29 - 30).

Apparently, *Pedi* converts were refugees in the colonized islands and enclaves on which mission stations were erected. These *Pedi* converts would till the ground for the missionaries and create wealth for mission work to continue.

2.5.3. The BMS and the *Pedi* Debate about 'God'

In many ways, missionary Christianity was unlike the *Pedi* religious thought. There has been some exchange of ideas between the God of mission Christianity and the one of indigenous *Pedi* thought. For this discussion I am relying on Moila (1987) and Mminele (1983). The ideas of the Christian God are drawn from notions of God as propagated by the BMS at *Botšhabelo* among *Pedi* Christians and in their daily conversation with the converts.

The First and Second Commandments were used as powerful instruments for the vilification of *Pedi* notions of God. The BMS relegated *MODIMO* as an 'other god' or 'false god', and they did not bother to enter into rigorous theological debate with the adherence of STR. The whole *Pedi* religious world was summed up as and reduced to ancestor worship. The missionaries imposed their notion of worship, prayer and salvation on the *Pedi* belief in ancestors. The *Pedi* were urged to depend entirely on the Christian God (Moila 1987: 161).

For the *Pedi* a chief is also a priest. He derives his authority from Modimo (sic), the Supreme Being (sic), through ancestors. Further, his powers are regulated by the interests of his subjects. For the first time the *Pedi* [were] told that chiefs are arch-opponents of God (Moila 1987:112).

The chief, who for the *Pedi* ruled in the interests of *MODIMO* and on behalf of *Badimo*, was for the first time demonized by the BMS. The BMS based their message on a misconception of *Pedi* belief in God (sic). The missionaries thought that the *Pedi* believed that the chief *is* 'God' (Moila 1987: 114).

One of the rules and regulations of *Botšhabelo* BMS mission station was that residents should regard the Christian God as the Highest Master and Leader. Residents were admonished to strive to glorify His name in all they do (Mminele 1983: 37; Moila 1987: 136 - 137). Worship of false gods was prohibited. Rainmaking feasts were not allowed. The practice of witchcraft, commission of adultery, drunkenness, gambling, *Magadi/ iLobolo* [marriage dowry of cattle], polygamy and attending circumcision school were all prohibited (Mminele 1983: 38; Moila 1987: 137).

Looking at the list of things prohibited by the BMS, in any case the *Pedi* do not see themselves as ever having been worshipers of false gods. Concerning rainmaking, in all cases *MODIMO* is invoked to help bring rain, even if the Traditional Healers or the Royal Family would use appropriate herbs and rituals to make rain, *MODIMO* is not omitted. As for adultery, drunkenness, 'gambling' and witchcraft, these are not considered virtues in *Pedi* society.

Polygamy was not a widespread practice. Only the wealthy, the mature-aged and chiefs, in particular, practiced it. But the prohibition of attendance at circumcision school was a serious affront to *Pedi* society. It affected the rites of passage and denied the initiates from learning the commandments of the circumcision school, which are : Respect your parents, trust and obey your chief and 'sacrifice' to the ancestors (Moila 1987: 156).

Because the mission was a God-fearing community [prohibited to participate in *Pedi* life and customs] ... Contrariwise they were expected to live as

Basotho in accordance with customs and traditions of their forebears, and not think that, now that they are living under Whites, they should deem it a fine thing to imitate the life-style of the Whites (Mminele 1983: 38).

What did this mean? African Christians must cut off cultural links with their communities in order to be in right standing in the mission station. Africans must thus be, as it were, without culture. On the other hand Africans could not be allowed to exchange their culture for the white Christian culture of missionaries. Africans were thus virtually excluded from the white Christian culture, and consequently Africans had to live without either the African or the white Christian culture.

The *Botshabelo* mission station was founded on the 'property' of the BMS. Merensky had the highest authority on the mission station (Mminele 1983: 38). Merensky had sole authority to interpret the will of God, and was himself also a High authority whom the Africans had to aspire to please. Merensky was then the visible highest authority representing God in the mission station. It seems as if Merensky had usurped the authority of God and in this way, had replaced God and become this 'God' himself.

While leading a godly life on the mission station, the *Pedi* Christian converts were expected to earn their living by honest work and by the sweat of their brows. The BMS system of manual labour was made a sacred duty. Merensky maintained that, through honest work and righteous living, the BMS would educate and civilize the *Pedi* converts very easily. The *Pedi* converts who agreed to stay at the mission had to do so willingly and at their own discretion. The *Pedi* converts, as it seems, gave themselves willingly to the authority of Merensky and his God.

2.5.4. The Missionaries in Collusion with Colonial Governments

It should be acknowledged that the BMS and Merensky (one of the BMS's key leaders in the *Botshabelo* area) played a direct role in collusion with the colonial governments. It has been said that missionaries in general played a similar role when it came to colluding with colonial governments against the indigenous peoples.

Why was the missionary work of Christianization so closely tied to the colonization of southern Africa? What was the role of the Christian God in the Christianization and colonization of southern Africa? These questions need to be asked, so that the reason for the distortion and the misrepresentation of indigenous peoples, and the reason for such a brutal attack on them and their economic and political systems, can be understood.

This exercise should unearth the Christianity of the missionaries and, through that, afford some insights into the way and manner in which they saw the indigenous peoples as subjects for repression, in order to prosper the work of mission. This may enable us to make deductions about the concepts of the kind of 'God' they introduced to African people and African religious thought.

On southern African frontiers, comparative religion was a discourse and practice that produced knowledge about religion and religions, and thereby reconfigured knowledge about the human, within the power relations of specific colonial situations (Chidester 1996: 2).

It is within this discourse that indigenous southern African religions could be said to be primitive, magical, superstitious, fetishist and so on (Chidester 1996: 3). Indigenous people and their religions were described and classified, accepted or rejected, defined and distorted by the colonizers and Christian missionaries. Indigenous people in foreign lands appeared in the travel reports and documents of

Europe as objects of conquest and subjects for repression and representation. It was the missionaries and other travelers who provided such knowledge, equipping Europe with the best strategies to conquer the indigenous people (Chidester 1996: 6).

Ross says that both John Philip and David Livingstone (both of whom were missionaries) were also politicians and never hid that fact, though some church historians have attempted to do just that - to hide that they were politicians (1977: 1). As a witness to what Ross (1977: 1) is saying, Setiloane (1976: 94) records that the missionary Lindley was the secretary and official letter-writer of the President of the Republic of Natal (Union of South Africa - now South Africa), and that he was a distinguished person among the Trekboers. Lindley has become a respected political figure in the history of the colonialists. The town of Lindley which the Trekboers built in the Republic of Orange Free State, and which stands to this day, was dedicated to his name.

Chidester (1996: 4) made the same observation concerning W. M. Eiselen who he says, by odd coincidence, was the leading expert on indigenous African religion in the 1920s. Eiselen was the assistant to H. F. Verwoed, the chief architect of the Apartheid system in South Africa. Eiselen worked with him at the *Bantu* (sic) Affairs Administration during the very time of the brutal implementation of the oppressive regime of 'Grand Apartheid' during the 1950s. Eiselen was not the only person doing this. Many other human and social scientists drew from European sources of research, provided by missionaries, to justify the legislation of Apartheid (Chidester 1996: 4).

On 17th February 1877 Merensky acted as mediator in the 'peace' negotiations between the Boers and Sekhukhuni. It was then that Sekhukhuni was subjected to the Transvaal Republic. At the same time Merensky was the superintendent of the BMS (Moila 1987: 37 - 38). It was Merensky who made the political announcement that the *Pedi* were then subjects of the Transvaal Republic and emphasized that they were

expected to obey the law of the state and to pay taxes regularly (Moila 1987: 138).

On the 22nd March 1878 he (Merensky) was appointed Justice of the Peace in and for the district of the Transvaal. He served in the First Anglo-Boer war on the side of the Boers as a medical practitioner. After this war it was clear to Merensky that, through his pro-British attitude since 1877, he had forfeited the confidence of the Transvaal Government (Mminele 1983: 33).

From the mission point of view, Merensky expected God's intervention and the defeat of the *Pedi* political system, which he deemed evil. Initially, the *Pedi* chiefs were friendly towards him and accommodated him in their land. Eventually, Merensky viewed the *Pedi* chiefs as irreformable and needing to be subjugated. According to Moila, this was one reason he made himself a paramount chief (1987:139).

The words of Johannes Dinkwayane, a Christian *Pedi* convert and Chief Sekhukhuni's brother, as recorded by Delius (1983: 178), show that he despised the Christian God and the oppressive political work and motives of the missionaries:

“You Boers ... do you think there is a God who will punish lying, theft and deceit? ... I say the land belongs to us ... Your cleverness has turned to theft. I say it in relation to the land because you came to this country ... ate everything up [but] your theft has come into the open” (in Delius 1983: 178).

The implication of this statement is that the Christian God was conceptualized as a 'God' of theft; 'God' of deceit; 'God' of treacherous wit; God of greed. The observation of Grehan (1979: 12) was that, for the *Khoi-Khoi*, the political instrument for reaching and influencing the Cape government was the missionaries. The *Khoi* view of the missionaries was first and foremost a political bridge between

them and the government and not a link between them and the gospel or God. In other words, the missionaries were the political link and hope for them to get the best deals for their lot in the Cape. This was as early as the 1780s.

This does not mean that the missionaries did not preach about a 'God' of love, mercy and compassion; a God who is just and holy and who is no respecter of persons. The missionaries did preach that all humans are made in the image of 'God'; that all humans are equal before 'God'. They did this, but did it along with the imposition, the expansion and the enforced implementation of colonial rule on the indigenous people.

The preaching of the missionaries was another parallel pressurizing force to surrender, not only to 'God' but first and foremost to the earthly colonial authorities. Surrender to earthly authority was said to be a visible sign of obedience to a Christian God. The manner in which the missionaries conducted themselves and the spreading of the Christian religion revealed to the indigenous people what kind of God they were confronted with.

2.5.5. The Missionaries as Informers and Intelligence

It is unfortunate that the image of a 'God' whom humans profess to follow is, in many cases, reflected by their conduct and, in the case of Christian missionaries in southern Africa, to the indigenous people this has been an image of a Christian God of horror and nightmare. The missionaries and their Christian God were part of the Christian wars of colonization, conversion, civilization and Christianization in southern Africa.

During the Boer and British war against Sekhukhuni the residents of Botšhabelo were compelled to take part in the war against Paramount Chief

as porters, wagon-drivers and ambulance men, on the side of the whites (Moila 1987: 142).

When the wars were being waged Africans' cattle were driven away, their huts burned, fields laid waste, people's food was destroyed, famine got hold of women and children, and diseases increased. 'Where were the humanitarians? Where were the missionaries and friends of the Africans? They were usually collaborating fully with the colonizing forces. In many cases, there was no difference between the missionaries and the colonialists (Majeke 1952: 58).

But we are not surprised that the superficial differences between governor, missionary and frontier farmer should melt into thin air when it was a question of subjugating the African (Majeke 1952: 58).

The missionaries were the informers and intelligence of the colony, and continuously informed the colonial military about tribal politics. They exposed the weaknesses and divisions in the African communities. They informed the colonial military about vulnerable chiefs, resistant chiefs and client chiefs - the latter being those who desired colonial education, culture and technology, who saw in the colonial power a force for their own political and power gluttonous interest against other contenders for chiefly power within the tribes (Cochrane 1987: 30).

With this information, the governor, the colonial military and the missionaries would apply appropriate strategies of coercion and conquest of the African. In the times of Governor Lord Charles Somerset, the missionaries pledged that the information they would give respecting remote nations (Africans) would be gratifying to the governor. In this manner, missionaries themselves could not see the distinction between their political and religious duties.

The Christian God of the missionaries could not have been conceptualized as a non-political or an apolitical 'person' or 'being'. The missionaries addressed the governor as 'our brother' and this was also understood not only in racial terms but in evangelical religious terms (brothers in the Lord) and in terms of cooperation in colonization, civilization and Christianisation (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 253).

In principle, there may have been a sharp cleavage between the realms of Cross and Crown. In practice it was a protean, as hard to pin down, as any other boundary between imagined domains (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 253).

Moila (1987: 131) records that Sekhukhuni was informed by two white traders that Merensky and Nichtigal were spying for the Boer government. It was at the time Sekhukhuni was accusing the *Pedi* Christian converts of being disloyal to him. At that time, already, Merensky was appointed representative of the Transvaal Boer Republic. Merensky was a representative of the interests of both God and the Boers in *Pedi* society. Merensky was a staunch supporter of the colonial government.

Thus, the notion that Christianity (or religion, for that matter) and politics do not mix is a fallacy that must be rejected outright. This is made much clearer when we observe that missionaries informed parliament in London; acted as secretaries of colonies; helped personally in drawing up tactical, fallacious and spurious treaties signed with African chiefs; and helped to draw up and design racist native policies.

Missionaries were given this role, which they were happy to take on as people who had specialized in 'knowing' Africans and were, therefore, well placed to be the colonial government's most useful agents of intelligence (Majeke 1952: 26). The missionaries provided intelligence and constituted an advance guard of the British to the interior, to the North (Majeke 1952: 89).

In this situation (1834 - 36) the missionaries were particularly vocal and ready with advice on how to deal with those whom they termed the 'rebellious Kaffirs'. There were several occasions during the war when they acted quite simply as Government spies, handing on information to the military (Majeke 1952: 44).

2.5.6. The Missionaries as 'Peaceful' Forerunners

The full extent of the political role of the missionaries in the subjugation of the *Bantu* tribes becomes apparent during the twenties, thirties and forties of the 19th century. It is not enough to say that they acted as peaceful forerunners paving the way for the governor and the military. They participated in a very positive sense in conquest (Majeke 1952: 25).

In 1860, Alexander Merensky of the BMS visited Chief Sekwati. He was allowed to start mission work among the *Pedi* of Sekwati. At that time, the chief and the missionaries met cordially in a friendly spirit. In the Lydenberg Republik both Merensky and Grützer were allowed to settle and begin mission work among the *Pedi* in Lydenburg. The Whites of Lydenberg and the *Pedi* were connected through the missionaries (Moila 1987: 129).

According to Delius (1996: 10), the missionaries were one among other 'experts' - officials, politicians - a diverse band of people set out to bend the African communities to their will. A typical example is cited by Majeke (1952: 89) that:

The Rev. E. Casalis, the leader of the party (of missionaries), interviewed Moshoeshe for the purpose of obtaining land to set up a mission station. The chief received them with every kindness, and for this the way had no doubt been paved by the London Missionary Society (LMS) (Majeke 1952: 89).

The missionaries got in first to ask for a piece of land to erect a mission station, understood to be a place where the doctrines of the Christian God, or the Christian religion would be taught. But soon the chief realized that a military barracks had been erected right in front of him and, when he protested, the missionaries answered with incredible arrogance and defiance, knowing that the governor was right there behind them with troops.

This scenario is explained by Majeke concerning the Wesleyan missionaries: "Wesleyans at the time showed themselves such willing agents of Government that it is difficult to separate out the military aspect of the campaign from those that more particularly concern the missionaries" (Majeke 1952: 37). In addition to that, concerning the same Wesleyan missionaries, Cochrane (1987: 28 - 9) says that:

In Pondoland, even as late as the early 1930s, mission churches could count fewer than five percent of the population as members or adherents. Suspicion remained widespread. Thus a chief like *Xhosa* Sandile regarded the Wesleyan missionary H. H. Dugmore as 'a man who came to teach the truth [God] to Caffers: but he does not know the truth himself. Such men from the colony speak lightly of war: they delight in the grass and water of Caffraria and make strings of lies to secure it' (Cochrane 1987: 28 - 9).

From the missionaries' free talk about war and God, Setiloane brings out an image that, among the *Batswana*, the missionaries were regarded as some type of *dingaka* (traditional healers):

... and seen as having some kind of access to supernatural powers. Besides, the ease with which they talked about things which were not mentioned in everyday conversation, like *MODIMO* and ITS doings and wishes, confirmed that they dabbled in the same mysteries as *dingaka* - only they

talked freely about *MODIMO*, for somehow they were in touch with IT (Setiloane 1976: 136).

As forerunners, the missionaries went ahead of the colonial military to ask for land to build a Christian mission station. After securing the land and building the mission station, the station was used as a garrison for colonial forces. Subsequently, all other colonial agents would come to operate from the mission station. The mission station was thus a launching pad for colonization.

2.5.7. The Missionaries as Go-Between Diplomatic Agents

After the battle of 1873, waged jointly by the Boers and the British on one side against the *Pedi* who were under Chief Sekhukhuni, “Merensky was appointed by President Burger of the Boers to act as mediator in peace negotiations with the *Pedi*. Due to the political role of Merensky as mediator, who was on the side of the Boers, the *Pedi* Christians of *Botšhabelo* were forced to be subjects of the missionaries in particular and Whites in general (Moila 1987: 142).

Merensky was appointed Paramount Chief of *Botšhabelo*. The *Pedi* in general regarded this action as unacceptable. The converts at *Botšhabelo* abhorred to be African Christian subjects of a white German Paramount Chief, imposed on them by the Boers. They hated staying with Merensky in *Botšhabelo*. The *Pedi* in general rejected ‘Paramount Chief Merensky’ as a supposedly *Pedi* ‘Paramount Chief’ among them. The *Pedi* regarded this Boer arrangement as *onnatuurlike samestelling* (unnatural living-together). The *Pedi* felt that it was a disgrace for their chiefs to be subordinate to Merensky (Moila 1987: 141).

For various reasons, some for good and some for ill, as the events of the colonization, civilization and Christianisation unfolded, it became imperative and strategic, and inevitable for some of the remaining chiefs to desire the presence of the missionaries

for reasons of political convenience. They asked for missionary education and 'religion' and used the missionaries as a buffer to pacify the raging forces of the British military colonial powers (Mminele 1983: 1 - 2, 54 - 66).

By 1934 the Berlin Missionary Society could boast of having erected 106 schools with 17 058 pupils in the Transvaal alone - thereby topping all other sixteen Missions that were also operating in the Transvaal, in both the number of schools and number of pupils (Mminele 1983: 21).

By then, already, the image of the missionaries and their Christian God was tarnished and, in most cases, missionaries were tolerated rather than accepted, with a sense of fear of some of the dreadful things which might happen among the people precisely because of the presence and the actions of the missionaries. The presence of the missionaries and colonialists was disturbing the societal tranquillity and equilibrium of African communities. In the words of Cochrane (1987: 24):

Often, in fact, at least some things were done at the request of a chief who sought his 'own' missionaries as kind of go-between in dealing with both the new pressures and the fresh opportunities (Cochrane 1987: 24).

But, thus far, what we have observed in the actions of missionary-colonizers (missionaries and colonial forces, inseparably), that they provided no new opportunities but a further disintegration and colonization of other areas of African life. If missionary education was providing fresh opportunities it would seem that, on the other hand, it was one of the worst forms of cultural erosion and the further telling of lies ever propagated among a people and the concepts of their deities.

The religious instruction introduced strange concepts of 'God'. Some of these strange concepts of 'God' which have been accepted by the *Pedi* and applied to

MODIMO are that *MODIMO* (God) is a person, and the notion of the self-disclosure of *MODIMO*) (see Moila 1987: 180 - 184). More will be said about this later.

The History of Botšhabelo began as a solid ground for the role of the missionary in the reconstruction of South Africa under colonialism, for the imposition of a new world view on the Blacks, and introduction of money and wage labor system [as] preparation for economic servitude (Moila 1987: 135 - 136).

The introduction of Western education for incorporation into a capitalist form of economy introduced Africans to a new economic system. In this new economic system, Africans would forever be the losers, and that situation exists to date. In this situation chiefs and their people had to cope and comply for the sake of survival. Otherwise the colonial forces would have wiped them out. Nolan (1988) says that if it was not because of the need for cheap labor demanded for mining in South Africa, the Africans would have been wiped out like other indigenous peoples such as American Indians and Australian Aborigines. Comaroff and Comaroff (1991: 256), when it comes to the so-called opportunities for Africans, think the same as Cochrane himself (1987: 24) that:

[The] Southern Tswana were quick to appreciate the temporal, and especially the political, advantages of the missionary presence; how soon the Europeans were put to use - often unwilling, now and then unwittingly - as diplomatic agents, military allies, and advisers. ... the evangelists themselves ... while they were kept at bay, their preaching ignored or even thwarted, they had to accede to the natives' request in order to pursue their goals (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 256).

It is amazing, and yet inevitable, that all of a sudden the missionaries were viewed as angels and saviours, sought after by Africans. It was as if there was no historical

process of pressurizing Africans painfully to surrender to the intrigues of British and Christian colonization, to the extent that, by pacification, through the Christian God, the Africans would come to a place where they toed the line and, like oxen, were inspanned on the yoke of capitalism to work for colonial administration for time on end.

Was not the African's so-called 'appreciation of Western European things' a vivid sign of defeat and surrender? If not, what could be clearer? In asking missionaries to be go-between diplomats to the governor on their behalf, was this not a sign of the fulfilment of the missionary-colonizers' program and vision of seeing Africans as objects of repression and conquest? Is it not the case that the more the chiefs and Africans relied on the missionaries as agents political and diplomatic mediation, the more they were sold out into the hands of the colonizing Britons acting as friends and protectors of people they had ravaged, scorned, scolded and scourged? Majeke (1952) reminds us about a case in point regarding this resultant dependence on missionaries as go-between diplomats, whether by invitation or invasion, there was no difference:

... as the foreigners [whites/ missionaries] increased, he [Dingaan, the successor of King Shaka of the Zulu people] found it more and more necessary to rely on the missionaries as go-between and interpreter. He had to rely on the very agent of imperialism whose task it was to undermine his authority. From this it was easy to pass to the next stage. As the ferocity of the military invasion increased, the chief, in desperation, was more willing to believe that the missionaries could help him to recover his lost territory (Majeke 1952: 25 - 26 addition mine).

Unfortunately, as happened with other chiefs of *AmaXhosa*, *Basotho*, *Batswana*, *Bapedi*, the men of the Christian God - the missionary, "... came as his 'friend' who was willing to intercede with the Government on the chief's behalf. But the more the

chief relied on the missionary, the more surely was he betrayed into the hands of the Government” (Majeke 1952: 26).

2.6. The Consequences of Missionaries’ Colonial Activities to Concepts of the Christian God

According to what happened in time and history, the chieftainships were undermined, wiped out, or transformed by the new missionaries’ colonial capitalist systems which resulted in the consequent subjugation of the local religious currency of *MODIMO*, since it was either exchanged for the currency of the Christian God, or amalgamated with it, or totally submerged by the Christian evangelistic religious concepts of ‘God’. The details of this matter will be discussed as the thesis unfolds.

In addition, participation in the new capitalist economy enlarged social interactions. It blurred the family and tribal lines of the tributary mode of production. It brought in production for competition and accumulation as a motivation for work, and not for family consumption or unity in the family. The establishment of mission stations not only as centres of the preaching about the Christian God or military garrisons, or places of skills development and civilization, but also as a presentation of an alternative society as opposed to the local village, had begun to divide members of families and divide people from their chief. Participation in capitalist economy as well as participation in mission schools sacrificed the unity of the African family, village and the chief. According to Mosala (1989: 78):

In the context of the communal mode of production, health care - physical and psychological - was the responsibility of the father in the home. Knowledge of the herbs, mixtures, and divinations by lot or dreams was a social property. Each man in the household was at once a priest, a medicine man, a lawyer. That is to say, each man was a *Ngaka, Nyanga, Nganga* of his own household (Mosala 1989: 78).

If such men were displaced or caused by economic and political circumstances to leave home, it created a crisis of faith, health and security. This indeed happened, with some men joining missionaries in the 'islands' of the mission stations. Some went to look for work on emerging colonial commercial farms which, at one stage, were their own lands. Some migrated to the emerging urban centres to mine gold, platinum and diamonds, to search for new fortunes, and to secure the independence of their Kingdoms, as it were (Delius 1984). Yet:

The early stages of the tributary economic system remain[ed] characterized by the persistence of communal values and practices. These exist[ed] side by side with new practices peculiar to the tributary mode. Incipient economic exploitation in the form of transfers [was] offset by the redistributive economic justice (Masala 1989: 82).

Setiloane (1976) indicates that there was no reason for the missionaries to criticize the distribution of work among the *Sotho-Tswana*, unless they deliberately wanted to upset the African *status quo* for ulterior motives, which is not to say that the African social system was perfect at all. But, even those missionaries came from 'lower classes' and it was amazing for them to disparage the work ethic of the African women, inculcating in them the idea that they were being over-worked when they were performing a role which was a cardinal virtue then.

In Europe, most missionaries did not come from affluent families. Their wives and mothers were not mistresses. They used their own hands to work hard for others and for themselves, just like African women. This should not be understood as the legitimization of the oppression of women, but as a critique of the pretense of affluence which the missionaries put on when they compared themselves with African men.

The subjugation and the defeat of Africans in colonial missionary times meant that their 'Gods' were also defeated. Should their 'Gods' rise and unite the people and

their leaders, as it had been in traditional pre-colonial times, the Christian people and their faith would have had to reckon with the resurrected African religious phenomena, as it were. The rise of the studies of ATR for Africans is a quest for the emergence of what Africans can proudly say is their own.

The emergence of African economies also could mean the possibility of the rise of African religions, should the Africans consider this important in this postmodern era. It has been observed how the missionaries and their partners, the colonialists, cooperated to achieve the success of their program. The same cooperation between the rise of African economies and the rise of ATR will be needed for the success of African Theology.

As things are, the concepts of African deities have been submerged in the political, economic and religious waters of Christianity and its partner - capitalist economies. African thoughts and African scholars need support to carry on genuine African studies today. A lot of work has to be done concerning African studies focused on the appraisal of the theology of African Traditional Religions.

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the historical survey of the observations and the debate about the concepts of deities in ATRs. We have discovered that the missionaries, colonial administrators, travelers and anthropologists portrayed an unacceptable picture of 'God' in Africa and ATRs. The information, in the form of reports written by missionaries, colonial administrators and anthropologists were of strategic importance to colonial governments. This information about people of 'strange lands' was used as intelligence for strategizing on how to colonize Africa.

The African Christian theologians criticized the picture which missionaries, colonial administrators, and anthropologists gave of deities in ATRs. The deities in ATRs

were in most cases described with the concept of the Christian God in mind. Deities in ATRs were Hellenized, just as the Christian God was Hellenized. African Christian theologians responded by correcting these descriptions of deities in ATRs. However, African Christian theologians did not give a unified picture of deities in ATRs. Some African Christian theologians argued that the Christian God is the same deity as the African deities. Some argued, there needs to be continuity between the Christian God and African deities. Some argued that the Christian God is one deity and African deities, on the other hand, are different. Some argued that there are some things which Christianity can learn about God from African notions and others that ATRs can learn from Christianity as well.

African Christian theologians were influenced and compromised by various factors. Some were compromised by Christian allegiance. Some were confined by their theological training. Some were ideologically driven by pan-Africanism, African nationalism and the challenge for the appraisal of ATRs. Some argued for the presentation of ATRs as one religion to counter the domination of Christianity. Some argued that there are some common basic elements that are identifiable in all ATRs. Some argued that ATRs need to be evangelized, since they seem not to offer salvation.

African Christian theologians presented yet another partially unacceptable image of ATRs and concepts of deities in Africa, though their attempt was not malicious or deliberately distorted. It was the question of research methodology and approaches to the study of ATRs and prior commitments which impeded their vigorous questioning. African Christian theologians were not social anthropologists. They were not historians of religion, or politically critical. They saw their task as to do 'theology' from the African Christian perspective, with no suspicion of the political role nor political ramifications of the study of religion. In their attempt to represent ATRs they used Hellenistic Christian appellations of God and imposed them on African deities. On the other hand, they attempted to defend ATRs, but did this from

the position of the Christianization of ATRs. The ATRs' notions of 'God' were not presented as African people would present them.

In southern Africa, and particularly South Africa, the fieldwork was done in the Limpopo Province in the *Botšhabelo* district. I found that the missionaries who worked there among the *Pedi* people came from the Berlin Missionary Society (BMS). The leader who was the superintendent of BMS was Alexander Merensky. We observed that the BMS colluded with both the Boer Republic and the British colonial forces. These missionaries did a lot in terms of building schools and mission stations. But their actions contradicted what the *Pedi* imagined mission was all about.

The missionaries influenced *Pedi* converts to turn against the chiefs and against their own families. The missionaries served the colonial forces with intelligence concerning the internal politics of *Pedi* society. In the end the *Pedi*, and some of the chiefs who were resisting the intrusion of colonial forces, were suspicious of the role of the missionaries. There was no difference between a missionary as sent by 'God' and the missionary as the political representative of colonial forces.

CHAPTER 3

3. THE PRESENTATION OF THE CONCEPTS OF THE CHRISTIAN GOD

3.1. Introduction

This chapter is about the presentation of the concepts of the Christian God by missionaries in general and the Berlin Missionary Society (BMS) in the *Botshabelo* area in particular. I will also describe the world from which the missionaries came, in terms of the theories they held about people in 'strange lands', with reference to southern Africa in particular.

The theological rationale of the missionaries in general and those of the BMS specifically will be described. I will also describe how the missionaries theologized about their role, both as perceived proponents of colonialism and as preachers and communicators of the Christian God. I will also look at how the missionaries and the preaching of the Christian God contributed to the subjugation of African people in general and the *Pedi* specifically, and will finally present the kind of God they impressed upon the minds of mission subjects.

3.2. The Social and Theoretical Mind-frame of the World of the Missionaries

In this subsection I deal with the frame-of-mind of the missionaries, shaped by the world from which they came. As it will be fully dealt with in other chapters, the introduction of the concepts of the Christian God was about the absorption of indigenous peoples into the capitalist mode of production emergent in Western Europe, with particular focus on British mercantile industrialization (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 200). Some missionaries may not have been conscious of this emergent new market world in their countries

of origin, especially on how this shaped their conception of the mission of the Christian God.

The BMS originates from Germany. Therefore, in South Africa it was not a colonial mission but collaborated with the British program of colonialism in the *Botšhabelo* district. It might be that some missionaries did not cooperate consciously and deliberately with the colonial forces. Some missionaries could have seen their cooperation with colonial forces as a matter of necessity during that time and as an opportunity to make the gospel prosper among the African people. But, whilst some cooperated consciously, others consciously resisted the repercussions of colonial forces insofar as they affected their mission work.

The mind-frame of conquest was formed long before the Industrial Revolution and the spiritual prompting to undertake Christian mission. Doing Christian mission was understood in terms of conquest or the winning of souls from the Kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of the light of the Son of God. It was thus important for those engaged in mission to have some knowledge of the customs and manners of the receiving culture.

In the case of the BMS, entrance for training as a missionary required full conversion to Christ. Students were required to have adequate knowledge of the Bible. Their conduct was expected to be beyond reproach. Students had to have at least some primary education. The students had to have the ability to learn modern languages as well as ancient languages such as Latin, Greek and Hebrew (Moila 1987: 36).

[The students had to have] good health; willingness to remain single during seminary training; their parents' consent; and a testimonial from the local pastor. Only those between twenty and twenty-five were admitted. Those who wanted to be missionaries in South Africa were further required to become one of the following: [They must be]

primary school teachers, carpenters, locksmiths or wheelwrights before they could be admitted at Seminary (Moila 1987: 36 additions mine).

At seminary the students were given adequate knowledge and training in the Bible. In addition to ancient languages which they had to learn, among the modern languages English and Dutch were compulsory. They also had to learn the language of the indigenous people they were going to minister amongst (Mminele 1983: 19).

During the first decade of the twentieth century a course in the most important tropical diseases was also added. Practical subjects such as carpentry, building, agriculture, and general ability in all forms of manual work were strongly emphasized. It was taken that the prospective missionary would be faced with the task of establishing a mission station wherever he would be sent (Mminele 1983: 19).

By the time the BMS missionaries came to South Africa they were able to communicate in the indigenous language. They were able to communicate with the British in English and with the Boers in Dutch. They were skilled to start work as soon as they had a piece of land. They employed local labor from among the converts and collaborating chiefs to speed up building construction and agricultural work. They were able to start schools and to impart reading, writing and manual labor skills to the indigenous people. In the process, as they lived in mission stations, they learned the inner working of the indigenous culture and their economic and political systems.

The aim of the BMS was primarily the evangelization of the *Pedi*. The BMS aimed at fighting the forces of darkness and evil in the characters of the indigenous people. They inculcated habits of industry and the dignity of manual labor, according to the aims of commercial industry in the West. To the BMS, work was a sacred duty. They considered the *Pedi* to be lazy and

that they needed to be educated and civilized through 'productive' manual labor (Moila 1987: 35).

With the rise of mercantile capitalism in northern Europe during the sixteenth century, authentic and reliable knowledge about human beings became a commodity that was valued for its utility in the work of trading or fighting with unfamiliar people all over the world (Chidester 1991: 1)

The knowledge gathered from these 'unfamiliar people' was utilized by conquerors and missionaries in their endeavor to spread capitalism and the mission of the Christian God. These 'unfamiliar people', as part of the project of colonialism, gave the missionaries a guess of the configuration of knowledge (Chidester 1996). Among other things guessed were the configuration of the concepts of land and land use (Majeke 1952), the reconstruction of the concepts of God (Setiloane 1986), and the disposition of the politics of space (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 1).

On southern African frontiers, comparative religion was a discourse and practice that produced knowledge about religion and religions, and thereby reconfigured knowledge about the human within the power relations of specific colonial situations (Chidester 1991: 2).

Apparently, the alleged coalition between British colonialism and Christian mission had a long-standing link and tradition. This tradition goes as far back as the Middle Ages, when the economic expansion of Europe was the foundation of the Christian crusades against the Mohammedans, the Spanish and the Portuguese slave traders. The Christian crusaders went on the rampage to conquer the New World with the holy cross and the crown at the mast-heads of their ships (Majeke 1952: 70).

It was the combined inspiration of Christian piety and profit that sent the Elizabethan adventurers in the late sixteenth century to join in the

commercialization crusade begun by their rivals and had stood the British in good stead from that time onwards (Majeke 1952: 70).

The British were not the only people who practiced colonialism. The scramble for Africa and other 'non-European' parts of the world was not the project of the British only. On the religious scene, as early as the first to the seventh century, Christianity was not the only religion interested in conquering other peoples in the name of evangelization and spreading the good news of the Christian God. Islam is also known for its wars of conquest of the Near East, North Africa and parts of south west Western Europe around the seventh century.

3.2.1. Search for Land, Labor and Trade

Christianity existed from first century Palestine and operated from the religious culture of Judaism. As time went on, the face and content of Christianity took on the situational matrix in which it was operating. During the times of the emergence of Christian missions, Christianity was deeply influenced by people who were hungry to open new commercial markets. These voyages and adventurous enterprises were also for the advancement of British commercial enterprise and the spread of the Christian religion. The Christian religion did not play a minor role in these military and economic expeditions.

The Christian God, it will be shown throughout this thesis, has been at the forefront of the conquest and the pacification of unsuspecting indigenous peoples, who were coerced into accepting mercantile economic systems. Though with much resistance, the Africans gave way as they were subjugated to accept the new status quo. At that time Africans had no means of determining the full economic implications of the act of accepting the Christian religion and the Christian God (Majeke 1952: 70). The missionary-evangelists of Christianity,

... spoke freely about heaven and hell, [and about God] but its roots were planted firmly in the capitalist civilization of their masters, an industrial civilization that was sending its many agents into Africa, Asia and India in the search for new markets and new raw materials, for new lands to conquer and countless Black hands to labor for it. Christianity itself was an ideological weapon of what was called 'Western Civilization' (Majeke 1952: 70 addition mine).

Besides speaking freely of heaven and hell, the missionary-evangelists spoke freely about God and war. This they did in African cultures which would avoid speaking so openly and so freely about such threatening items (God and war).

The Portuguese demonstrated the same blend of religious and political motives that characterized the Crusades. The conquest of land, the colonization of the peoples and the acquisition of new areas for trade were all held to forward the interests of God and Christendom, since they were to be the means whereby Saracens and pagans and other unbelievers inimical to Christ were to be brought under the rule of Christ (Bediako 1997: 40).

Although Chidester (1996: 14) sees the encounter of Africans with British capitalism from the perspective of interreligious confrontation, he does assent to the fact that the denial of the indigenous religion by colonizers was one way in which the denial of concepts of land, labor and trade, according to the practices of the indigenous people, could be understood. The African idea of land ownership, in particular, was that though the land was in the custody of the Chief, it belonged ultimately to *MODIMO*.

In other words, the land could not be owned by individuals by title deed. Both the Africans and the colonialists had a vested interests in the land, including the water resource, labor and trade. This was a struggle for political autonomy and legitimacy. The fact that 'people were found without religion' signified and justified their dehumanization and, therefore, their subjection to land

dispossession, labor exploitation and unacceptable trade exchange (Chidester 196: 14).

Merensky's view was that the establishment of reserves and locations for Africans was justified. He favored the allocation of gardens for African farm laborers. He favored the levying of taxes to encourage diligence, judicial protection, and spiritual and material development (Moila 1987: 38).

3.2.2. Chidester and Majeke's Configuration of the Missionary Mind-Frame

Majeke (1952) configures the missionary mind-frame as that of conquest of people in foreign lands. The conquest Majeke (1952) speaks about is that of the land and the introduction of British mercantile economy. This was a new form of economy which was brewing in the industrial revolution. Chidester (1991) sees the missionary mind-frame as that of cultural exchange. He implies that the indigenous people who were being conquered were not neutral. The indigenous people also had an impact on the ideas and actions of the missionaries and colonialism.

In order to understand the configuration of the missionary mind-frame we need to look at the theories which informed the missionaries and which consolidated their misguided picture of other peoples and of their lifestyles. It is because of the influence of this mind-frame that the missionaries caused damage and resentment towards Christian mission work amongst Africans. It is not sufficient to say the missionaries were 'children of their age' and not to expose what that age entailed and stood for. This exercise is the continuation of the unfolding of the missionary mind-frame. This mind-frame included their attitude toward the indigenous religious ideas (concepts of God, in particular).

In this section of the unfolding of the theories which informed missionary attitudes and activities in relation to African people, in addition to Majeke (1952) and Chidester (1996), other theologians and writers were involved.

This exercise is undertaken to understand further why mission and colonialism were, by and large, comprehended as the same project, though not all proponents of the 'good work' done by missionaries agree.

3.2.2.1. The Theory of One Religion

In this subsection I will confine myself to the exploration of several theories which were operational in the minds of the missionaries and other agents of colonialism in the mission of the Christian God. This is what formed a corpus of knowledge and lenses through which the missionaries saw other people. These theories were applied in various contexts of the encounter between mission and indigenous people in strange lands (Africans included), which

... appeared in travel literature as objects for conquest and subjects for representation. Their discovery, or invention, reinforced - or perhaps actually constituted - the notion of Europe by centering and surrounding it within a strange periphery (Chidester 1996: 6)

Out of the reports which were sent to Europe by explorers, travelers, missionaries and so on concerning indigenous people, a cast and a frame of mind were created that the salvation of the indigenous people was dependent on their being conquered and subjected to Western civilization and Christian religion. The indigenous people were seen as subjects of conquest and not as fellow humans who can, together with the European explorers, civilizers and missionaries, create a world in which all can live in peace under the rule of God or the divine.

The reports gave the impression that the people of the 'New World' could not represent themselves but could only be represented by Europeans. That meant that these people could not stand for themselves regarding anything in life - politics, religion, commerce and so on, but had to be assisted by Europeans. In

other words, a people which were naturally deprived and depraved had been discovered.

Influenced by religious motives and coloured by particular Christian assumptions about the efficacy of Satan, the missionary Robert Moffat (for example) nevertheless advanced a general theory of the history of religions. In the beginning, he proposed, there was one religion. Through a long, gradual process of historical diffusion, a process determined, in Moffat's reading, by Satanic influence, the one had become many; the religions of the world had proliferated (Chidester 1991: 190, addition mine).

Other religions were put in a position where they were presented as enemies of Christ. These were the enemies with which missions should wrestle, struggle, and toil to eradicate, to extract, to pull down, as the strongholds of Satan. The missionaries were to set free the adherents and proponents of other religions from the darkness of their minds and the sorry situation into which their beliefs had plunged them (Chidester 1991: 191).

Instead of tracing the many religions of the world back to innate, intuitive, or natural religious ideas, Moffat derived religion from primordial revelation. In the beginning, the revealed truth of religion was transmitted both in oral tradition and writing. However, Satan intervened to distort revelation. As a result of Satanic influence, the original revealed religion degenerated by stages, on a continuum from the refined Greek paganism, through the proliferation of polytheism and idol worship in India and China, to the barbaric religions of the most savage people around the world ... (Chidester 1991: 190).

Regarding the *Bechuana* [sic], more specifically, in southern Africa as recorded by Chidester (1991: 191), it was said that they were people without theological ideas or religion. It was understood that their lack of religion was an obstacle and a structural barrier to the advancement of Christian

colonization and mission. As a result, it led to an understanding that, in order for missions to succeed among Africans, they must be marauded and overcome through the vehement opposition of their cultural practices.

So, the one true religion the missionaries referred to was the Christian religion. This religion came in full force and under the conviction that it was the only, one, true, and original religion sanctioned by the 'true Christian God'. This religion, it was said, had to be accepted universally, and no other allegedly 'false religion' would be allowed to stand in competition with or to coexist with it. On arrival in foreign lands, the missionaries had this kind of thought. They approached the African people with an assumption that the Christian religion was the only, one, true and original religion.

This attitude of 'one true religion' fermented hostility and antagonism against the local religions. The history of the BMS missionary enterprise among the *Pedi* was characterized by "... the missionaries' eagerness to destroy *Pedi* customs. They were not merely hostile to these customs, but also worked against everything that can be recognized as custom or religion" (Moila 1987:113).

3.2.2.2. The Theory of a Religious Vacuum

Further, as propounded by the missionaries among the *Sotho-Tswana*, as Chidester (1991: 186) explains, was the theory of a religious vacuum. This theory suggested that these people were a religious wasteland and were susceptible to being filled by the truth of the 'gospel' they so desired to receive, to enlighten their minds. This theory suggested a total absence of religion among the *Sotho-Tswana* and, thus, they were seen as a peculiar brand of people when compared with other 'pagan' nations and 'idol-worshippers'. It was alleged they had nothing and did nothing which resembled religion in their social system. The missionaries said that African religions were 'like the

streams in the wilderness, which lose themselves in the sand, and had entirely disappeared' (Chidester 1991: 186).

They lacked any of the familiar, expected features of 'pagan' or 'heathen' religion. In dramatic, highly charged images, Moffat tried to evoke for his readers the unique situation of a Christian missionary who was faced with such a remarkable religious vacuum (Chidester 1991: 186).

In other words, there was discovered among the *Sotho-Tswana*, a people with no point of connection with the gospel. The missionaries found no reference from which to commence the introduction of the higher notion of the Christian God. No religious idea could be identified. All talk about God was beyond the comprehension of the people the missionaries found themselves amongst, as Comaroff and Comaroff also observed (1991: 200).

This theory of a religious vacuum concurs with that of the 'Empty-land' (discussed below). Common among colonizers was the idea that the lands they scoured, corroded, wiped out and depopulated had not been occupied before. It was alleged and believed that the remnants they left over, for the supply of labor, had migrated from elsewhere and were not the original or the legitimate owners of the land. These, it was alleged, were slaves which had migrated from 'elsewhere'. These slaves would serve well in the new capitalist society that had been introduced among the 'savages'.

3.2.2.3. The Theory of Empty-land

According to Setiloane (1976: 19) and Comaroff and Comaroff (1991: 207) the missionaries portrayed an image of Africa as a wasted garden, a desert. The picture was that of a land never tilled since the Christian God created it. Where there were Africans occupying this alleged wasteland, which was virtually empty in the missionaries' sight, these Africans were depicted as

‘dessiccationists’ [which means ‘to dry out’]- people who spoil the land, cause soil erosion, who have no idea of farming but just break up the land for no reason.

Missionaries gave the idea that Africans had no sense of the value of land and of commercial farming methods. It was described that the Africans had caused the land to be a desolate vineyard and that they had to be stopped from continuing to do that, for the welfare of all (Africans and Europeans). In retrospect, certainly, this was not for the well-being or welfare of the African people. In his rebuttal of this gloomy picture of the relationship of Africans to the land, Setiloane says:

All we need to establish . . . , however, is that, contrary to ideas lately propagated by some new historical outlook, seeking to fix the claims of the white man in southern Africa today, the land was not an empty no-man’s-land, teeming with game and unoccupied by man [sic] when the first Boer trekkers crossed the Orange River. Settled communities had lived there and conducted their affairs in a manner to them orderly and even civilized (Setiloane 1976: 19).

Chidester (1996: 15) gives another insight into this notion of ‘empty land’ or ‘empty space’ as he calls it. In his view, he sees it as a ploy intended as an encouragement to exterminate the peoples of strange lands in the name of colonization and conversion to the mission of the Christian God. This is how Chidester explains this phenomenon of ‘empty land’ or ‘empty space’:

By the nineteenth century, as the European colonization of Africa was underway, the denial of religion assumed another layer of significance by representing Africa paradoxically as both empty space and also an obstacle to conquest, colonization and conversion (Chidester 1996: 15)

3.2.2.4. The Theory of Four Religions in the World

Chidester (1996: 17) records that, during the eighteenth century, “European comparativists generally assumed that there were four religions in the world - Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Paganism, with the last sometimes divided into ancient, heathen, and diabolical forms” (Chidester 1996: 17)

It must have been a horrifying experience for missionary-colonialists to discover the plurality of religions of the new world. They could not contain them within their limited theories about other peoples. They were inevitably tempted to classify them as ‘worship of the devil’. This was the case, especially, among those peoples where there was undeniable evidence of the existence of religion.

Besides that, with those peoples the missionary-colonialists said had no religion, it was so because they could not relate to their religious systems in terms of what religion should entail. To the missionaries it must have been a cultural shock - a feeling of religious ignorance and destitution. They must have felt lost in that world. The best way to describe the situation was to paint a horrifying picture or to deny the existence of a legitimate religion among these ‘strange people’.

For the missionaries in particular, the search for the ‘unknown God’ in Africa provided a charter for comparative religion. Defining the genus of religion in terms of worship, they found three species of religion in the world - the God worship of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam; the object worship of Pagans, whether it assumed the form of idol worship of Asia or fetish worship of West Africa; and the ancestor [sic] worship of southern Africa, a species of religion defined by contrast with the other two (Chidester 1996: 27).

It was the so-called 'ancestor worship' which impressed itself on the minds of the missionary-colonizers as a unique religious phenomenon, in that in it there were no obvious or visible signs of religion - temples, shrines and so on, especially shrines for the so-called 'Supreme God' or 'High God' . That must have left the missionaries in a state of utter astonishment, in that they could not believe that there was so much religion among 'pagans' in any case. Chidester (1996: 27) says: "Without any worship of a Supreme Being, and without any idols or fetishes, indigenous religions of southern Africa were defined as a unique type of religion devoted to worship of deceased ancestors".

3.2.2.5. The Theory of Euhemerism

The classification of the religions of southern Africa as 'ancestor worship' leads us to another theory held by missionaries concerning the religions of the world and that is the theory of Euhemerism - of the elevation and deification of ancient heroes. This Chidester (1991: 184 - 6) extracts from the beliefs of Moffat:

In his reconnaissance of all the indigenous people of southern Africa, Moffat found absolutely no religion. By explaining the 'Zoolah' (Zulu) sacrifices as celebrations of ancient heroes, however, Moffat did propose a theory of religion, the ancient theory of Euhemerism, which accounted for the origin of religion in the elevation of cultural heroes to divine status. According to Moffat, Euhemerism could explain any hint of worship that might be found among indigenous people of southern Africa (Chidester 1991: 185 - 186, addition mine).

The ancient heroes referred to are people like King Shaka, to mention one. If properly represented, he could have been rightly pictured as one African leader who led the greatest and the most organized political civilization the world has ever seen. His would be compared to the great empires such as in the times of Graeco-Macedonian and Roman rule.

But Shaka was not given these honours. Instead, he was demonized as one of the most cruel leaders southern Africa has ever produced. As Setiloane (1976) would agree, one of the praise names given to Shaka and all his successors is *Silo* (in Zulu), *Selo* (in Sotho), meaning - a person who deserves the greatest of honors from his subjects and not a dreadful, monstrous wild animal.

Besides this, Bediako (1997: 60) and Chidester (1996: 8) both hold that another theory which influenced the thinking of missionary colonialists was the theory of environmental orientation to which we now turn. This theory is about how the environment and climate affect the thinking and religious ideas of people.

3.2.2.6. The Theory of Environmental Orientation: Climatic Conditioning

According to Bediako (1997: 60) “There was little room for cultural diversity within the European Christian world-view. The assumption was that European culture was the heir of an original cultural uniformity and that subsequent divergences were the result of a process of both diffusion and degeneration”

In other words, the notion of one original revealed religion brings to mind the idea that ‘Ancestor Religion’ is proof of degeneration of the European ‘true’ original religion. It was said in southern Africa there was no trace of this revealed religion. Apparently this original religion was totally dissipated and that, in other parts of Asia and so on, it had degenerated to idol worship. This religion had been kept pure in its original form in the Christian religion.

However, this theory cannot be subjected to authentic proof. The Christian religion as it stands now, and as it consisted in the past, has always been a syncretism of various divergent religious thoughts, theologies, and

philosophies. The Christian religion has never been pure in its formation as an offshoot and a branch of Judaism and as a Hellenized religion.

For those who rejected this European Christian understanding of cultural diversity, there was another way to account for this in the European cultural tradition; namely, environmentalism, the belief that climate and geography affected directly the development of culture so that different combinations of factors could account for the divergences (Bediako 1997: 60).

Cultural divergences are possible in situations of different cultural needs and cultural assumptions. Culture also has to do with the kind of resources accessible at the time, and not in any human nature's spontaneous responses to the conditions of the climate. This thinking will, consequently, lead us to conclude falsely that it can be proved that people in colder climates have a natural advantage over others. Many psychological tests have been conducted to try to prove that people of darker skins are less gifted than those of lighter skins. None of these experiments hold water. Theories which are meant to prove that people in colder climates are more intelligent than those in hot climates do not hold water either (Bediako 1997: 60ff).

Another theory, like that of 'environmental orientation', is the theory of Social Darwinism, which is a view that Africans are racially disabled and are facing a long evolutionary struggle before they can aspire to parity with Europeans (Cochrane 1987: 19). This is the same as the idea that Africans are, like children, out of touch with the real world because they cannot evaluate objects (Chidester 1996:15). It is not surprising therefore, though it is appalling, that:

However, the best environment, by which all others were measured, was invariably that of Europe, and the way of life each environment was supposed to engender was measured against the way of life upon which Europeans prided themselves at the time (Bediako 1997: 60).

That is why, in order to convert the peoples of strange lands, force had to be used to try make them 'European' in culture, religion and otherwise. The preaching of the 'gospel' of the Christian God was not going to grow and mushroom as it did among such resilient and yet humble people of other lands.

But still, after two to four hundred years of subjection and subjugation to the mission of the Christian God, not all the attributes of the African deities have been wiped out of the minds of indigenous peoples. This exercise of the comparison of the concepts of the Christian God and *MODIMO* of STR is meant to de-Hellenize the African deities and to unearth *Sotho* concepts of *MODIMO*. What made it more difficult for missionaries, psychologically, was this adherence to the environmental orientation theory. Chidester (1996: 8), commenting on this idea, says:

First, the mission could not be established in any inhospitable climate. Not only concerned with the discomfort of extreme heat or cold, or the prospects of life-threatening diseases, missionaries often adhered to an environmental theory in which climate was held partly responsible for shaping human disposition. The missionaries complained about ... the damp and cloudy atmosphere which depresses the mind and disposes it to the reception of melancholy and superstitious impressions (that is why it is alleged) ... The 'natives and the Dutch immigrants were both susceptible to the gloomy imaginings' of superstitions as a result of living in such climates (Chidester 1996: 8, addition mine).

With this theory, it is clear that the missionary-colonialists were attempting to say the religions of Africans and the politics of the Dutch (colonialists in the Cape) were incompatible with Christianity. The hatred that developed between the Dutch and the British was not because either the British or the Dutch wanted better living political conditions for Africans.

They differed on whether Africans should be made willing slave labourers of the capitalist market the British wanted to introduce, or that the Africans should be taught to know plainly where their place was in the colonial feudalistic society that the Dutch still used, or make it plain to the Africans where their right place was in the new proposed capitalist culture. It was alleged that the climatic conditions and the environment in which the Africans lived were partly responsible for their 'superstitions' and 'unwillingness' to come under the new 'civilizing' forces. This is all about Eurocentrism, which:

... does not mean simply European provenance, but refers to a cast of mind which, when exposed to other peoples and their world-views, presumed European superiority and responds with a comprehensive effort to subdue all new phenomena under existing European frames of reference, in order to reinforce them (Bediako 1997: 58).

In addition to that, for Maimela (1983: 51), the problem was the white Christians' practical view of humanity, which white anthropology portrayed. One world-view into which human beings are locked is the idea that people are enemies to each other. The Government comes in as the only force of coercion that is capable of preventing the war of each against all and all against each. This view of human nature is negative in that it does not encourage mutual trust between humans.

3.2.2.7. The Theory of Anthropological Orientation

The white Christians' view of the human self portrays man as a creature who is dominated by self-centred social drives, seeking to acquire as much wealth, power and prestige as he can for himself or his group or class, and caring for no others except [insofar as humans relate as masters and servants] as they are necessary tools for his personal gratification (Maimela 1983: 51 addition mine).

The issues of the accumulation of wealth and power, and of the control and manipulation of products, are at the heart of capitalism which the missionary enterprise was promoting. This capitalist enterprise was promoted far more than the purported objective of planting of religion, which was supposed to be the missionaries' primary concern among other peoples. Mission was overtaken and undermined by the capitalist ethic it imbibed, to the discredit of the mission of the Christian God.

Details of stock thefts, mis-constructed treaties, cheating and heinous crimes that Blacks are alleged to have perpetrated against innocent Whites fill the pages of history-books. Nothing good or creative was to be found among Blacks, because they were 'barbarous' beasts in the skins of men; as they may appear by their ignorance, habit, language; with other things which are brutish, being with no order in nature, no shame, no truth (Maimela 1983: 52).

These are assumptions that filled the missionary mind-frame. How on earth would the missionary-colonizers have survived if they had to live with such monstrous beasts of the myth of the 'Wild Man' (p'Bitek 1971:21 - 2)? This was about the justification of the conquest of indigenous people. The mission had the freedom to be condescending towards and to treat black people with the harshness, cruelty and brutality befitting their (Africans') 'nature' as humans of an alleged 'lower nature'.

The 'gospel' of the mission of the Christian God taught that humans have uncontrollable fratricidal drives which even the gospel and conversion cannot tame (Maimela 1983: 52). The result of the conversion of black people supposedly would not make any difference to their nature and behavior, except for admission and absorption into the European capitalist society. Theirs was to be slave wage laborers and to have no possibility of competing in the capitalist market economy.

It was imprinted in the minds of the whites that it was undesirable for black and white people to come together. If this should happen, it would be inviting danger and troubles and it should therefore be avoided at all costs. The danger spoken of was that black people and whites would cut each other's throats and that the whites would get the worst deal in the ordeal and would, consequently, be brought to extinction (Maimela 1983: 52)

According to Maimela (1983:53 - 54), even though he writes in later years of the oppression of black people by white Christians, Afrikaners (formerly Dutch/ Boers) and British together, white anthropology, which has been one of the theories on which whites based their treatment of black people in the early years of missionary colonialism, says that:

Humans are inherently not good and cannot perform good works; they cannot act justly, creatively and responsibly towards their fellows and therefore cannot be relied upon for help and promotion of lives of others ... Rather it tends to remind humans of how low, useless, rotten and sinful they are, thereby cultivating low self-esteem (Maimela 1983: 53 - 4).

Through the sermons of missionary-colonizers this low self-esteem was forced into the minds of the black people of southern Africa. The teachings about the love, holiness, justice, mercy and grace of the white Christian God of colonial capitalist 'civilization' turned out to be the means by which black people were cajoled to give in, into the hands of the colonial Governor and the Christian God.

It is out of this background of the world and ideas of the missionary-colonizers that a comparative study between the concepts of *MODIMO* in STR and the concepts of the Christian God will be deliberately made. Below is a summary of these elements of the mind-frame of the missionaries and how this impacts on this comparative study.

3.2.2.8. Summary of the Theoretical Mind-Frame of Missionaries

The missionaries had the mind-set that Christianity is the, one, true religion and that the Christian God is one, true God. The implication of this is that all other religions are false. All other Gods and false gods. This attitude and mind-set persists to this day.

In encountering other religions, these convictions informed the actions and attitude of missionaries. In most cases their actions and attitude toward other religions were evangelistically hostile, and they presented a hostile concept of the Christian God. In southern Africa, especially among the *Sotho-Tswana*, the missionaries did not find any obvious signs of heathenism but still they condemned STR as pagan. They did not see any objects of worship and thus came to the conclusion that they had found a people without religion. Their religious mind was informed by the religious symbols of the Christian religion. They could not conceptualize other symbols of religion outside the Christian ones. The theories of religion that informed them became a stumbling block and a blind spot on their religious observations.

Another element that shaped the mind-set of missionaries was that of the illusion that the lands they traversed were unoccupied. To them, the black people they found on the land were 'no people' or 'non-people'. They could not accept the forms of agriculture the black people practiced. They did not recognize anything human that would indicate that black people have ideas of land ownership and land rights.

The missionaries' attitude concerning individual land ownership impacted on the African's concepts of communal or tribal land ownership and the divine ownership of the land, in which African divinity was linked holistically with the ownership of land. Therefore, to Africans, the concept of individual land ownership was desecration - because to Africans, ultimately, the land belonged to *MODIMO*.

One more element that blinded the missionaries was the notion of the four religions of the world: Christianity, Judaism and Islam on the one side and paganism on the other. Christianity, Judaism and Islam were seen as theistic religions. Religions of the East were classified as idol worshipers - as one manifestation of pagan religion, West African religions as fetish worship - another manifestation of pagan religion, and southern African religions as Ancestor-Worship - a diabolical form of pagan religion. Even though such theories were unfounded, the missionary-colonizers disregarded the true situation and operated according to their mind-set.

In addition there was the theory that the climate and the environment of Africa were the cause of the mental and cultural debasement of its people. They found Africa climatically difficult to cope with. Yet, they felt a need to exploit the human and natural resources of Africa for the advancement of colonialism, civilization, Christianization and capitalism.

One more element was anthropological orientation. According to Maimela (1983: 51ff), white anthropology taught that humans are prone to be enemies one to another. This anthropology depicts people as enemies, especially black people, on one side, contrary to whites on the other. This anthropology makes people have low self-esteem, which was inflicted upon black people by whites. In the religious sphere, the white Christian God of a supposedly superior people and culture was presented as superior to all other Gods.

3.3. The Positive Contributions of the Missionaries

3.3.1. The Development of Leaders and Education

Stanley denies that the missionaries and colonial forces co-operated in the subjugation of black people and participated in the colonial territorial extension of the imperial power. He called the concept of missionaries'

collaboration in colonial imperialism an 'anti-colonial chorus' (Stanley 1990: 11).

According to Stanley (1990: 13), some people collaborated in the exploitation of human beings to express doubts about the spiritual integrity of those who ought to be honored as men and women of God. This impugment Stanley blames against the 1960s communist propaganda. He says:

There can be little doubt, however, that until the 1960s the portrayal of Christian mission as an essentially imperialistic agency was generally associated in the Western mind with Chinese Communist propaganda (Stanley 1990: 15).

The first phase of African de-colonization and resistance against British imperialism was generally supportive of and sympathetic towards Christianity. The independence of Ghana in March 1957 is an example of this positive attitude and acceptance of missionaries which did not group them with imperial and colonial forces of oppression.

The cry of missionaries as agents of colonialism is communist propaganda (Stanley 1990: 13). Africans embraced the prosperous Western capitalist countries and Christianity. That Christianity was a leading religion was embraced among African people. The West stood for the good that the Christian mission was achieving and the communist East was contrary to that.

In December 1957 Nkrumah, addressing the Ghana assembly of the International Missionary Council, paid tribute to the great work of missionaries in West Africa; he saluted in particular those who had given their lives for the enlightenment and welfare of this land, and insisted that the need for devoted service such as they gave was as great as ever (Stanley 1990: 16).

What Stanley (1990: 16) prides himself in is that missionaries did very well. “Many of the first generation of African nationalist leaders were products of Catholic or Protestant schools and theological colleges”. He mentions Jomo Kenyatta, Albert Luthuli and Kenneth Kaunda. He says : “... By and large, this generation of nationalist leaders remained broadly sympathetic to Christian principles while being severely critical of many aspects of missionary paternalism” (Stanley 1990: 16).

Stanley is convinced that ‘church’, or missionaries, and colonized people would have been in a good relationship, had it not been for the Marxist influence of African liberation movements, which depicted Christianity as the enemy of colonized people (1990: 21ff). What Stanley calls a ‘dependency theory’ was, in his view, a misrepresentation of Marx’s theory, which stated that States must first be industrialized before the proletariat could rise. But, instead, the Marxist propagandists of the ‘dependency theory’ spread the idea that the Western capitalist Christian countries were prospering at the expense of the exploitation of the resources of the colonies. This, for Stanley (1990: 21ff) was not the case. In addition to that;

The fourth major development to have affected substantially perspectives of missions and imperialism issue from the late 1960s onwards has been the emergence of indigenous African, Asian and Latin American theologies of self-conscious reaction against the hegemony of Western intellectual tradition in theology: dependency was a unacceptable reality in theology as in economics (Stanley 1990: 23).

But, in Stanley’s view, African theology of the 1960s shows itself in accord with Christianity. African theology was not necessarily antagonistic to Christianity but wanted to assimilate some of the Christian teachings and to propagate them as extensions of African belief systems. He says it was the South African ‘Black Theology’ which was at variance with and politically

aggressive towards Christianity. He says 'Black Theology' was even less indigenous to Africa, but was a term of which the theoretical framework was borrowed from the USA (1990: 23).

Nonetheless, the appeal of black theology in Africa has derived from its close identification with the reality of racial oppression in South Africa: it is a self-conscious theology of 'praxis' which takes the dehumanization and exploitation of the black population of South Africa as its starting point. Black theology has been consistent in its unqualified condemnation of Western missionaries for having been in the vanguard of colonial oppression (Stanley 1990: 24).

Black Theology has been relentless in creating an unacceptable image of Christian mission. This has been a common phenomenon in Latin America and Asia. These theologies focused, on the other hand, on liberating Christianity from its cultural and political alliance with Western colonialism, capitalism and the domination of colonies. These emerging liberation theologies accused missionaries of collaborating with Western imperial forces and thus creating a negative attitude towards missionaries, who in themselves were doing much good in Africa.

These governing motifs of the Third World theologies derive from a wider political context of the reaction against all forms of colonial dependency and the accompanying surge of revolutionary Marxism in both the West and the Third World in the late 1960s (Stanley 1990: 25).

Then the ecumenical movement became an additional thorn in the life of missionaries. The calling of the moratorium on missions to the Third World insulted the good work of the missionaries. The World Council of Churches radicalized the enigma against mission and classed missions together with anti-colonial sentiments and reactions, and this caused a big problem for the cause of mission work.

After de-colonization, attacks on missions intensified. Missions were perceived as representing continuing Third World dependence on the West. The Christian parallel to the post-colonial propaganda battle against neo-colonial dependency was the campaign in the 1970s for a 'moratorium' on Western missionary activity (Stanley 1990: 27).

Missions made their own direct contribution to the growth of nationalism, primarily through the medium of education. From the late nineteenth century onwards most missionary societies devoted more of their resources to education, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels. Strategically, this was a function of their belief in the priority of establishing a self-governing: educated indigenous leadership of progress towards autonomy (Stanley 1990: 134).

Indeed, the arrival of the missionaries in British colonies introduced Africans to literacy and numeracy. Many Bible colleges, schools, churches and hospitals were built with great effort to ensure the advancement of Africans and civilization in the manner of the Westerners. New methods of agriculture and commerce were introduced and many Africans were enrolled as merchants and craftsmen like their counterparts in Europe. The gospel of the Christian God was preached and many turned from their 'heathen' darkness and were introduced to the light of Christ.

Judgement that is passed without some measure of accurate understanding is by definition no more than prejudice. Careful analysis of the historical evidence is important, not least because current judgement of the relationship of Christian missions to imperialism is inevitably distorted by the preoccupation and limitations of contemporary ideologies (Stanley 1990: 175).

3.3.2. The Development of Resources, Labor and Land

Some parts of Africa are not commercially valuable while some have enormous resources. There are areas which are 'superlatively rich in agricultural and mineral resources'. The advanced countries of the world need raw materials and customers to buy their finished products. Africa is strategic in fulfilling this economic need. "The eyes of the world are turning more towards Africa in the well-founded belief that she can supply both products and markets" (Smith 1926: 83).

African people are not as lazy as many Europeans make them out to be. They are people who cultivate their lands and feed their families. But it has not dawned on them that they are able to produce goods for export for greater profit than merely to feed their own stomachs. The Africans have no intention of commencing overseas trade. Under their present conditions, there is no possibility of such a thought arising. "Moreover, they have no desire of themselves to do it" (Smith 1926: 84).

The economic development of the resources of Africa can, under present conditions, only be accomplished by the co-operation of Black and White. The Whites find the capital for railways and build them largely by means of the Black man's strength. They instruct and supervise Native laborers. Where the Natives are taught and encouraged to cultivate economic crops for exportation, white men act as middlemen, transporting and shipping the products - the cotton from Uganda, the cocoa from the Gold Coast, the ground nuts and palm from Nigeria, and so forth (Smith 1926: 84).

The Whites (missionaries implied) see themselves as people of superior power and culture. The whites see their invasion of Africa, religiously and economically, as something for the good health and faith of Africans. They came in to enrich themselves (the Africans sharing these profits), to seek

homes and livelihood. Companies looked for better shareholdings, markets and investments.

Above all else they demand two things: land and labor. If they care to use it, they possess the power which superior armaments give them to deprive the Natives of their land and to compel them to work for the white man's benefit; and, in the past this power has often been used with ruthless cruelty (Smith 1926: 85).

Despite all the questions asked by missionaries about the justice of and justification for taking the lands of Africans and the legitimacy of European people ruling over Africans and making laws that bind them without their consent, Smith (1926: 85 - 89) said that the Africans benefitted after all. But "Conscience is a disturbing monitor," says Smith. "It asks many questions. It prompts us to enquire whether our dealings with the African could be justified at the bar of God's judgement" (1926: 85). Smith (1926: 85) was conscious of the fact that the Christian God does not like what the Whites (missionaries implied) are doing with Africans, dispossessing them and impoverishing them.

I am now looking in general at the theological rationale under which the missionaries operated. I am now focusing on what happened in southern Africa and what happened among the *Basotho* (including the *Sotho-Tswana* and, more specifically, the *Bapedi* - a section of Basotho) - Northern Sotho people amongst whom we did most of our field work. I am leading to a point where I will be able to state the kind of God the missionaries presented among African people. All this background helps one to make sense of the image of the Christian God as presented by the missionaries, through their actions and words.

3.4. The Missionaries' Theological Rationale

The theological themes the missionaries operated with were: the doctrine of providence, the moral disarmament of the Africans, and the corrosion of African religious thought about belief in a deity. The foremost of the commercial theme the missionaries worked with was the belief in the stimulation of demands for the consumption of British goods and the increase of commerce (Cochrane 1987: 26).

The missionary theological education for the Africans was aimed at the spread of Christianity as acceptable civilization, the erosion of 'barbarism' and the extension of British control, the protection and promotion of Western culture, the introduction of a capitalist economy, the spread of Christian religion and the concepts of the Christian God, and the teaching of the English language (Cochrane 1987: 26).

The missionaries' attitude of being Englishmen first, and then 'men of God' second, and of being concerned with Christianization as civilization, was questionable. Their mission was not just the conversion of Africans to the Christian religion merely for the cause of spiritual evangelization. This gave the impression, therefore, that "... determinations regarding what is 'pagan' and what is not are arbitrary - a theo-political battle of the highest order" (Young 1993: 19).

Theological discussions that exclude aspects of life such as economics and politics lead to distorted images of deity. Though some missionaries may have claimed that they were not involved in politics, their apparent non-involvement has left the political playing fields of their time not leveled to the detriment and disadvantage of the African people they were so eager to convert. For people to be able to gain a broader perspective of who 'God' is, their theological discussion about deity and how it relates to the material world must be as comprehensive as possible.

... one may draw the conclusion that theological talk of God cannot know anything about God; and that in shedding light upon its ignorance through imaginative illustrations, theology proceeds negatively and critically vis-a-vis the claims it nevertheless makes (Cochrane 1987: 215).

Unfortunately, in the southern African experience, on the one hand missionary theology proceeded in a grossly over-enthusiastic and negative sense. This was precipitated by the European's negative view of other people and the European sense of the superiority of their culture, religion and economy. This adversely affected the possibility of developing an African contribution in the search for knowing 'God'.

Humans, as creative beings, are makers of their own history, politics, religion and so forth. In southern Africa it was predominantly European culture and conquest that shaped the history, politics and economics of this part of the world. In many ways the Africans remained continuously surprised, horrified and startled by the missionaries' own human creations of 'God'(Cochrane 1987: 1).

The missionaries' view of themselves as an elect people gave them the theological idea that the social order from which they came was Christian. In so thinking, they regarded the capitalist communities they were promoting during the then current urbanization of South Africa as unquestionably Christian. There was no way that the missionaries could see Christianity and the Christian God being able to adjust to economies and social arrangements which were different to theirs - i.e., those of European Christian capitalist people. And this was one of the images gained by Africans of the Christian God of missionaries - European capitalist.

3.4.1. The Missionaries Sanctioned by Divine Providence

The missionaries believed it was by divine providence that they came to southern Africa. The work of the Christian God was put in their elected custody. This providential responsibility gave them excellence, superiority and supremacy of economy, religion, concepts of 'God', commerce, wealth, reputation, moral laws and intellect, and the right to exercise these over peoples of 'foreign lands'. These 'men of God' believed the Christian God guided the destinies of nations. But the result of their work in southern Africa showed their shortsightedness by the introduction of oppressive policies, the engendering of wars and the extermination of natives who might have been, in any case, profitable 'workmen', good customers and good neighbors (Majeke 1952: 50).

Instead of accommodating themselves to the manners and ideas of the people, for the purpose of profitable, humane exchanges of theological and trade goods, "... the rulers were never in any doubt as to the particular place he (the Black man) should occupy in that civilization, and the particular education required for it" (Majeke 1952: 69).

It was going to be an industrial education, involving mechanical arts and education for servitude, as the Christian God had appointed, as Providence designed Africans to be - servants of whites (Majeke 1952: 69). This was going to be an education of teaching the Africans to work. It was an education of proving to Africans that the Christian God created them inferior to the Europeans. The Africans were predestined by Providence to dig water trenches for missionaries, to prepare their gardens, cut down wood and serve the white masters as unto the Lord their Christian God, for such was the Providential Divine will of this 'God' (Majeke 1952: 69).

From the beginning the mission station was a school where Christian dogma and moral instruction went hand in hand. Thus the individual

relationship to God set up a new authority in his mind. At the same time he learned new ideas of good and evil, reward and punishment, and sin, ideas appropriate to the White man's civilization (Majeke 1952: 69).

The form of relationship with the Christian God taught at mission schools was different to the one in which Africans were raised. It is the task of this investigation to demonstrate these differences. The new authority that was introduced and imposed was unlike the traditional authorities the Africans were used to, as this investigation will show later. The concepts of good and evil, reward and punishment, and sin, were also different and these shall be shown, in subsequent chapters, to have been strange in terms of how Africans understood justice.

The Newtonian cosmology of an ordered physical universe governed by mechanistic laws and originating in an omnipotent God lay behind the doctrines mentioned above (providence, privilege, rules). For the missions, largely influenced by British Evangelical Christianity, this cosmology was united with biblical revelation ... A belief in 'Manifest Destiny' provided divine sanction for the dominance of European people and the British in particular, by arguing that providence reigns in the affairs of nations. Rule is therefore a providential matter, as is privilege. Rule was further legitimated by the notion that the privilege carried with it responsibility for ruling the unprivileged (Cochrane 1987: 19).

The Europeans believed that it was given by Providence for them to rule people of 'foreign lands'. A process of ruling by Providence was set up in mission schools. It became strategic, in order to minimize the level of resistance from among those destined to be ruled, to disarm them morally. This will be our next subject of discussion.

3.4.2. The Moral Disarmament of Africans

It was engraved in the minds of missionary-colonizers that African morality, culture and religion was nothing more than the work of the devil. This work of the devil had to be rooted out using the Christian spiritual weapons of warfare, not carnal weapons but mighty through the power of the Christian God.

Whichever agent of British imperialism came first, it was as though the flag followed the cross - meaning the gospel was first introduced before the British crown took over to rule - but, as it also happened, after a military siege the gospel was preached to those who had been politically and militarily defeated.

Among the *Pedi* the BMS condemned tribal justice, *Kosha* (traditional dance), *lobolo* (dowry - misinterpreted as wife purchase), shrines, circumcision, rainmaking, witchcraft, divination, strengthening with medicine, cleansing of weapons, polygamy, examination for virginity, control of women, parental authority, disciplinary methods of the initiation school, services to the chief, duties of court messengers, court sessions on Sunday, traditional holidays, first fruits rites, taboos, respect to sacred places, burial in wet places, dirt removing rite, and *Pedi* art and clothing. The BMS further condemned prearranged marriages, inheritance of wives, cross-cousins marriages, the authority of the husband and socio-economic roles and chores (Moila 1987: 153 - 156).

For those *Pedi* converts who failed to uphold that which the BMS missionaries said was Christian, they were refused the privileges of Christian baptism and confirmation. They would be reprimanded and denounced publicly in the church. They would be subjected to forced road-making [i.e. hard labor] and forced catechism classes. The ultimate penalty was to be expelled from the mission station (Moila 1987:153-156).

This was introduced so as to teach Africans 'true' virtue, morality and 'human' civilized behavior. The work of the gospel and the mission of the Christian God would be to instil the fear of the Christian God in the natives. This would

be done after the natives had seen the mighty, devastating machinery of the mercenaries of the Christian British soldiers. The natives would then be taught to honor the king of England, the Colony and the imperial power - in effect, this is what the Christian God would be known to be (Cochrane 1987: 37).

Issues of morality, education and organization also affected the traditional society. Christianity introduced new and unusual disruptive definitions of social morality, while what remained of the old was modified and made to suit the new conditions and situations. But this was no universal morality, it was that of the Victorian Evangelicals and declining gentry, but shaped by the values of the rising commercial and industrial elite (Cochrane 1987: 34).

But, in the eyes of the Africans, the new Christian morality was, as could be expected, strange, unbalanced and ignorant of traditional ways. The new morality demanded the impossible. It caused breakdown of moral order, the disruption of families and of society at large. For instance,

... missionary hostility to 'witchcraft', was in fact [on the other hand perceived as] an attack on witch finding: For the *Xhosa* [the *Sotho* included] , this was like denying the existence of a disease and suggesting the elimination of the medical profession (Cochrane 1987: 34, addition mine).

On some of these problems the missionary-colonizers applied what they called 'the power of the Word' to inculcate this new morality. But it was no solution to the moral and social problems the Africans had been able to control and eradicate on their own over the years. The missionaries thought that the 'savages' had a dormant intellect, whereas they had come with more religious and empirical methods of finding solutions. Unfortunately, the missionaries were unaware of the questions with which African social morality was struggling (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 234).

The missionaries entered into a competition with Africans over these moral issues. They imposed their methods, eroding the African methods and thus disarming the Africans of what they knew best. For example,

[in] an effort to make the church schedule yet more encompassing, and so to compete more effectively with the ubiquitous practices of *Setswana*, [including of *Sepedi*] the missionaries constantly elaborated their own ritual circle ... with a view of seizing the high moments of the indigenous calendar. ... for example ... [missionaries] arranged an annual, three-day festival once the harvest was in. This was to be held in July, during the period of most intense *Tswana* ritual activity ... of *go loma thotse* [harvest thanksgiving] (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 234, addition mine).

This the missionaries did so that African Christians should not attend the traditional ceremony of harvest thanksgiving. In so doing, the African Christians were seen to be disobedient to the chief who was the main presider over the ceremony. Dissenting African Christians were seen to be inviting disdain from the 'tribal' *Badimo* [Ancestors] and generally dissociating themselves from the entire community, taking on themselves an image of being *majakane* (strangers) to the traditions of their Fathers and Mothers and pouring shame on their own families. This was what the missionaries wanted, so that they could boast about the depth of the repentance of African Christians from the 'darkness' of their former traditional ritualistic and ceremonial participation. Ultimately "... the role of the missionary at the end of the plunder would be to disarm the people morally and intellectually in order to ensure the continuance of White domination" (Majeke 1952: 76).

3.4.3. The Christian Mission as Pacification

The way the missionaries went about the introduction of the Christian God and the interpretation of the scriptures to indigenous people was disempowering

and Africans would not have understood that they could draw strength from the scriptures and from the Christian God to wage a struggle against colonialism. The scriptures were interpreted in such a pacifying manner, in favor of the colonial power and, in many cases, against the African people. In the case of the BMS among the *Pedi*:

The missionaries read and understood theology or theological statements only in terms of Western culture. For them the task of theology was to defend both Western Christianity and civilization. The task of theology according to this view is to show that God is contained within one specific culture rather than within culture in general. Thus conflict between Western culture and *Pedi* culture is equal to conflict between Christianity and *Pedi* culture (Moila 1987: 156).

For instance, a portion of the story of Israel wandering in the desert would be told and interpreted to mean that the Africans were like Israelites, wandering in the desert, without a place of their own. The political implications of such an interpretation would be that the Africans were found to be a nomadic people and, therefore, did not have a legitimate claim to the land they were found occupying (Majeke 1952: 36).

It was the task of the missionaries to placate African people. African converts were the first prey of this strategy of missionary-colonial conquest through religious placation. The missionaries did not fail to make the African Christian converts allies of the colony, who conveniently continued to spy for the governor. The missionaries had the duty of improving the image of the colony and discouraging hostility towards the colonists. The missionaries had to see to it that they restored confidence and trust in the colony and conducted themselves as peacemakers and, ultimately, that they made the Africans dependent on the colony (Cochrane 1987: 36 - 7).

Education offered by missionaries was an additional lure to conversion, because it allowed easier access to the market and a place in the new industrial society. Certainly missionary education made its contribution in enabling many Africans to cope with and master the totally new conditions now irrevocably upon them (Cochrane 1987: 34).

3.4.4. The Judgement and Condemnation

Missionaries preached a judgmental and a condemnatory message from the Christian God. The doctrines of the missionaries were preoccupied with teachings about sin in the human heart. Such doctrines made no sense to the Africans. The response of the Africans was that they had never sinned in the manner in which the missionaries explained 'sin'. Specifically, the *Sotho* believed that sin was an anti-social characteristic. In fact, according to the *Sotho* understanding of sin, the missionaries and the colonizers with their anti-social behavior had been sinning all along, ever since they had arrived among them. As for the *Sotho* people, they never committed sin towards the missionaries, nor towards *MODIMO* for that matter. However, the *Sotho* were always inclined to welcome the missionaries as 'men of God', humanely and with trust (Setiloane 1976: 115).

The missionaries' condemnation of sin in the heart of a person and the 'sin' of polygamy they preached about, were false, unheard of and laughable to Africans. Among the *Tswana* sin is a wrong of social significance. When the *Tswana* heard about the dread and the pain of the 'day of judgement' they could not understand such a cruel God or such a cruel manner of dealing with people regarded as His own creatures and subjects, condemning them for such unheard of transgressions (Setiloane 1976: 116).

It was not only the people that the missionaries condemned as sinners. They condemned their customs as well, including polygamy, and this is the issue that Cochrane (1987: 34) commented on. He wrote:

Among the customs that fell prey to missionary assault was polygamy, with its attendant bride-price (*lobola*) system. The latter was regarded by Whites as a form of slave purchase. Yet, whatever its drawbacks, *lobola* in fact played an important part in a manner of social relations as well as the redistribution of wealth (1987: 34).

The newly introduced Christian marriage was different to the traditional African marriage system. Christian marriage did not promote family relations. It was too individualistic and focused on the bride and the bridegroom. For Africans, Christian marriages marginalized families, as well as Ancestors. Christian marriage was one weapon with which human and social bonding was dismantled. It undermined African social solidarity. According to Comaroff and Comaroff (1991: 238), concerning the condemnation of African institutions: “Royals were directly threatened by such moral tirades, seeing the onslaught on rain-making, initiation and polygamy as a serious challenge to their sovereignty” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 238).

In addition, the missionary-colonizers’ talk of ultimate salvation as ‘the hereafter experience’ was meant to placate the Africans into not resisting the evil of the presence of colonial forces among them. Africans were encouraged to learn to live with the Christian capitalist presence, hoping for a good life in the hereafter - i.e. Christian Heaven. The missionary-colonizers prided themselves by reporting that: “Once the divine light of truth had fallen on it, savage innocence became original sin, its ways to be loudly condemned as the path to death and damnation” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 238).

As events unfolded “... the Southern *Tswana* took the mission at its word, so to speak, treating literally the implications of their tropes [figures of speech].

Eager to domesticate the new force in their minds, they identified the Bible as a major repository of the word of the whites (sic)” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 228 - 229, addition mine).

But, as a potential rebuttal and a form of re-appropriation of Christian symbols, with the intention both to work in favor of the *Tswana* and at the same time to reject what did not work for them, it was impressed on the mind of the *Tswana* that the ‘Word of the Christian God’ was medicine (*sethlare; pheko; moleko*)[medicine; charm; that which can heal or harm; or could be a means of bewitching]. This ‘Word’ led to complaints and was responsible for the new order of things, where the Africans found themselves under the domination, aggression and commandeering of a white Christian God.

It was impressed by African chiefs upon the *Tswana* (*the Pedi* included) that the doctrines of the Bible - the Word of the Christian God - must be opposed and the *Tswana* must be strongly warned to distance themselves from the clutches of Christianity. The *Tswana* were concerned that the ‘Word’ would contaminate the waters of their rivers. This was not absurd, in that the Christian God, as were the missionaries, was capable of doing this (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 228).

Many years later, Wookey, who worked among the *Tlhaping* [one *Tswana* ‘tribe’] in the second half of the century (19th), confirmed that once local people began to know something of his work, they opposed [him] tooth and nail. This was hardly remarkable. The doctrine borne by the Word was explicit in its attack on the entire edifice of customary practice (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 238).

The work of the missionaries was based on the ‘Word of God’. The handling of that ‘Word of God’ was made inimical to everything African. Yet, the Africans were lured to believe in it. The ‘Word’ demanded absolute obedience from the African converts. In many ways the ‘Word’ sought to uproot the

African and to change him/her into a 'European', and yet not to be accommodated in the company of white 'masters'. The Christian God was presented as a discriminatory deity, even among Christians themselves. There was a clear division between the African Christians and the Christian colonial white missionaries.

By the 1930s, however, the [African] ceremonies had virtually disappeared, primarily because Christian missionaries regarded them as immoral and convinced 'progressive chiefs' to abandon and prohibit them (Magubane 1998: 123).

3.5. The Missionaries' Methods of Subjugation

3.5.1. The Encroachment of Missionaries as 'Men of God'

In this section I want to illustrate the methods used by missionary-colonizers to infiltrate and subjugate African communities. The missionaries, supposedly as 'people of the cloth' would go in first to face the 'tribal' chief to ask for permission to work among the people and ask to be given a small piece of land from which they would operate - to preach the Word of God.

As soon as the land was granted the trader-capitalists would move in alongside the plot allocated to the missionaries and ask permission to trade with the people. Soon thereafter the colonial magistrate would be introduced and, when the Africans began to resist this influx of whites, the colonial government would bring in troops to conquer the area and, in some instances, even detain the chief. From then onwards the area would be totally colonized and put under colonial rule.

As a first step, with the greatest pretense, false humility and extreme hypocrisy, the missionaries would stoop low and put on a pretense of humility to ask the chiefs for a place to preach the gospel of the Christian God. These

missionaries would visit chiefs, assuring them of friendship and protection, either from rival tribal groups or encroaching white colonialists. The missionaries knew, however, that this was just the first step towards the conquest and the subjugation of the chiefs and their people (Majeke 1952: 14).

The missionaries looked upon African people as useful to the Colony and as potential wage laborers in the capitalist economy. The introduction of a capitalist economy was done simultaneously with the introduction of the Christian God. The Africans were also desired for conscription into the colonial forces, since they knew the hinterland intimately and were useful in battle in terms of following tracks and knowing hideouts.

At times the colonial missionary-government would send Africans to make war on other Africans on behalf of the Colony. The most vulnerable potential African conscripts were the African Christian converts. Thus one learns that chiefs were concerned about the missionary impact upon traditional discipline, resenting the removal of converts from their jurisdiction and the loss of their services in time of war” (Cochrane 1987: 33).

A typical example of the use of African Christian converts in conflict situations is that of the defiance of Sekhukhuni by his half brother Mampuru. Mampuru was a rival for the *Pedi* throne. When there was conflict between Mampuru and the reigning Chief Sekhukhuni, Merensky and other missionaries sided with Mampuru. The Christian converts joined and sided with the defiant Mampuru. Mampuru was given shelter in the neighborhood of Kgatlatlou Mission Station of the BMS (Moila 1987: 131).

Angered by the double standard of the missionaries, their interference in the internal politics of his society, their domination of and subversive actions within the whole Christian community, chief Sekhukhuni forced Christians to renounce their faith by imposing restrictions on them. He accused the missionaries of stealing his

people and undermining his authority and forbade them to do further mission work (Moila 1987: 131 - 132).

The Christian converts of *Botšhabelo* were armed with guns. They were instructed to assist the colonial government in the event of attacks by Sekhukhuni, the Boers and the Transvaal Republics. By 1870, 109 guns had been distributed among the *Pedi* converts. Merensky was held personally responsible for the guns. The residents of *Botšhabelo* were taught to shoot and how to repair the guns. The Mission Station had its own supply of gunpowder and lead (Moila 1987: 139 - 140).

The *Pedi* society was divided between armed Christians, who lived in the Mission Station localities, and those termed 'pagan', who were still under the rule of the chiefs. "This division initiated a fierce conflict among the *Pedi* people and between the *Pedi* political leaders and missionaries together with their converts" (Moila 1987: 153).

This meant that conversion to Christianity was not affecting the individuals on a spiritual level. There were political implications, such as losing potential warriors. The warriors added value strategically to the colonial mercenaries. Conversion to Christianity was a gain for the colonial forces and a loss to the traditional communities. With the encroachment of the missionaries, the harvesting of African converts and the separating of them from their homes and chieftainships meant that: "Christianity, where it took effect, had the effect of destroying the ritual and ceremonial bonds which bind the traditional kinship" (Cochrane 1987: 33).

Besides that, the arrival and the acceptance of missionaries in the territories of African people attracted, introduced and paved the way for all the partner agents of British colonialism: the trader, the magistrate and the soldiers. Each one of them would do their bit of subjugation and exploitation. All worked towards transforming the local people, land and economies to be like those of

industrial Europe. This was not the work of only a few selected missionaries who were up to no good.

But, whatever may be said about individual missionaries, it remains generally the case that their ambiguous role within chiefdoms, the effect of their connections to the colony, their tendency to split converts away from their fellows, and their reliance upon colonial force or power in crisis or conflicts, all contributed to undermining chiefdoms in the long run, or at least to making it much easier for settlers and colonialists to exploit existing divisions and tensions (Cochrane 1987: 29).

It was the function and task of the missionaries throughout the period of the colonization of southern Africa to break down the traditional systems with new ideas. These included ideas of deity and they continued to do this in their various fields of operation (Majeke: 1952: 100).

When Southern African tribes looked upon the strange, pale faces of the Europeans whose nations would come to rule their continent, they surely could not foresee the impact of their arrival. Within decades the newly emerging African states and kingdoms were shattered; their chiefdoms were undermined until many chiefs were little more than lackeys of the colonial administration; their pre-capitalist economies were variously altered, and later tugged to pieces though not quite destroyed ... (Cochrane 1987: 12).

The missionaries, their tactics and impact on local communities, and their spying work were such a nuisance to the Africans that, in 1817, senior royals urged Chief Mothibi to expel Missionary Read, a colleague of Campbell, arguing that:

[The] churchmen [Men of the Christian God] had already reduced other rulers to servitude. In order to resolve the contradiction posed

by Europeans - whose power to 'protect' from external threat was also the power to undermine the polity from within - the Chief tried to hold them at arms length (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 200 - 201, additions mine).

So would be the first phase, where the missionaries came in first. As soon as they had made their entry in the name of religion and the Christian God, the valleys would be full of 'pale faces'. Then you knew that the 'dragons' had come and that there was no escape from them and their evangelizing Christian God. Next would be the coming of the trader-capitalist -economist to change the trading scenario. The production of goods and trading would be made an issue of competition and no longer meant purely for subsistence.

3.5.2. The Africans Under Duress - The Economic Necessity

With the progress and success of the missionary-colonizers' methods of gradually and ruthlessly undermining the African polity and traditional methods of subsistence, the Africans were put under pressure to transform and to take on the new capitalist mode of production, and to become *pseudo*-competitors with the colonialists. It was inevitable for Africans to take on the new challenge, though not for the improvement of their lot, but as a succumbing to the new economic pressures put upon them by the trader, who came along with the missionaries to do his bit of economic colonization and exploitation. "Economic necessity was dissolving tribal loyalty. The chiefs themselves were hunted men, their very office usurped by missionaries and sons of missionaries" (Majeke 1952: 59).

Thus it should be understood that transition and transformation from 'tribal' systems to those of capitalism was not a voluntary exercise and did not just take place automatically. The manners, habits, customs, ideas, procedures and protocols of the old systems had to be broken down and replaced with those of the new Christian capitalist systems. And this was one of the methods by

which the missionaries, traders and colonialists continued to suppress and to erode the African systems and institutions.

Capitalism has shattered tribalism and destroyed the social relationships that go with it; it has broken the old tribal bond, but it has created new ties that bind men together in a much wider unity. It brings men face to face with the objective industrial forces, for the whole of society is organized around industry and commerce and men take their place within it, irrespective of to what tribe or race they belong (Majeke 1952: 140).

This wider economic participation changed the traditional mode of production where, for instance, traditionally, production was for family subsistence. The division of labor and the allocation of duties were based primarily on gender and age within the family, up to the 'tribal' level. The new system introduced a mode of production amongst families. It brought competition between families. Moreover, individuals entered into competition based not on gender and age but on ability, the acquisition of skills and the capability to compete alone and to win alone, using the new ideas of production for accumulation and profit, and no longer production for consumption and distribution as it used to be (Cochrane 1987: 31).

In the end, the trader won, and traditional customs were defeated but not annihilated. Up to the present, rural communities still practice subsistence farming. Though, with the growth of the capitalist economy, this is also impacting rural areas. The rural people need finished goods which are mostly enjoyed by urban people.

The aim of Christianity in *Pedi* society involved much more than the simple question of religion. The aim was to destroy *Pedi* culture and replace it with the Christian civilization of individualistic Europe. Modern Europe moved from mercantile to industrial capitalism at the point at which missionaries started to evangelize in Africa ... Thus the

history of missionary enterprise in *Pedi* society was also a history of transition from tribalism to capitalism (Moila 1987: 115).

3.5.3. The Coming of the Magistrate

The next colonizing agent would be the magistrate, who would colonize the judiciary system. Where possible, the magistrate would replace the local chief.

To impose a magistrate and a missionary on the chiefs meant to hasten the process of tribal disintegration, which in turn paved the way for the next stage of military conquest. Actually, these were aspects of a single process. The confiscation of land increased the necessity to accelerate the break-down of the old system and incorporate the Africans into the new system as laborers (Majeke 1952: 43).

The magistrate-colonizers targeted primarily the traditional judicial systems so that those aspects of traditional law which did not comply with the new system should be undermined and changed. This was done to speed up the new capitalist colonial order. It was a matter of principle to ensure that new laws would be applied to rule the Africans. The missionaries and magistrates were convinced that the introduction of the new judicial system was an experiment which must not fail. They believed that the Christian God demanded and commanded it.

The new laws introduced by the magistrates were underpinned by a missionary theological justification: that they were the laws of the Christian God. In the minds of Africans, whatever happened in the magistrates' courts gave the impression that it was what the Christian God required. What emanated from magistrates' courts was conceptualized by Africans as the righteous justice of the Christian God.

3.5.4. The Military Conquest

As we have seen, a pattern was consistently followed whereby the missionaries came in first to ask for a piece of land to preach to Africans about the Christian God. This paved the way for the traders, and then the magistrate would be imposed upon the chiefs. The next colonizing agent was the military. These mercenaries came for the annexation of African land to the colony. The missionaries would teach and advise the chiefs, as it happened to Moshoeshoe, Chief of *Basotho* that, according to Majeke (1952: 89 - 90), Rev. E. Casalis said the following words after a meeting with Moshoeshoe:

‘If Moshoshoe and his people (he said) consented to place themselves with us the care and direction of God, we had the most perfect assurance that He [God] would undertake to make the incursions of their enemies cease and create in the country a new order of belief and of manners which would secure tranquillity, order and abundance’
(Majeke 1952: 89 - 90).

Concerning military conquest, in the eyes of the missionaries it would bring a new political order. According to the missionaries the traditional social and political order which the Africans had created was assumed to be not according to the pattern of the Christian God. The new order was supposed to be like that fashioned in industrial Europe. It was this order that the Christian God would take care of and give direction to. When that order was established, as promised, it would bring material abundance. Accordingly, it was the capitalist order and productivity that would make this promised prosperity possible.

Alas for Moshoeshoe’s good faith - or misplaced diplomacy - dragons’s teeth had been sowed in his soil and the mutual destruction of the tribes would continue for years to come (should this proposed Christian capitalist order be accepted) (Majeke 1952: 99, addition mine).

If Moshoeshoe had known that 'dragons teeth' - the Christian God - had nothing good intended for the *Basotho*, especially when it came to making war, and taking cattle and land, he would not have assented. Moshoeshoe should have learned from the *Xhosas* that the Christian missionaries had only one agenda - to colonize. The Christian God would not help him when the colonial forces came to attack his people.

The intrusion of the Christian missionaries was just the first step in this method of conquering. Introduce a new God, bring in a new economy, then new laws, reduce the chief and his people to servitude and finally take all. "The focal point of attack on the part of the military was the chief. This was no less true of the missionary" (Majeke 1952: 30). This makes the image of the Christian God as the God of 'civilization', capitalist conquest and Christianization.

The missionaries were viewed by Africans as strategic mediators with the colonial governors. Through the missionaries some concessions could be granted, should they as Africans be at peace with the missionaries. But all this was a delusion, a real mental aberration and denial. There was no intention on the part of the missionaries to make any genuine mediation between the chiefs and the colonial governors.

The intention of the missionaries was to mislead the chiefs further. Their aim was to open up more opportunities for the Christian colonizing forces to put 'dragons teeth' even deeper into the soil and souls of Africans. As a result, the Africans would suffer to the uttermost, as has indeed happened in the history of southern Africa in the name of the Christian God.

For example, for the BMS, the colonial government was divinely elected from the beginning, but they perceived the *Pedi* political system as an evil which could not be tolerated. They regarded it as an evil structure which needed to be defeated before Christianity could be established in *Pedi* society (Moila 1987: 125).

The missionaries and colonial government employed the gospel and the gun to destroy *Pedi* religious, economic, social and political systems. The missionaries and the colonial government regarded the chiefs as the principal enemies of colonialism, Western civilization and Western Christianity (Moila 1987: 126).

The missionaries portrayed the governor [and the military] as ‘men of God’, seemingly working for the good and welfare of everybody. These colonizers were portrayed as bringing light to the ‘damaging’ darkness of the Africans. The missionaries taught that the governor was a just man and would redress any real grievances of the people (Majeke 1952: 31).

They also taught that people must in turn not expect any more than was reasonable. What was reasonable was that the governor was obliged to protect the colony, make sure there was no degradation of resources such as land and water, and that the duty of the chiefs was to prevent the stealing of cattle and to restore ‘stolen’ cattle from the Africans (Majeke 1952: 31).

The governor could reasonably care for the Africans if they submitted to his rule. But, on the other hand, it was the missionaries and the governor who sanctioned the robbery of African land and cattle and depended on the army to protect them against Africans. The colonizing forces trapped people in starvation, threatened them with war and destruction and left no choice for Africans other than to steal or to die of starvation or risk the consequences of war. The missionaries and the governor - these ‘men of the Christian God’ - made the existence of a nation depend on circumstances beyond the reach of human power. People had just to resist (Majeke 1952: 31).

Consequently, the Africans also collected and bought arms in order to prepare for resistance, which was another factor that seriously alarmed the British. “

... the increasing use of guns on the part of the Africans reduced the military advantage they had previously had over a people armed only with assegai[s] and shield[s]” (Majeke 1952: 64).

Needless to say, missionaries advised the chiefs to allow the military to drive them and their people out of the tribal lands with the bayonet ‘peacefully’. They advised, “[when] the soldiers come and take cattle, suffer them to do it without resistance. [When] they burn your huts, allow them to do so. [When] they shoot your men, bear it till the governor comes. Then, present your grievances to the governor, and you will get justice, and will not regret taking the advice, and will have no occasion to regret of having followed the advice” (Majeke 1952: 31).

This must have been strange advice from ‘men of God’. The governor himself, as another ‘man of God’, would have been the one who sent the Christian soldiers to go and seize cattle from the Africans. How could the missionaries’ advice be taken seriously by discerning people? Or who, among humans, could bear such demented advice?

3.6. The Presentation of the Missionary Images of the Christian God

Lutheranism [promoted by BMS] maintains that both civil and ecclesiastical authorities are instituted by God as independent of each other. The civil government governs through the sword and provides its citizens with external righteousness and peace. The ecclesiastical government governs through the preaching of the gospel and administration of the sacraments. This belief shaped the missionary strategy in *Pedi* society (Moila 1987:34).

The continual presence of missionaries in South Africa had become a reality that African people had to live with. The doctrines taught by missionaries were conceptualized in different ways within missionary communities, which happen to be white, and African communities, which happen to be black. The images of the Christian God taught by missionaries could be observed in white communities in general. Some of the images of the white Christian God could be observed from the reflections of various theologians. It is the task of this section to discuss these images.

The images of the Christian God which will be examined in this section are characterized as follows. One overall characteristic of these images is idol worship. The worship of an idol implies worship of falsehood. An idol is an image of a deity carved in stone or other material and also shrewdly constructed in theological doctrinal statements, such as 'God is Love'. Idol worship is the same as the worship of material things - stone, wood, wealth, ideas, and so on. An idol is worship of 'something else', other than the creator. This 'something else' could also be worship of self and worship of ideas which deny the reality of a creator. The denial of the reality of a creator can also be seen in the way humans treat each other. This is what was experienced in southern Africa in particular.

As the above quotation from Moila (1987: 34) implies, civil government and ecclesiastical government are given by God. Civil authorities rule and govern in the earthly realm. The ecclesiastical government rules and governs the spiritual things. The civil government offers external righteousness. The ecclesiastical government offers internal righteousness. God rules the external through earthly authorities and the internal through ecclesiastical authorities. In both instances, the internal and the external, the missionaries were involved. The rule of the Christian God can be observed through the manner in which they exercised their God-given authority to rule the earthly and the spiritual.

3.6.1. The Worship of Land, Power and Privileges

There are divergent images of God imprinted in the minds of African people. Besides that, the inhumanity of whites as people was a puzzle to many African communities. Some thought missionaries possessed powers such as those of traditional healers, because they dabbled in the things of *MODIMO*, a privilege enjoyed by people like traditional healers (Setiloane 1986). The Christian God that was preached by the missionaries was in many cases incompatible with their actions. This has been an ongoing perplexity for many years of missionary presence among the people of southern Africa. Kritzinger (1990: 3), himself a white theologian, wrote:

But what is the 'bad news' which we hear when we listen to the prophetic voices of Black theologians, and begin to see ourselves through the eyes of our victims? What do we need to be liberated from? The biblical concept of idols is suggestive, since it describes aspirations for which people are sacrificed. The man who exchanges the living God for false gods, at the same time exchanges real people for 'false people', whom he uses and manipulates without qualms of conscience. Whoever treats other human beings as less than human no longer worships the living God, but has changed God into an idol (Kritzinger 1990: 3).

In Kritzinger's time of writing, (1990s), African people occupied thirteen percent of the land, arid land at that, and the whites who comprised just ten percent of the population of South Africa, occupied the rest of the fertile and arable land which was eighty-seven percent. These figures mean that Africans were compressed in a small area of land whilst whites enjoyed the rest of the land. The notion of South Africa as the land of whites had been so inculcated among the whites that it would take a 'conversion' to change that mind-set, and for the whites to begin to see that it was through military and religious conquest that the African people and the whites found themselves in such unequal positions. Yet, all along, the missionaries had preached equality before God. When it came to equality between African people and whites, that was incomprehensible.

The acquisition of land became so integral to white spirituality that they were prepared to sacrifice not only themselves but their children as well. White society introduced religio-political and capitalist economic systems that would continue the degradation of the lives of African people. The expansion and promotion of white oppression and domination of African people in all spheres of life developed in front of the eyes of the missionaries. Kritzinger (1990: 6) says:

The idea behind *Die Stem*, for which whites are willing to offer their lives (In fact singers of the song were singing that they would offer their lives for the *country*, not the song itself), is an idol. It is a false god, which creates the false and arrogant consciousness among its white worshipers that they have the sole right to control the country and to 'grant' certain parts of it to the black majority. Nothing reveals the colonial nature of our society more clearly than this. But this white conception of the country is legitimized by a theology, by an understanding of a God whose actions are described as follows in the preamble to the 1983 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa: 'In humble submission to Almighty God, who controls the destinies of nations and the history of peoples; who gathered our forebears together from many lands and gave this their own; who has guided them from generation to generation, who has wondrously delivered them from the dangers that beset them ...' (Kritzinger 1990: 5 addition mine).

The Almighty God mentioned in the national anthem and the 1983 Constitution is a Christian [God]. The roots from which the anthem was derived can be traced to the Christian missionary presence in southern Africa. This is the Christian God who was preached by the missionaries for three hundred years, compelling Africans to abandon *MODIMO* and *Badimo* and instead to embrace the 'One, True, Christian God'. The anthem venerates the idea of the Christian God, as revealed in British imperialism and missionary enterprise which, at the time of *Die Stem*, was carried forward in the form of 'internal' colonialism (Nolan 1988: 70).

The Christian God is alleged, at this point, to have given the British and the Boer the mandate to determine the destinies of many nations. To the Africans, insofar as they have conceptualized this white deity, their destiny was the abyss of dry, over-crowded homelands or the squalid areas of mining compounds and locations of emerging African townships meant to serve the emerging capitalist metropolis of South Africa.

This is a history sculpted by missionary colonialism. The forebears, gathered from many lands, were people of white descent who came from various European countries such as Britain, France, The Netherlands and Germany. The dangers referred to include being in Africa, which was described as wild and dark, full of diseases and wild predatory animals, and opposition by African people. The successful colonization of Africa was attributed to the Christian God.

But this idol is also sustained by another myth which needs to be exposed. It is the notion that South Africa was empty and uninhabited when Van Riebeeck arrived at the Cape, and that whites therefore have as much right as blacks to own land here. This clearly serves the interest of white settlers, and it can be totally refuted by means of archeological evidence (Kritzinger 1990: 6).

For this myth to be removed from the white consciences and for whites to be able to redress issues, they must be converted from it, encouraged and challenged to consider their commitment to Africa. That means they must begin to see themselves as *Africans*, historically and politically speaking (and not genealogically speaking), and to have the plight of Africa at heart. They must see that their future in Africa is connected to and dependent upon the freedom and prosperity of all people living on this continent. There is enough space for both *them* and Africans to live under the African majority, democratic, non-racial government. Kritzinger (1990: 6) says:

But this demands a conversion, a resolute turning away from the white 'our country'- idol to the living God, who calls us to exercise just stewardship of the land. This requires of whites to develop a new theology of land ownership together with black Christians, a theology which can inspire and discipline all of us children of Africa to live together justly as neighbors (Kritzinger 1990: 6).

The problem we may encounter with Kritzinger's (1990: 6) suggestion is on the conceptual level. The missionary mentality, which is tantamount to white mentality, regarding stewardship may not be the same as that of African people. For example, in the African rural and agrarian society the chief was the custodian of the land. Land was a communal possession and all inhabitants and strangers could be allocated a portion thereof, without sale agreements. The concept of personal ownership of land was foreign to Africans. The idea that land can belong to one person for ever was unthinkable and this seems irreconcilable with the European capitalist idea of private and personal land ownership.

The idea of justice, as conceptualized by Europeans, was also foreign to Africans. Africans by and large practiced distributive justice, whereas Europeans practiced retributive justice. The major difference between these two systems of justice is that the latter is punitive and the former is corrective. In the African setting the guilty party gets part of the goat or sheep (one rear leg usually) meant for punishment back, from the judgement or verdict against him/her. Ironically, when the verdict is passed, the chief, who is the main distributor of justice, would say to the guilty "Go and commit another offence so that we may receive something from you." Misunderstood, the previous statement may give a wrong interpretation to the outsider who does not know the inner working of African distributive justice to mean that it encourages the wrong doer to continue doing wrong.

Another form of justice meted out among African communities by and large is restorative justice. This is the form of justice that embraces the wrong doer and restores the person back into society. The wrong doer is internally and socially healed by being invited back to the social activities and restored to the social status and rights all other citizens enjoy. This is done also by announcing a word of forgiveness and reconciliation from the one who was wronged. So, on the part of the chief and the entire community and on the part of the one who was wronged the air is cleared and as such the wrong doer is restored.

The opposite is actually true. Kritzinger (1990: 5) continues to say:

To break the power of 'our country'- idol is therefore also a theological struggle, in which the 'providence' of God will have to be conceived of in a new way. It is simply impossible to equate the will of God with whatever happens in history, that is, with the achievements of the powerful. If the dispossession and oppression of the black majority in South Africa is the 'will of God', then that 'God' is an idol (Kritzinger 1990: 5).

Concerning the new philosophy of land ownership, providence and justice that Kritzinger (1990: 5 - 6) wishes done, in order to heal the ills of South Africa, this should be done together with all Africans and not only with African Christians. African people's theological or religious orientation does not exclude anyone. African religion does not divide people into Christian and African Traditionalist camps. African religion does not distinguish between people and does not suggest that a certain group of people, called theologians, are the only ones qualified to speak religiously or theologically. An inclusive approach would be more attractive and acceptable to Africans.

Nevertheless, the missionaries continued to teach about the Christian God who encouraged the whites to dispossess African people of their land. In other words, the missionary Christian God power and privileges was about converting the African people to be European whilst not absorbing the African people into white society, unless it was for the purpose of service to the whites as servants and wage laborers.

Another purpose of African domestication was perpetuated by African Christian teachers who were trained in mission schools. These teachers parroted missionary theology and were not critical about the plight of the would-be Christian believers and Africans in general. The African Christian teachers were concerned only about themselves as an emerging African Christian elite. They continued to indoctrinate their own people. The same

was done by the African missionaries' assistant preachers and, later, by the African policemen working alongside the Dutch (Boer) policemen.

The irony of the South African situation is that exactly because capitalism permits us to enter the city, to pass through the sacred portals of a white church and set foot in the even more sacred sanctuary of madame's bedroom, but only as workers, capitalism thereby indicates to us daily that it is in fact our labor that makes the city live, that gives voice to the *predikant*, the preacher, and provides the necessary conditions for procreation (Mbeki 1978: 21)

While the African 'passed through the sacred portals of a white church', the African heard no condemnation of the belief in the idol Christian God of land, white power and privileges. The preachers affirmed this 'God', who was presented in the interests of conquest, civilization and Christianization.

It was vividly clear that the white missionary Christian God was a 'God' of bloodshed and deceit, of treaties and intrigues; a God of war and materialism; of capitalism and conquest. Unfortunately, the white Christians exchanged the worship of this God for the worship of the African lands themselves - meaning that whites then idolized/ worshiped land that belonged to Africans (Majeke 1952: 65; Setiloane 1976, 1986; Chidester 1996).

The problem with this materialistic white Christian God of land, power and privileges was the notion of blotting out the savages and taming the remnant to serve the whites on the land. The indigenous people were subjugated into docile Christian yeomanry, trained by the restraining efforts of God's ploughmen and by the civilizing effects of agrarian toil (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 242). This brings us to another image of the Christian God.

3.6.2. The Worship of Mammon - Wealth

One characteristic of the image of the Christian God is an image of the God of wealth, exploitation, competition and capitalism. The way the whites accumulated wealth for themselves at the expense of African people, and the way they brought African people into this competitive, Christian capitalist, colonial economic system demonstrated the kind of God they served. The missionaries played a major role in the transformation of African societies from the agrarian rural to the capitalist urban society. The role the missionaries played was in favor of white people. The African people participated as objects of labor exploitation, in this new urban setting (Bosch 1983: 31) .

It was the initial need for cheap labor, for an exceptionally numerous labor force at an exceptionally cheap price, that made South Africa different. Without this need most of the indigenous people might have been eliminated, like the native Americans, or pushed into separate colonies outside the 'golden areas'. What actually happened was that millions of black people were forced into a kind of slave labor to dig the deepest holes and the largest network of tunnels on this planet. Pharaoh's little effort at putting up huge buildings and pyramids with forced labor was as nothing in comparison with this (Nolan 1988: 72).

The African people were forced into slave labor in the mining industry where they had to dig out gold, discovered in 1886. These African people came from the conquered groups who had no land but who had to survive through earning wages. Part of the wages was used to pay the taxes imposed on them. The very introduction of taxes was meant to encourage African people to look for money in white capitalist emerging mining cities.

Put quite simply, the purpose of all colonialism is money. In the olden days the colonizers exacted a tribute or tax, in kind or in cash, from the colonized. European colonialism, however, was a way of acquiring more land, new markets, raw materials or cheap labor -

depending upon which of these were available in the colonies. These were the commodities that were needed by the economy of Europe, by its particular way of producing or manufacturing goods (the capitalist mode of production). The European economy and its successful way of producing goods were based upon the arrangement that some people would own the land, the factories, the mines and machinery, while others would work for wages (Nolan 1988: 73 addition mine).

The South African experience of the Christian God, who was preached by these missionary-capitalists in mining compounds, and their following generations of white capitalists preachers, was as the God of wealth, greed, exploitation and economic oppression. This happened after the missionary military forces had subjugated the African people and succeeded in changing their tributary mode of production and distribution into the capitalist mode of production and accumulation. With the discovery of gold, the greed for wealth was unsatiated.

According to Kritzinger (1990: 6), on the subject of the worship of money, one more idol, a 'false god' identified by Black theologians, worshiped by white Christian capitalists was Mammon, the worship of money, wealth, property, privilege, power and prosperity. 'To this money-idol many human lives have been sacrificed' (Nolan 1988: 72; Kritzinger 1990: 6).

The whites sacrificed their lives for the wealth they found, accumulated and worshiped (Nolan 1988; Kritzinger 1990). According to Mbeki (1978: 18), it was the ultimate aim of British imperialism and policy to have a self-governing white community in southern Africa which would be supported by African people. African human labor, natural and spiritual resources were exploited for the benefit of whites only.

From the African people, as they were economically colonized, the Christian God of money demanded total obedience, absolute subservience and full co-operation with what was happening to them. The economic exploitation of

African people was portrayed as the will of the Christian God and was being fulfilled according to divine providence according to Christian missionary teaching. This Christian God was said to be moral, all-knowing, all-powerful, and to have supreme authority, and this was expressed in the apparent supremacy of whites over African people (Ntwasa and More 1973: 20).

In the perception of Africa people, as expressed by Chidester, "...the mission was not 'religion': rather, the mission represented the arbitrary exercise of political power, exploitation of labor, and extraction of wealth" (1996: 34).

Translating the advantages of black worker disenfranchisement into cash, the Chamber of mines stated in its 1910 Annual Report that it 'viewed the native purely as a machine, requiring a certain amount of fuel'. It decreed accordingly that the diet of the African miners living in mine compounds should be determined in terms of the formula 'the minimum amount of food which will give them the maximum amount of work' (Mbeki 1978: 16).

At that time the English-speaking white churches, products of the missionary-colonizers, were far away from the plight African lack labor - poor makers of wealth (Cochrane 1987: 2ff). In other words, the white English-speaking churches chose to be complacent about the plight of African people and their economic and political future. It was, therefore, during the conquest of the African people that the missionary-colonizers were to find full scope for their activities (Majeke 1952: 17) which tempted the whites to worship Mammon. As it were, the role of missionaries was to reconcile the 'savages' to the colonial Christian capitalist society, to create artificial wants, as well as industry, trade, agriculture and to incorporate the African people into the capitalist mode of production (Majeke 1952: 18).

It seems to many that throughout history God has all too often appeared in the garb of the rich and the privileged, standing on the side of the authorities and without protest abiding by all untruths, the

half truths, and the equivocating myths. In South Africa, God is white ... (Boesak 1979: 33).

3.6.3. The Worship of Race, Culture and Language

Yet another image of the Christian God identified by Black theologians is racism - the worship of race (Kritzinger 1990: 3).

It is important, however, to understand what they (Black theologians) mean by it. To them racism is much more than mere racial prejudice, which functions at the level of attitudes and feelings, and is therefore responsive to moral appeals. White racism is seen by black theologians as a system of oppression, a power structure which causes exploitation and oppression of black people. For this reason they link it to colonialism, in order to indicate that they are concerned with institutional racism and not merely with racial prejudice (Kritzinger 1990: 3, addition mine).

Whites are, first, white as a race - a population group before they are humans. In other words whites are human as a secondary characteristic. Otherwise they can live as beings which are white and void of humanity for it is only in this attitude that they can dehumanize African people (*batho* 'humans') and treat them like objects, as indeed whites did in southern Africa and in South Africa in particular. Otherwise, human conscience will always prevent humans from doing inhuman things. But, in southern Africa, we have seen what Mbeki (1998: 33) relates. He says:

I have seen what happens when one person has superiority of force over another, when the stronger appropriate to themselves the prerogative even to annul the injunction that God created all men and women in His image. I know what it signifies when race and color are used to determine who is human and subhuman. I have seen the destruction of all self-esteem, the consequent striving to be what one is not, simply to acquire some of the benefits which those who had

imposed themselves as masters had ensured that they enjoy. I have experience of a situation in which race and color is used to enrich some and impoverish the rest. I have seen the corruption of minds and souls as a result of the pursuit of an ignoble effort to perpetrate a veritable crime against humanity. I have seen concrete expression of the denial of the dignity of a human being emanating from the conscious, system and systematic oppression and repressive activities of other human beings. There the victims parade with no mask to hide the brutish reality - the beggars, the prostitutes, the street children, those who seek solace in substance abuse, those who have to steal to assuage hunger, those who have to lose their sanity because to be sane is to invite pain. Perhaps the worst among these who are my people are those who have learnt to kill for a wage. To these the extent of death is directly proportional to their personal welfare (Mbeki 1998: 33).

This is what happens when 'God' is conceptualized in terms of race, color, culture and creed. Once race, color and creed come first, before humanness. One sees no humanness in a person of another skin color, or another race, culture or religion. In other words, bigotry reigns supreme and a person becomes so blind to racism as a god - a god of an alleged 'supreme culture, language, religion'. But what is an enigma is that these gods and idols (of race, color and creed) are worshiped in the name of the 'living Christian God'.

Thus, as Mbeki (1998: 38) reiterates, it is illegitimate to name people and define them by their race, religion, language or culture. Allegiance to a particular religion, speaking a certain language or being born into a particular population group do not make anyone a superior being. These references to race, religion, language and culture are just impositions by missionary-colonizers we have seen in southern Africa which have left us with what Mbeki (1998: 34) described in the quotation above. Regarding racial worth, the following is what the white Christian missionary-colonizers in southern Africa thought about Africans because of their race, color, culture and creed: "Religious language proclaims: You are of infinite value to God .

Life proclaims: I hope you will be satisfied with the value God places on you, because in our eyes you (the African) have none” (Ntwasa and More 1973: 26, addition mine).

The African people’s experience in South Africa was that they were worth nothing before the Christian God. This was the experience of African people in church, government and society. It did not mean much that all humans are equal and are made in the image of the same Christian God. In South Africa, the ones who had human value were whites. African people had none to speak of. This had far-reaching implications for Black people as *modumedi* (lit. One who agrees; a Christian; a believer).

Here was one area where there was a clash. African Christians were expected to worship the Christian God. White Christians worshiped the God of race, language and culture. In almost all spheres of life whites assumed an advantage over the indigenous people. The European religion (Christianity) culture, language, interests, politics and economics were promoted through the use and abuse of Africans. Africans were not allowed access to resources to strengthen their language, culture or religion.

3.7. Conclusion

The social and theoretical mind-set of the missionaries were influenced both by the theories held concerning people in ‘strange lands’ and by colonial needs. Colonialism was a program which was in search of the land, labor, trade and goods demanded by the growing Western Industrial Revolution.

According to the theory of one religion, it was instilled in the minds of the missionaries that other religions were a corruption of the true religion, which was revealed in Christianity. The notion that people in ‘strange lands’ had no religion was also misleading. In many cases the missionaries were appalled by ‘so much’ religion among the people they had to evangelize. The branding of other religions as pagan, euhemerism, heathen, diabolical and so on, without

having studied the inner workings of those religions within their own cultures, was condescending or patronizing upon other people. The view that other people were inferior to whites puffed the missionaries up and further blinded them concerning the African people in particular.

Among the positive things the missionaries did, the foremost was the education of African people up to tertiary level. The intention of the missionaries was to produce African leaders who would govern their people and lead them from colonial rule to self-governing political autonomy. Indeed, some, if not most, of the first African nationalist and revolutionary leaders were products of mission schools and theological institutions.

The missionaries were also determined to teach the Africans how to make the transition from subsistence economy to a capitalist economy. The 'Word of the Christian God' was central to all that the missionaries wanted to achieve. Issues of African labor, land and trade were discussed. The missionaries introduced new ways of managing resources, new ways of organizing labor and new ideas on how land should be used so as to maximize agricultural production.

Theologically, the missionaries operated under the sincere conviction that they were fulfilling the mission of the Christian God. The notion of divine providence, civilization and evangelization encouraged them to do this work as efficiently as possible under the guidance of 'God'. In the process Christian mission was seen as a form of moral disarmament, in terms of transforming African customs, traditions and culture.

It turned out that African people were very vulnerable. On the negative side we have seen that African people did not experience mission as something to do with religion and 'God'. Mission was viewed as an instrument of colonization and subjugation. The message of the Christian God was understood to be condemnatory and judgmental towards African religion, culture, customs and thought.

Mission was experienced as the religious partner of the political oppression, economic exploitation, cultural coercion and land dispossession of African people. The introduction of 'white' magistrates, some of them missionaries themselves, was seen as an instrument of the legal displacement of the African law and justice systems. African chiefs were targeted as enemies of mission, progress and prosperity, in that most of them, like Sekhukhuni, became suspicious of missionaries like Merensky of the BMS. African chiefs began to oppose missionary work and, at times, debarred their subjects from participating in and accepting the Christian religion.

In the end the images of the Christian God turned out to be those of a deity who is an idol. The missionaries, and the associated 'white' churches, were seen as worshipers of land, power and privileges. Another image of this Christian God was that of Mammon, of the love and worship of wealth. A final image was that of the worship of race, culture and language.

CHAPTER 4

4. STRUCTURE AND ETHICAL ELEMENTS OF SOTHO TRADITIONAL RELIGION (STR): DE-HELLENIZATION OF SOTHO COSMOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the structure and the ethical elements of STR within which the concepts of *MODIMO* were traditionally conceptualized. This structural presentation is meant to assist us to understand more comprehensively the concepts of *MODIMO* in STR. Further, this chapter presents the world, the reality and the ethical contexts in which the concepts of *MODIMO* have been formed.

Sub-themes such as the notion of the origins of the earth and the celestial vault are tackled. Since *MODIMO* is panentheistic (Setiloane 1996), IT is also known as a source of all things we see around us, some of which will be discussed in detail. We shall also look at ethics in STR, seeing that the Sotho traditional society was very ethical (Hlokoa 1996: 16th November Interview). Besides constructing this chapter from literary sources, most of the information in this section will come from fieldwork research.

The structure of the STR has been discussed by Tema (1985), Hammond-Tooke (ed.) (1974), Setiloane (1976, 1986), Mönning (1967), Willoughby (1923), Callaway (1868) and Davies (1983). Other writers, theologians and anthropologists will be considered in the construction of this chapter.

The reason for and the significance of this chapter are that 'concepts' are not conceived in a vacuum. Concepts do not drop from nowhere but emerge among the people within their living situation (Sefoka 1996: 23rd December 1996).

4.2. The Cosmological Context of Sotho Traditional Religion (STR)

4.2.1. Origins: Creation

In STR, myths of the origins tell that *MODIMO* brought forth humans in communities, together with their livestock. The STR myths of the origins do not speak about the origins of celestial bodies (Nchabeleng 1998: November 16th Interview). The STR stories of the origins concern themselves with the origin of humans. It is told by Hammond-Tooke (cf. Tsekelo 1995: 14 - 15) that:

The *Tswana* speak of a hole or holes in a rock at *Lowe*, near *Mochudi*, from which the tribal ancestors are said to have emerged and pointed to the footprints in the rock as proof. The *Lobedu* (one dialect of the *Pedi* group) also believe that *Khuzwane* (*Lobedu* name for *MODIMO*) left his footprints on certain rocks when they were soft, and this association of the name *Khuzwane* with footprints is also found as a subsidiary belief among the *Venda* (a South African ethnic group settled at the far north of the Northern Province (Limpopo Province) along the border of Zimbabwe. This group has tenets of the *Pedi* and *Shona* culture) (1974: 320, additions mine).

This STR 'creation' story related by the *Tswana*, of people emerging from the hole is not about the creation of the earth nor the cosmos. The *Tswana* speak about the beginning of the tribe. The tribe is traced from *Badimo*. The location of the myth is on earth - the hole is on earth. The myth does not speak about the origin of the earth. The earth is there already. Other myths do not speak about the origin of the earth either nor the origin of the cosmos, but of humans.

For example, there is a myth of people emerging out of the bed of reeds from the river (Kgwale 1997: November 24th, Interview). The myth does not claim that *MODIMO* made the reeds and the river. We can only assume that the tribal people were caused or brought forth by *MODIMO* to emerge from the hole or the

reeds in this instance. But, to be consistent with our observation, it is believed among the *Sotho* that *MODIMO* is axiomatically behind anything that happens, even the emergence of the tribe just happens and all is believed to be caused by *MODIMO*.

The earth and all the ancient tribal people have always been there (Ngoetjana, Michael 1998: 18th December, Interview). Important to note is that the *Sotho* could not imagine a time when things (the earth and heavens / celestial vault) were not there. The Ancestors found creation as it is, and it had not been otherwise in the past (Setiloane 1976: 8).

In all cases, men, accompanied by their animals, were led out of the earth by a one-sided agent of *MODIMO* called *Lôôwe* by the *Batswana* and *Tintibane* or *Thobega* by the *Basotho* (Setiloane 1976: 34).

More specifically, the origin of *Basotho* is from a hill between Frankfort and Vrede in the Free State Province: a place called *Ntsuanatsatsi* - meaning 'where the sun rises or from the Sunny Hillock in the East'. The *Sotho* came out of the bowels of the earth through a hole or a cave at this mentioned place (Setiloane 1976: 33). About these origins of the *Sotho-Tswana* Magubane (1998: 103) says:

According to *Basotho* legend, people first evolved from a marsh at a mythical place called *Ntsuanatsatsi*. They left the marsh in groups that became clans (*liboko*), each of which was allocated an animal as god-protector (Magubane 1998: 103).

The 'god-protector' that Magubane (1998: 103) is referring to is a totem animal. This is an animal the clan would associate with as it's own emblem. The clan poem would be appreciative of the totem. They would ululate the praise names of the wonders, and the nature of the said animal. The clans respected their totems and would not kill them for no apparent reason. They feared that the Ancestors would be angry with them should they do so.

Magubane (1998) and Setiloane (1996) give the same story of origins from *Ntswanatsatsi/Ntsuanatsatsi*, with slight differences. The mention of the marshes gives us an idea that the *Sotho-Tswana* also emerged from the reeds, which tallies with the *Nguni* myth of creation. This gives the impression that the *Nguni* and the *Sotho* had the same creation story, though in different locations, and that the two groups had dealings with each other for a long time (Motala 1998: 12th December, Interview).

To mention a few examples from Motala (1998: 12th December, Interview): the *Sotho* clan of *Masemola* is *Masimini* in *Nguni*; *Ntshabeleng* is *Shabalala*; *Nkwane* is *Zwane*; *Kgapola* is *Nkambule*; *Matlala* is *Madlala*; and the *Sotho* word for a human is *Motho* and *Umuntu* in *Nguni*; *Thaba / Intaba* [Mountain]; *Taba / Indaba* [an issue / story / news]; *Metsi / Amanzi* [water], and so on respectively. These few examples of similarities of clan names, Motala (1998: 12th December, Interview) says, are proof that the *Sotho* and the *Nguni* originate from the same source.

Going back to the footprints pointed to, the beginnings of the African people are said to be proof of earlier human existence made possible by *MODIMO* or *Umvelinqcange* [one who appeared first in *Nguni* language]. There are hooves of animals and goats in such places. Thus it is claimed that human communities came out together with their flocks. It might be likely that the humans and their livestock lived in these areas, which were covered with volcanic magma. People could make footprints in this when the magma was cool enough to allow them to walk on it, if you were to look at it from the geographical perspective.

Their sheep and goats could also have been allowed to pass through the cool magma. This is geographically possible and imaginable. Despite this, it is found that one footprint points backwards towards the hole, meaning that *MODIMO* has since gone back into the hole, although *MODIMO* is not conceptualized as a human amongst all the *Basotho* peoples and in the cultures mentioned by Hammond-Tooke (1974: 320). Proof that the footprints are those of *MODIMO*

is questionable. The best conclusion is that the footprint that points back towards the hole is that of *Lôôwe* who, Setiloane says, was the agent of *MODIMO* (1976: 34).

I have personally seen another single big footprint, 30cm long and 12cm wide, on a rock at a place called *Marishane*, Nebo district, a village next to *Gaphaahla* on a hillock called *Thabaneng*. On investigation, I was told that the rock was taken by Rev. *Tshudubana Sebesho*. He stays at the foot of the said hillock. "This person is a retired teacher and minister of religion as well" (Sefoka 1997: 19th December, Interview).

I have also seen one person who has a shoe size that big. It is imaginable that there were people who had such big feet in those communities of old. The size of the footprint must not be taken too literally as sufficient evidence that it is the foot of *MODIMO* or *Lôôwe*, but rather that it is a human footprint. The point to be made is that, according to Setiloane (1976: 6), the *Tswana* believe that *MODIMO* lived in that hole. This creation story gives the impression that *MODIMO* is conceptualized as a big person, but it must not be relied on too heavily as proof that *MODIMO* is like a human. There is no evidence that the *Basotho* conceptualized *MODIMO* as a human being.

Mönnig (1967) proposes an idea, which is disputed in this thesis, that the root '*dimo*' is found in the word *legodimo* (sky) and *ledimo*, which means a whirlwind, a hurricane, a storm or a giant. This gives the impression that Africans conceptualized *MODIMO* as a great person who had a thunderous and a fearful character. If we follow Mönnig's speculation to its logical conclusion we must conclude that the *Sotho* conceptualized *MODIMO* as a huge human being. But that may not be necessarily the case. The case is:

MODIMO is '*Mothlodi*'; the source, originating in unrecorded time, of the stream of life which flows into the indeterminate future and is ever

returning to its source ... *MODIMO* as 'Mothlodi', is everywhere, involved in everything (Setiloane 1976: 81 , 82)

4.2.1.1. The Characteristics of STR Cosmology in Relation to 'Origins'

The problem we are facing, and which must be appreciated in a monistic cosmology, is that the concepts of *MODIMO* are coherently interrelated with the search for the ideas of the 'origins' in STR. Unintentionally, the concepts of *MODIMO* begin to emerge even before we want to expose them deliberately in their own section or category. *MODIMO* permeates all things (Setiloane 1976).

MODIMO is also conceptualized as both threatening and helpful. In a thunderstorm the lightning is threatening, but at the same time the torrential rain brings blessings. Therefore, *MODIMO* is good in the sense that both threat and blessing dwell in *MODIMO*. Thus *MODIMO* is neither a fearful THING nor an approachable THING. But, *MODIMO* is both revered and approachable. Setiloane rightly argues that 'opposites' dwell in IT, are fused in IT, and are reconciled in IT (1976: 21 - 29). In relation to the 'origins' *MODIMO* permeates all things.

If *MODIMO* ever existed as a physical, gigantic person and was known as *MODIMO* by the forefathers, why was so little told about its personality? It is because, in essence, the character of *MODIMO* is constructed from the manifestations of natural phenomena much more than from the anthropological analogies of a gigantic human who lived in a hole. Hammond - Tooke (1974: 320 - 321), Setiloane (1976: 21 - 29) and Mönnig (1967: 46 - 47) agree that *MODIMO* was seen to be manifested as lightning and as a thunderbolt.

Among the *Pedi*, *Modimo* is very closely associated with the elements of nature, wind, rain, hail and lightning. In fact there is more than association. To a large extent these elements are personified by *Modimo* (Mönnig 1967: 46 - 47).

This emphasizes the fact that *MODIMO* was conceptualized as manifested in natural phenomena rather than observed as a gigantic human. The impression of the gigantic human must be regarded as purely mythological and analogical. The myth was about the origin of humans. It had nothing to do with the observation and the revelation of the person of *MODIMO*, nor the conceptualization of *MODIMO*, nor even the idea that *MODIMO* created the earth at all.

4.2.1.2. Reference to the Underground as Part of Creation

According to Tema (1985) the STR cosmology concerning the 'origins' includes *legodimo* [firmament, celestial vault] and *lefase* [earth]. Reference will be made later to the underworld as part of the STR cosmology and as the abode of *Badimo*, but I suspect that this idea has a Christian cosmological influence (II Pet. 2: 4). The interviewees in the field did not refer to any specific place or location underground as the sole abode of *Badimo* (*GaPhaahla* Teachers Research Team 1996: 18 - 19th June and 1999: 23 - 25th June, Group Discussions; and *Madupe* Herbalists and Traditional Healers Association 1996: 14th - 16th December and 1999: 17th to 20th December, Group Discussions).

Interviewees talked about *Bodulabahu* [the abode of the dead] or *Boyabatho* [where people go] (Rajuili 1998: 3rd August, Interview), which they do not see as being only the cemetery, the homestead, or any other single place. They always agree that it is located somewhere in an unknown location, though there are several geographical locations referred to as places of *Badimo*, like the mountain called *Modimolle* near Naboomspruit in the Northern Province (Limpopo Province), South Africa. Stories about these places will be related in their proper place in the following chapter of this thesis.

4.2.1.3. STR Creation and Divinities

The STR cosmology does not have divinities, demigods, spirits and demons. What it consists of is *MODIMO* and *Badimo*. That *Badimo* are 'ancestral spirits'

was a description imposed by missionary-colonizers, rather than being a traditional STR description of them (Sefoka 1998: 20th December, Interview). *Badimo* are not spirits at all. They are departed parents. When these parents appear they come in dreams, in the form of humans. They are seen in their own bodily form. In most cases they come during sleep in dreams, or in visions during the day (Motala 1998: 22nd December, Interview).

There are no false gods in STR cosmology (Makgai 1998: 23rd December, Interview). The notion of false gods was introduced by Christian missionary teachings. Nor is there anything like a true 'God' in STR. The question of whether gods can be 'true' or 'false' is a foreign debate. *MODIMO* has no rivals and has no equals. *MODIMO* is not in competition with anyone. There is no doctrinal teaching or emphasis that *MODIMO* is one, and only one (Dt. 6: 1 - 6), as if *MODIMO* has anything to protect or to preserve about ITSELF. There is no heresy, no false doctrine or false religion in STR thinking. STR itself is not a 'false' religion, in that it is a religion in its own right (Makgai 1988: 23rd December, Interview).

4.2.1.4. About Believers and Unbelievers

There are no believers and unbelievers in STR. All *Basotho* born in the culture of *Basotho* belong to STR. There are other *Basotho* who are of the opinion that their parents never practiced or ever encouraged them to follow traditional ways of invoking *MODIMO* and *Badimo* (Letsoalo 1997: 17th July, Interview). It therefore makes sense when Bediako (1995: 212) records that the traditional religions have converts and founders. The founders are the Ancestors and the converts are those who did not believe in Ancestors before but who later came to embrace the religion of Ancestors.

Though Bediako (1995:215ff) has not mentioned it, there are many backsliders from Ancestor religion. Among them are those who turned their backs on it for economic reasons or for spiritual fulfilment. They joined other religions such as

Christianity. In STR it is unthinkable for people to ask where *MODIMO* is, or for people to declare that they don't believe that *MODIMO* exists. It is assumed that there is no question about the existence of *MODIMO* (Ngoetjana, D. 1996: 14th December, Interview). The adherents of STR never ask the question: Does *MODIMO* exist? Nor do they declare that *MODIMO* is dead.

There is no Satan - an enemy of 'believers' - in STR (Mafokoane 1996: 18th July; Ngoetjana, D. 1996: 14th December; Sefoka 1997: 18th December, Interviews). There is no equivalent of Satan in STR. There is no notion of sin in STR, but a sense of wrong and right, good and bad, humble and proud, not sinfulness and righteousness (Masoga 1996: 27th June, Interview). People are not separated from *MODIMO* by what the Christians call sin in the human heart. Evil is not located in the human heart in STR. Evil is located within interpersonal relations and among members of the family and the community at large (Motala 1996: 19th December, Interview).

4.2.1.5. Creation of the Spirit World

There is no spirit world in STR. There is only one world - *lefase*, and that's all. *Legodimo* [celestial vault] is not a separate natural phenomenon from *lefase* [earth] (Tema 1995). The STR cosmology is monistic. Everything is related and integrated in this holistic world-view. Traditional religions are a unified cosmic system (Bediako 1995: 212). Thus the Ancestors should not be studied in isolation, to avoid possible distortion of the whole monistic system (Bediako 1995: 212). To remove one element of the system would result in breaking the harmony of the whole (Bediako 1995: 212).

Comaroff and Comaroff (1991: 213) also witness the fact that the *Tswana* world-view was pragmatic and non-dualistic. In their encounter with missionaries it became difficult for the missionaries, to the extent that the missionaries went so far as to introduce special rain services into the regular cycle of church activities, albeit with great reluctance. But they had to do so in order to effect and to

implement a divide-and- rule policy on the *Tswana* people. The African Christian converts were distracted from attending the traditional rainmaking ceremonies and the harvest ceremonies, because the Christian church would have planned an alternative service at the same time and officially debarred them from attending the traditional ceremonies. Otherwise they would be evicted from the mission station.

Further explanation given to the concept of monistic cosmology is that the past, the present and the future are coherent and inseparable. Yesterday, today and tomorrow are one continuum of life. Time and space are one experience of one reality. What happens in time happens in the same space (Nchabeleng 1998: 19th December, Interview).

4.2.1.6. An Anthropocentric Worldview

Human beings are the centre of the STR world-view. It is an anthropocentric cosmology (Kamalu 1990: 14). Humans are dynamically engaged in the world. Humans are completely absorbed and embedded within the world. Humans and nature are one and are in harmony (Bediako 1995: 212). Nature cares for humans and humans mutually care for it (Setiloane 1976). Humans do not see themselves as meant to dominate and exploit the earth and deplete the environment. Humans see themselves as part of the environment and as beneficiaries out of the environment and the environment also benefitting from human caring, protection, preservation and conservation. *MODIMO* is intrinsically one with this monistic experience and human survival depends on the maintenance of an equilibrium or harmony in relationship with other life-forms (Kamalu 1990: 14).

Kamalu continues to state that, in this African cosmology, 'God' is both within and without creation; that the all-pervading Deity is the energy or life-force inherent in everything. In this world-view, 'animism' and polytheism are dispelled and panentheism is accepted because in it 'God' permeates everything (Kamalu 1990: 14). There is community between the living and *Badimo*. The

living do not necessarily look forward to being with *Badimo*, as the Christians look forward to being in Heaven with the Christian God, but the living acknowledge that once they die they will join the *Badimo* of their own family. There is a certainty in STR that, potentially, all will reach the destination of the abode of *Badimo*. To be in the abode of *Badimo* is not an achievement, it is a consequence of life (Motala 1996: 15th December, Interview). In the words of Setiloane (1996: 20):

In *Sotho-Tswana* experience, society consists not only of men, women and children organized in hierarchical groupings. It consists of *badimo*, the living dead, whose intimate involvement in the details of daily life is taken as much for granted as that of an all-pervasive central government in a contemporary welfare state (Setiloane 1976: 20).

4.2.1.7. Resurrection and Salvation

Furthermore, in STR there is no hope of a resurrection, in the sense of coming to life again in a spirit body - a glorified body, as the Christian God has promised. Life does not reverse in the STR cosmology. Life continues. The experience of resurrection would be an unfortunate reversal. Death itself is feared in this cosmology. People want to live forever on earth. There is more meaning and relevance in living on earth than in being dead. But, on the other hand, once people die it is believed they go to be with *Badimo* of their own families, and should be content there (Sefoka 1997: 18th December, Interview).

If salvation, as understood in the Christian faith, has to be conceptualized in the STR world-view, the whole of creation has to be redeemed, all at once, because there is only one monistic world in which people and all other creatures co-exist inseparably. Not a single person would be lost and condemned to eternal damnation. The spine-chilling condemnatory doctrines of the missionaries' Christian God did not make sense to the *Sotho* (Letswara 1998: 27th August, Interview). The *Badimo* deal with a person while he or she is alive, and this

dealing has no eternal consequences, but is corrective. *Badimo* correct people's ills while they are alive on earth. In STR none of the human shortcomings lead to eternal perdition [= loss, ruin, hell] (Sefoka 1997: 18th December, Interview).

In this cosmology nature is made to serve humans and humans are responsible for preserving nature, as said earlier. But this time, in comparing between nature and people, people are more important. Human life has more value, although this does not necessarily mean devaluing nature. Instead, nature, the trees, the herbs, the flowers and all vegetation and rocks which are medicinal and are good for health and well-being, are made and meant for humans (Mafokoane 1996: 28th December, Interview). The whole of creation is saturated with *MODIMO*. There is no concept that some or other dimension of reality is devoid of *MODIMO*.

4.2.1.8. Sketches of African Cosmologies

Parrinder (1974) sketches an African Traditional Religions' cosmology which can be conceptualized in the form of a triangle. The two angles at the base of the triangle represent Ancestors and Nature Spirits. The angle at the top represents God. The center of the triangle represents Humans and, Parrinder says, just below humans reside magical powers.

I do not agree with Parrinder (1974). What he described above is not the case in the cosmology of West African people, who have a hierarchy of powers. The topmost position would be occupied by the Great Spirit (God), followed by divinities, nature spirits, Ancestors and humans, in that order (Idowu 1973: 140ff). The *Bapedi* cosmology consists of the celestial vault and the earth (Tema 1985). The hierarchy of *Bapedi* is in society, and not in the abode of the dead. I also agree with Makalu that, generally speaking, African cosmologies are not conceptualized as composed of dead matter. The earth and the experienced reality are alive. "For the African, matter is a living entity, endowed with vital force; whereas the Western view is that of matter being inert or dead" (Makalu 1990:45).

Oosthuizen (1991: 38) says the metaphysical world of Africans is a reality which constitutes the world of spirits, demigods, and gods. It is simply not like that. He is reading into the *Sotho* cosmos too many foreign concepts and categories. STR does not have such celestial and metaphysical beings as he mentions, except for *MODIMO* and *Badimo*. Besides that, on the positive side, the monism and holism that Oosthuizen expresses is typical of Traditional African communities, especially the *Sotho*. He says:

... the law of participation prevails - everything is part of every thing else, the group precedes the individual. The group again cannot exist by itself but exists in conjunction with the supernatural (Oosthuizen 1991: 39).

Oosthuizen (1991: 239ff) continues to say that the classical southern Africa religion embraces everything and is directed to the essence of things. But, I think, there is too much distinction made between Africa and Europe, not only by Oosthuizen (1999: 239ff). The distinction is about Africa having a non-rational cosmology and Europe a rational cosmology. I think it would suffice to say that agrarian, religiously inclined communities tend to see things holistically, while industrialized communities tend to see things in compartments.

Besides that, there is nothing particularly African in non-rational ways of thought and nothing particularly European in rational ways of thought. This is a matter of the economic and scientific situation within which humans conceptualize, form habits, create religious thoughts, make culture, develop assumptions and survive. Otherwise, all humans are prone to be non-rational at certain times and rational at other times.

In support of this argument Kamalu (1991: 23, 24) says the African world-view is thoughtful, reflective, abstract and inventive. He says the Greek and the European civilizations have borrowed from the African civilizations not only material goods and slaves from Africa but also abstract ideas of the spiritual and

the material, invisible and visible, individual and universal dimensions of the same experienced reality not in the dualistic forms which they created by dissecting the cosmology, but in the monistic forms which they distorted.

4.2.2. Heaven and Earth

Heaven (*Legodimo/ Leratadima*) in STR is the celestial vault. This heaven is not the abode of *MODIMO*. Though *legodimo* is one manifestation of the essence of *MODIMO*, among others. *MODIMO* in STR is not confined to one abode, identified or located in the sky (*legodimo*). Here again, once we touch on one aspect of the holistic world-view of *Basotho* or *Bapedi*, in relation to creation or the 'origins', other images of *MODIMO*, who is the source of all these things, appear unbidden. By this I mean that, even when we have not yet come to explain who, in essence, the *Sotho* believe *MODIMO* is, IT appears in all that has to do with IT. Tema (1985: 24) says: "The *Pedi* cosmos consists of the concrete material world (*Iefase*) and the firmament, the celestial vault (*legodimo*)".

Legodimo is the celestial vault - the firmament. *Legodimo* is the sky, not the place described in Rev. 21: 1 - 22: 5, where the Christian God dwells. Heaven exists in the Christian cosmology and not in the STR cosmology. In other words there is no Heaven as an abode of *MODIMO* in STR cosmology. There is no Heaven as a spiritual, geographical or theological place for *MODIMO* of STR (Hlokoa 1998: 20th November, Interview).

Thus *MODIMO* does not have a heavenly abode. *MODIMO* cannot be confined in one place. This does not mean that God, as conceptualized by Christians, can be confined to one place either. But Christian teaching gives the mental impression that believers will one day go to Heaven and there see the Christian God, like other non-omnipresent creatures of the Christian God which dwell there - e.g. angelic heavenly beings. The Christian doctrines teach that God is present everywhere. As far as the abode of *MODIMO* is concerned; firstly, in STR it is proclaimed that no one knows *MODIMO*, nor where *MODIMO* lives

(Mafokoane 1998: 28th December, Interview). Secondly, *MODIMO* is neutral - meaning, there is no specific location for *MODIMO*. Saying that the STR *MODIMO* is everywhere is not the same as saying that the Christian God is omnipresent. What it means is that *MODIMO* saturates all things.

The Christian concept of the omnipresence of God has the element of preponderance [= to exceed in quantity/ number] an overarching domination and an occupation of space - a presence. In STR *MODIMO* is just there but not prevailing over IT's subjects. It is actually the *Badimo* who, most of the time, exercise and put up a show of power and preponderance, as shall be shown in the next chapter. *Badimo* have a dominant role in the family and are felt and known as present within the family (Sefoka 1998: 23rd December, Interview). Tema continues to say:

The two (*lefase le legodimo* [earth and heaven]) are caused by God to be and constitute His home, His abode in which He is ever present, conscious and active. He is that same of whom the Bible declares: 'Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep' (Psalm 121: 4) (1985: 24).

Unfortunately, Tema has confused and blended together *MODIMO* and the Christian God, and has confused Heaven (abode of God) and *legodimo* [celestial vault] and, most unfortunately, he has imposed *Yahweh*, the God of Israel who does not sleep or slumber, on the *Basotho* people. Even the deity of the Bible, '*Yahweh*', to whom Tema refers, has not remained a constant concept of God within the Bible. There has been a development of the concepts of God in the Bible itself (Hood 1990). Besides that, *MODIMO*, unlike God, is not referred to in generic terms. IT (Setiloane 1976: 80ff) is *MODIMO*, IT is neither male nor female, though conceptualized in a *Sotho* patriarchal society. The *Sotho* social arrangement did not make *MODIMO* a gender-bearing deity.

Concerning the origin and the cause of *lefase* and *legodimo*, the STR does not speculate. The *Basotho* believe that *lefase* and *legodimo* have always been there. The forefathers found it so and did not speculate about its origin, Sefoka reiterated (1997: 23rd December, Interview). The *Basotho* myths of creation are about the origin of humans and not about the origins of *lefase* and *legodimo*.

If Tema means 'Heaven' when he speaks about *legodimo* [celestial vault], it shows that he has uncritically accommodated the Christian cosmology [within STR]. The characterization of *MODIMO* as present, conscious and active depicts *MODIMO* as a personal being. The STR does not conceptualize *MODIMO* as a being but as a deity. The STR sees *MODIMO* as having allowed life to go on without much interference from IT's side. This idea is not like that of deism - where God is said to have created the universe and then left it to continue on its own (Mafokoane 1998: 27th December, Interview).

The STR idea is that creation has been continuing as is, without the interference of *MODIMO*. *MODIMO* does not necessarily make things happen. *MODIMO* is not an active agent who is driving events. We can scarcely find *MODIMO* speaking to humans, like one finds in Biblical narratives where the former Hebrew God and now the Christian God was seen as active in history. This Christian God, unlike *MODIMO* of STR, takes the initiative to direct and run history according to a sovereign plan (Sefoka 1998: 23rd December, Interview).

Kalu, in his essay in Uka (ed.) (1991: 14), discussing the concept of space in African Traditional Religions (ATR), says that the abode of the 'Supreme Being' and of major deities is the sky. The STR deity - *MODIMO*, has no specific location; there are no major and minor deities or divinities in STR cosmology and there is no 'earth Goddess' - an idol - in the sense of the feminine concept of IT in STR. The question of the abode of *MODIMO* is not an issue in STR. What matters is that, when *MODIMO* is invoked, especially to bring rain and healing, that invocation must yield the desired results. *MODIMO* serves people and it is not that people serve *MODIMO*.

In the contrary, the Christian God calls humanity to serve 'Him'. Those who heed the call and serve 'Him' well are promised Heaven. In the Christian religion God has a place called 'Heaven', as mentioned earlier. It is said that this place has 'mansions'. Jesus Christ has prepared this place for those who believe in Him (John 14: 1 - 6). Christians look forward to going there and being there with the Christian God (Phil. 1: 22 - 23). Heaven, and the eternal future, are the final destiny of Christians, where they will be with the Christian God forever (Rev. 21: 1 - 22: 5)

4.3. The Ethical Context of the Sotho Traditional Religion (STR)

4.3.1. *MODIMO* as Source of Natural and Supernatural Forces

Authors like Setiloane (1976; 1986), Tema (1985) and Hammond-Tooke (1974) agree without reservation that STR conceptualized *MODIMO* as closely associated with the elements of nature, such as wind, rain, hail and lightning. The Christian God, at one stage, was also conceptualized as the giver of rain (Acts 14: 17). This issue of the giving and the making of rain has played one of the central roles in STR communal life and the conceptualization of *MODIMO*. *MODIMO* is conceptualized as the ultimate giver of rain. In this instance *MODIMO* and the Christian God play the same role of giving rain.

Some elements of nature (e.g. hail and lightning) are harmful when they strike humans and crops. In STR it is believed that sorcerers can harness and manipulate the elements of nature such as lightning to harm other people. It is also believed that *MODIMO* allows sorcerers to harm others. Sorcerers ask *MODIMO* to give them the ability to use the natural and the supernatural forces to do their harmful work (Mafokoane and Ngoetjana, D. 1997: 29th December, Interview). *MODIMO* is the one who is in charge of all these forces. Nothing can work unless *MODIMO* permits it (Rajuiili 1998: 26th August, Interview).

Besides the point that, in STR, it is believed that sorcerers get their power from *MODIMO*, this idea of *MODIMO* being in control of all things, including the way evil is allowed to work, is shared by some Christian theologians and is also found in the Bible. The whole notion of Satan is rationalized as being in line with the plan of the Christian God. Satan, it is believed does not do what 'he' likes. Satan is under the direction of the Christian God (Job 1: 6 - 22).

Other elements of nature are good and welcome. Elements such as steady rain, which saturates slowly and deeply into the soil, bring prosperity and wholesomeness. Another 'good' element is gentle wind which blows away chaff at the time when this is most needed but which does not blow so hard and strong as to uproot trees or dislodge rooftops. As we can observe, these natural elements do good when they are not violent. But, when they act in excess, there is an element of destruction in them. For instance, fire is good for cooking and other functions when controlled but, once it gets out of control, it is extremely destructive (Rajuili 1998: 26th August, Interview).

All these natural elements are controlled by *MODIMO*. Thus, *MODIMO* is good in the sense that forces of good and evil are controlled by IT. Forces of destruction as well as forces of prosperity dwell in *MODIMO*. These natural phenomena are, simultaneously, a source of destruction and a source of prosperity. *MODIMO* reconciles these opposites of nature. *MODIMO* is manifested in both the destructive forces and in the forces of prosperity (Rajuili 1998: 26th August, Interview).

Since these natural forces are taken to be symbolic manifestations of the nature of *MODIMO*, we can speak of *MODIMO* as being composed of both evil and good forces, but never of evil of forces alone. That is, *MODIMO* is not conceptualized as being the cause or source only of evil. In other words *MODIMO* is conceptualized as ultimately responsible for both good and evil. In the words of Hammond-Tooke (1974: 320) *MODIMO* is responsible for the workings of nature, especially in its more majestic and dangerous aspects of

storm, drought and flood. In comparison with the Christian God, this view of the deity bringing evil is not strange. The story of Job is a case in point, where the Lord allows evil, but also brings good (Job 42: 11).

4.3.2. *MODIMO* Conceptualized from the Wonders of Nature

One of the sources of the concepts of *MODIMO* is from the wonder and the threat of the natural phenomena, especially lightning. In *Gikuyu*, a Kenyan language, Kenyata (1979: 237) says that when it thunders it is believed *Ngai* [God] stretches 'his' bones and that lightning is *Ngai*'s visible weapon. With this weapon, when it thunders and lightning strikes, it is believed that *Ngai* is moving from one place to another and is chasing 'his' enemies. It is taboo to look up, or to lie looking upwards, when it thunders. When it thunders, all must be indoors (Kenyata 1979: 236 - 237). According to *Gikuyu* belief, *Ngai* must not be pestered for petty things (Kenyata 1979: 238). This belief is the same as in STR.

... the *Gikuyu* turn to God and offer sacrifice only in serious matters such as drought or outbreak of an epidemic and great distress, as with a serious illness (Kenyata 1979: 239).

In STR some recurring experiences, such as severe droughts, pestilence and diseases, have strengthened this concept of *MODIMO* being in charge of the evil in life. The solution to droughts, pestilence and diseases lay in the coming of rain. In other words, droughts, pestilence and diseases cease when it rains. The rain, among other natural phenomena, is closely related to *MODIMO*. The phenomenon of rain strengthens our observation that *MODIMO* is good in the sense that, while IT is the source of fear (fear of thunder and lightning), IT is simultaneously the source of solutions to various problems such as droughts.

The evidence suggests on the whole that the *Bantu* believe in a supreme being, generally associated with the sky and showing himself most impressively in the phenomenon of the weather. Some groups look upon

him also as the creator of all things and a moulder of destiny. But he is withdrawn from direct dealings with men. He remains entirely in the background of their normal religious life, although he is to some extent sensitive about human conduct, so that irregularities in the world of man are bound to react immediately on the world of nature and call forth such signs as drought, storm, and pestilence (Eisellen and Schappera 1974: 264 - 265 in Schappera (ed.)).

Eisellen and Schappera (in Schappera (ed.) 1974: 264 - 265) are reading eisegetically into what they call the *Bantu* [humans] belief. They say the Africans in southern Africa believe in a supreme being. Once more, they are eisegetically finding a Christian God in the African beliefs (p'Bitek 1971) and this should be rejected as being not a study of African religion but a Hellenization of African deities.

4.3.3. *MODIMO* as a Compound of the Feminine and the Masculine

In a symbolical sense, *MODIMO* is conceptualized as a compound of the feminine and the masculine genders. In the image of the biological father and mother *MODIMO* is conceptualized as composed of the complementary elements of the paternal and the maternal, or the masculine and the feminine characteristics. This is explicitly evident in the way *Legwama / Thokgola / Titikwane* [*Hypoxis villosa*] is ritually planted. There are always two plants planted, to represent the father or grandfather on one side and the mother or grandmother on the other (Motala 1996: June 19th, Interview). When only one *Legwame* plant is planted or has survived the weather, it is addressed for both the maternal and paternal Ancestors (Motala 1996: June 20th, Interview).

MODIMO is fatherly and motherly (Motala 1996: 19th June, Interview). But, in STR, *MODIMO* as an all- pervading force, the awful THING, is not Father or Mother in a personal, biological sense. In comparison, the Christian God is

Father - Father in the doctrine of Trinity; Father of Jesus Christ; and Father of Christians in a spiritual sense (Motala 1998: 19th June, Interview).

MODIMO, conceptualized symbolically as a biological father and mother, refers to the living parents. But *MODIMO*, the all-pervading deity, is conceptually good in the sense that the fatherly and the motherly characteristics are complemented and merged in IT. Where there is only one *Legwame* it represents both the male and the female *Badimo* [Ancestors] (Motala 1996: 20th June, Interview, and *Madupe* Herbalists and Traditional Healers Association 1996: 27th June, Group Discussion).

MODIMO, analogically speaking, as a biological parent, refers also to the deceased parent. We must be very careful when we use the word '*modimo*'. The biological parent is also *Modimo* in the sense of being an authority and an Ancestor. It is parents who bring up children. They take care of children in all their upbringing in life. They give guidance in life. They provide for the needs of life. They deserve respect and obedience, whether they are dead or alive. *O swanetse go ba direla ba sa pheela* [You must work for them, preferably when they are still alive]. *Ge ba robetse o swanela ke go direla / tlhabela Badimo* [When they have passed away you must give thanks to them] (Motala E. 1996: 2nd July, Interview).

In STR the nearest *Modimo* (Ancestor) is the immediate grandfather or grandmother. This is mostly the case when biological parents are still alive. This *Modimo*, who is a deceased grandfather or grandmother is symbolized by *Legwame*. This *Legwame* is the greatest of all *Badimo*, according to Motala (1996: July 2nd, Interview). No one is above *Legwame*, he says. From the way *Legwame* is described one might say it was a symbol of *MODIMO* (Motala 1996: 2nd July, Interview).

Legwame is a beautiful plant. The smaller of the two plants, or the plant which grows small, is *Makgolo* [grandmother]. The larger plant of the two is *Rakgolo*

[grandfather]. *Makgolo* is *Modimo wa mosadi* [female Ancestor]. *Rakgolo* is *modimo wa monna* [male Ancestor]. Both these plants are planted inside a circular bed. The name *Thitikwane* and *Legwame* are used interchangeably (*Madupe Herbalists Group Discussions* 1996: 27th June, Group Discussions).

This *Legwame* is also called *Modimo wa fase goba Modimo wa Thaba* [God of the ground or God of the mountain] meaning that the plant is planted on the ground and is dug out from the mountain. In STR, conceptually speaking, *Legwame* is not like the Canaanite *Baal*, god of the land and heath or like the Israelite *Yahweh*, God of the mountain (Young's Concordance p. 65b; p. 536b). The difference is that *Legwame* symbolizes human Ancestors.

On the previous point concerning *Legwame* I discovered *Seboka-Badimo* [congregation of Ancestors] at *Ngaka*, T. J. Motala's place on June 17th 1996. A number of shrubs, flowers and plants were planted in one big patch of land. When I asked what this was, Motala told me that it was a congregation of *Badimo*. As a Traditional Healer, he said, he gets patients from many tribes and peoples. He does not have to wait to find and to inquire from specific *Badimo* (Ancestors), should the need be, to treat his patients who come from far countries. If a patient is *Venda* for instance, and there is a need to consult the *Venda* Ancestors, he goes there and then to speak to the *Venda* Ancestors at *Seboka-Badimo*. Among the congregation of Ancestors was *Legwame/Thokgola/Motubo/Thitikwane*, the greatest of all Ancestors (Motala 1996: 17th June, Interview).

According to Hitler Letswalo, supported by interlocutors T. J. Motala and three other Traditional Healers, members of the *Madupe Herbalists Traditional Healers Association*, with whom I had group interviews on the concepts of *MODIMO* in STR, *Titikwane* represents the whole world and everything that has to do with a person in life. This explanation gives the impression that *MODIMO* is the sum total of all the forces that shape a person from birth to death. It also implies that *MODIMO* is a universal constellation of powers. This power is existentially

invested in the person of the nearest *Modimo* [Ancestor] or the most remembered and most respected among the *Badimo*, symbolized by *Thitikwane* (Letswalo 1996: 29th July, Interviews). The most effective, powerful and significant *Modimo* [Ancestor] is the nearest deceased parent or grandparent.

This explanation correlates with what the *Legwame* looks like. The *Legwame* plant grows like a fan. All the leaves come out from the center of the bulb. Conversely, all the leaves converge towards the center of the bulb. This pattern implies that *MODIMO* is symbolically conceptualized as a diversity of dynamic powers which emerge from the center, which is the source, the very essence of *MODIMO*, and saturates the whole Cosmo-sphere. On the other hand, *MODIMO* is a center which attracts all forces and powers in the whole of life. All things are centered on and concentrated around *MODIMO*. Hence the concept that *MODIMO* is a conglomeration of all the forces of nature.

Mrs. E. Motala, the first wife of Traditional Healer T. J. Motala, is also a Traditional Healer. She lives in the adjacent homestead to that of the second wife. The two wives say that they live together in peace. The first wife, who is a Traditional Healer, planted a *Legwame*. She told me that the prayers and the messages are directed to the female *Legwame*, the *Makgolo* [Grandmother]. *Makgolo* takes the prayers and the messages to *Rakgolo* [Grandfather]. *Rakgolo* is the larger of the two plants. *Rakgolo* gives the final verdict (Motala, E 1996: 04th July, Interview).

This is also the way protocol is followed in traditional life. A woman, especially the paternal aunt, is the spokesperson for many domestic affairs. Women are spokespersons and men are judges. In this case *MODIMO* is conceptualized as the one who receives prayers as Grandmother and judges as Grandfather (Ngoetjana, D. 1996: 04th July, Interview).

4.3.4. *MODIMO* as Molder of Humanity

As it has been said earlier, concerning the origin of humanity, the most common assertion in STR is that the world has always been as it is today. STR claims that the forefathers, even the earliest ones, found the world as it is. None of these ancient people knew how it came about. They did not bother to question how it came about. The ancient people just used the earth, hunted game, ploughed the fields, kept pastures, and moved about gathering food as life went on (*Madupe Herbalists and Traditional Healers Association 1996: 24th August, Group discussion*). But there is a different claim, made by *Batswana*, as seen in the source quoted below.

But the *Bechuana* all say that *Modimo* has always been known to them. Many say that he was better known to their forefathers than he is to them, but none, even they, ever knew where he was or what he really was (Brown 1969: 117).

Indeed, STR is sincere about the incommunicability of the nature and essence of deities, and about their unknowability. STR does not pretend to know or formulate specific doctrines about that which they can neither demonstrate or present by qualified propositions. For that sincerity, in the culture of African religious thought, they deserve a place in the arena of theologization, for deities are ineffable indeed.

Tema (1985: 88) claims that the *Pedi* praised *MODIMO* as the maker of the mountains. This is clearly a smuggling in of the concepts of the Christian God. Praises to *MODIMO* did not feature in STR, but praises to the chiefs were very common. Almost every person has some praise name given by the family. Such will be names of the people they are named after.

But, besides Tema's writing, there is no other evidence or source which says the same about *MODIMO*. The *Tswana* speak of people coming out of caves and

rocks, but not that *MODIMO* made the caves and the rocks. The claim that *MODIMO* made the mountains and the stones is an assumption, like any other religious assumption. This assumption must have been influenced by the Christian thought of Gen. 1 - 2, which claims that God created the heavens and the earth.

Careful analysis of the *Sotho-Tswana* creation stories shows that *MODIMO* did not found the earth but formed and molded people, not as individuals but as communities. The STR concept of *MODIMO* is that *MODIMO* is a molder of people in communities, who came out of the earth - from holes, caves and rivers. The popular and commonly accepted Christian teaching of the origins of humans is that the Christian God created the individuals, Adam and Eve. This individualistic understanding and emphasis has come from the Western influence of the notion of individualism. Otherwise, the Biblical word 'Adam' means 'earth-person'. This word can be interpreted as denoting the beginning of human communities. Thus, the STR assumption that *MODIMO* molded communities is similar to the Biblical story of creation (Gen. 1 - 2).

MODIMO is not responsible for individual personalities (Makola 1996: 3rd August, Interview). If individuals become corrupt, *MODIMO* cannot be blamed as the one who caused that person to behave like that. If an individual does good, *MODIMO* does not get the credit as the one who enabled that person to do good. In STR, *MODIMO* is readily associated with the actions of humans and is thus not defined by human personalities or human behavior. In contrast the Christian God causes some to do good and others to do evil. He simultaneously loves one person and hates another or - He loves *all* people, but hates *some* of the things they do. He saves some and condemns others (Rom. 9: 13 - 29).

Makola (1996: 3rd August, Interview) confirmed by Ngoetjana, D. (1997: 29th December, Interview) said that *MODIMO* cannot be held responsible for the acts of the sorcerers and the injustices of *Magoši* [Chiefs] when they contravene justice. *MODIMO* remains good, as far as individual responsibility is concerned,

in the sense that IT is not directly responsible for or subject to individual behavior.

MODIMO is good in the sense that IT does not cause either the corruption or the goodness of individuals. If corruption has to be dealt with, *MODIMO* or *Badimo* attend to it while the individual is still alive. And the whole living community witnesses how *MODIMO* or *Badimo* punish a person who is out of order, in this life. On the other hand, the Christian God waits to punish people for the wrongs they have done thousands even millions of years previously (Makola 1996: 3rd August, Interview). Further, according to Daneel:

All African religions speak of a Supreme Being ... He is the creator God, responsible for the earliest origins of the world, nature and humanity. He is the ground [basis] of all that exists, not directly controlling or maintaining it, but an uninvolved God who has retreated to a great distance because of some error committed by human beings (Daneel 1989: 111, addition mine).

It is true that the *Sotho* regard *MODIMO* as the molder of humans. That *MODIMO* is the molder of the world and of nature is not what I find in the STR creation stories; and that *MODIMO* is the basis of all that exists is an overstated and Christian scholastic idea. That God is the basis of all existence is a concept which comes out of 13th century Western scholastic philosophy. I want to reiterate, in simple terms, what I have concluded from my observations: that the *Sotho* people believe that creation has always been as it is and that the forefathers found it as it is and could not tell exactly how it came about or who made it. STR does not claim that *MODIMO* is responsible for the earliest origins of the world. Rather, it claims that *MODIMO* - and IT's agent *Lôôwe* (Setiloane 1976), came out of a cave, together with humans and their flocks.

4.3.5. *MODIMO* as Source of Good and Evil.

According to the observation of Sheddick (1972: 65), *MODIMO* was held responsible for most general misfortunes. In that observation, *Badimo* were the ones who cared for and looked after their progeny. The probable source of good and evil was *MODIMO* - meaning that the ultimate source of unresolvable evil was *MODIMO*. *Badimo* were pastoral and parental. On the other hand Hambrock (1981: 120 -121) observed that Witches were the source of evil. Yet, Mrs. E. Mthembu (1998: 19th June, Interview) claimed that *Badimo* were a cause of most family evils and not *MODIMO*.

Here I find contradictory claims, one from literature and the other from fieldwork. Sheddick (1972: 65) claims that in STR *MODIMO* is the source of evils. Hambrock (1981: 120 -121) says it is the Witches that are the source of evil. Mrs. E. Mthembu (1998: 19th June, Interview) says it is *Badimo* who cause evil. The question is: what do other sources say and what will the conclusion(s) be?.

Monistic theories trace both good and evil to the same source, the divine creator of all things, although that does not necessarily imply that God is the direct author of evil...The creator God is seen as absolutely good, whereas evil is mainly human in its origin - manifesting particularly in wizardry (Daneel 1989: 145 - 6)

It is important to note that in STR evil is interpersonal and not personal (Mafokoane 1997: 17th July, Interview). In STR people are not evil by nature. Evil is manifest when two or more people have broken their interpersonal relationship. It is believed that the effects of witchcraft are possible in a situation where interpersonal relations are strained. In STR evil and sin do not come out of the human heart but rather out of broken social relations (Mafokoane 1997: 18th July, Interview).

Evil in Africa - whether cosmic or on a limited scale - is one-dimensional, moral in character owing to its personal, human origin, and it is dealt with in this existence (Daneel 1989: 148).

Evil is corrected in this life, as Daneel (1989: 148) says, because with *MODIMO* there is no eschatological judgement or condemnation. It could be that the observation of Sheddick (1972: 65), above, that *MODIMO* was said to be the cause of all evil, was made from the observation that, whenever there was an uncontrollable natural calamity or any unresolved disaster, *MODIMO* would be blamed for it. In STR the *Sotho* believed that, if a problem was caused by *MODIMO*, nothing could be done about it, in the sense that *MODIMO* alone and no one else could resolve it. It would not matter what the people did because *MODIMO* had sanctioned it.

The ultimate responsibility for evil and good lies with *MODIMO*. In this instance *MODIMO* is good, in the sense that both good and evil co-exist and emanate from IT without corrupting IT. This observation affirms that another concept of *MODIMO*: *MODIMO* is that in which the forces of good and evil are harmonized (*GaPhaahla* Teachers 1997: 16th December, Group Discussion).

Ngoetjana, D (1996: 1st July, Interview) says that in STR there is no contradiction between good and evil. *MODIMO* allows good and evil to happen through *Ngaka* [Traditional Healer]. People in the community bring good and evil through the way in which they behave towards others. Albertina Mashiye Ngoetjana said: 'Only *MODIMO* knows what is happening on earth as regards good and evil' (1996: 1st July, Interview).

Regarding good and evil in relation to *MODIMO*, Mafokoane (1996: 28th December, Interview) says that both *baloi* (sorcerers) and *batho* (people) pray to *MODIMO* for help to avenge themselves in various situations. *Baloi* ask *MODIMO* to help them succeed in their use of charms for bewitching others. People also ask *MODIMO* to help protect them against sorcery. *MODIMO*

allows *baloi* to bewitch others with success. On the other hand *MODIMO* gives power to *Dingaka* [Traditional Healers] to help people with various problems, including protection from sorcery.

MODIMO is claimed to help both ways. IT gives permission for both evil and good to happen (Mafokoane 1996: 28th December, Interview). Here, again, we see that the concept of *MODIMO* in STR is that *MODIMO* is good, in the sense that IT allows the sorcerer and the victims of sorcery to co-exist, and IT allows both good and evil to happen without being overpowered by evil. What STR conceptualizes is that *MODIMO* allows both evil and good to happen. The end of this matter is that *MODIMO o phala baloi* [*MODIMO* is better than sorcerers]. In other words it is better to trust in the power of *MODIMO* than to trust in the power of *baloi* [sorcery].

4.3.5.1. Sorcery and Witchcraft

I wish to elaborate further on other sources of evil in STR. One source, as we said before, is the breakdown of interpersonal relationships (Setiloane 1976). The other source is the witch (*moloi*) (Hambrock 1981: 120 - 121). The *Sotho* believe that sorcerers and family enemies enter into a family to bewitch it through the crack of the breakdown of interpersonal relationships (Mafokoane 1996: 28th December, Interview). Evil forces enter through the gap made by interpersonal clashes and the breakdown in interpersonal relationships. The *Sotho* believe that there is no way in which sorcerers and enemies can hurt the family if all members of the family are in good relationship with each other.

In STR, the person of *Moloi* is seen as the embodiment of evil, but is not seen as Satan. *Moloi* is always viewed as a human being who possesses enormous celestial power, dangerous magic and poisonous medicines (Motala 1996: 23rd July, Interview). On the other hand, "... Satan, is a spiritual power, who is the source of all evil and is opposed to the Christian God, who is infinitely good" (Bourdillon 1992: 214).

Sorcerers and witches are not Satan. In traditional communities, people who are likely to be called sorcerers are old people. There is a belief in STR that a person of great age who does not die is prevented from dying by the evils he/she is still doing on earth (Ngoetjana, A 1996: 5th June, Interview). Other people subject to suspicion for sorcery are those who keep anything unusual like a monkey, snakes, cats or tortoises. Other suspected people are those who flourish, disproportionately to all other people in the community, such as a very beautiful person, a person whose farm is always green in times of relative drought (Ngoetjana, A 1996: 5th June, Interview).

People who are Traditional Healers are also commonly suspected of sorcery, especially when they do not attract patients any more. Traditional Healers would be suspected of no longer using their medicine properly, for healing purposes, if they fail to attract patients. Traditional Healers whose character and behavior have degenerated and declined from the unquestionable integrity expected by the community, would also be suspected of having something evil about them (*GaPhaahla* Teachers Research Team 1997: 18th December, Group Discussion).

4.3.5.2. Concept of Evil and Notion of Witchcraft

Concerning evil and the notion of witchcraft, Bourdillon (1992: 213) says witchcraft is the epitome of evil. For me, the understanding of witchcraft and the application of witchcraft as evil operate in the moral and societal aspect of STR. In STR, natural calamities would not be categorized as evil, as would a thing caused by witchcraft. For instance, it is in the striking of lightning where discernment is needed. Natural lightning is brought by *MODIMO*.

There is a Lightning Bird which strikes natural objects, usually trees. Then another Bird of its kind comes to pick up the Lightning Bird, which always dies in a crevice in the tree which it strikes, to hide it, usually in a crevice in the mountains where no one will see it. A tree struck by a Lightning Bird from *MODIMO* is forbidden for use by anybody as firewood, because it is believed that

the tree was struck by natural lightning from *MODIMO*. The tree as such is good, but not for making fire, but should be kept intact and therefore must be preserved and not be chopped or burned down (Ngoetjana, M 1998: 20th December, Interview).

Lightning from Witches strikes homes, livestock and people. At times, it is told, the lightning takes away groceries from the home it strikes. When such a lightning caused by Witches happens, people of the village rush to the river. It is told that, after striking, the Witch goes to the river to wash off the lightning medicines. Then, if people react fast enough, they will find the Witch washing and they will catch him/her (Ngoetjana, M 1998: 20th December, Interview).

The Witch would be sent to *Moshate* [Royal Residence] to be dealt with according to traditional justice. Almost every time Witches are tried they are found guilty. Their sentences vary, depending on the harm and damage they have caused. The judgement also depends on whether the Witch has offended before and was ever suspected of such practices. In most cases the Witches, when found guilty, are expelled from the village. In olden days no Witch was ever burned or stoned to death (Ngoetjana 1998: 20th December, Interview).

Johannes Motala (1998: 28th December, Interview) confirmed Michael Ngoetjana's statement (1999: 20th December, Interview) that, when Witches are expelled from a village, what was expected of them was that they should throw away their evil medicines as they cross a river, and should make sure they wash themselves clean before they reach the village of the next chief, where the former suspected Witch could then ask to be incorporated into that new community.

The chief's royal Traditional Healers would be called to discern whether these newcomers do not carry bewitching medicines with them. The chief's royal Traditional Healers would ascertain whether the former Witches were clean and could be given land to till and could become part of the new community. In the Limpopo Province the burning of Witches was a new thing among the old people

I interviewed. They thought that the burning of Witches and sentencing of people to death must have been an idea the local youth learnt from Christian schools and from white history and culture.

In STR, it is understood that the cause and source of evil, which also results in acts of witchcraft, is jealousy (Ngoetjana, D 1998: 2nd December, Interview). Jealousy emerges and becomes possible in broken social relationships which makes all *Basotho* potential witches (Ngoetjana, D 1998: 2nd December, Interview). Also, evil as moral depravity makes people susceptible to becoming witches. *Basotho* are also susceptible to doing evil as humans. Furthermore, evil, as the opposite of all that is good, is associated with the activities of witches (Bourdillon 1992: 214).

In STR, as in ATR, there is no distinction between moral evil and material evil, in the sense that there can be material evil, like a bus accident, which caused evil when people get hurt and die in the accident (Bourdillon 1992: 215). Rathethe (1998: 4th November, Interview) expresses his view of moral-related evil in these words: "there are no accidents in STR - all evil has a social and moral cause. The 'Witch' in the bus must have caused the accident, or someone inside the bus is not in good relationship with another, or someone has not resolved a broken relationship with somebody. This person with the broken relationship with another must be the cause of the accident" (Rathethe 1998: 4th November, Interview).

In small (local/ family) centered religions like STR and in simple societies, the different kinds of evil are not usually clearly distinguished (Bourdillon 1992: 214). In almost all cases the culprit is the nearest friend, a family member, or the nearest clan member.

The values of such a society are largely concerned with keeping people alive by keeping the system going. Anything that disrupts the normal order, and thereby threatens the livelihood of people, is regarded as evil,

and often assumed to have a moral element. Any disruption may be assumed to involve the immoral machinations of a witch or sorcerer (Bourdillon 1992: 214).

Bourdillon (1992: 215) continues to say that:

In practice, it is common to give material misfortunes connotations of moral evil. In many societies, death, or at least the death of a young person, is assumed always to be caused by a morally evil person or power (Bourdillon 1992: 215).

Occurrences such as death cause disruptions in traditional agricultural societies. These societies do not differentiate between disruptions of a social type and those of a natural type. All disruptions are disruptions and are usually attributed to the Witch or Sorcerer (Bourdillon 1992: 187).

4.3.5.3. Concept of Sin [*Sebe*] and Manners (*Mekgwa*)

STR does not have a concept of *sebe* [sin] but has a concept of *mekgwa* [manners] (Masoga 1996: 7th March, Interview). There are good manners and bad manners in STR. Manners manifest themselves in social relationships. People may have good or bad manners. It is the responsibility of the parents in a family to overcome bad manners and to inculcate and encourage good manners in people from childhood. It is incorrect to speak of *MODIMO* in terms of good and bad manners. These categories are not applicable to the character and dignity of *MODIMO* (Masoga 1996: 7th March, Interview).

It is the responsibility of the community to combat and to eradicate all manifestations of evil and bad manners. Each and every member of the community must act immediately and appropriately upon seeing the emergence of evil and bad manners (Makola 1998: 16th April, Interview). Bad manners can also emerge in the form of jealousy. Jealousy is taken as a very serious evil, to

the point that it is believed to be the source of evil and sorcery, as said earlier. The community as a whole must make sure that evil, jealousy and bad manners do not take root in the society (Ngoetjana, D 1998: 2nd December, Interview).

How is this done? The elder brothers and sisters are responsible for the younger brothers and sisters. They must reprimand them. When they punish them, the manner of punishment must be appropriate, not extreme. The elder brothers and sisters are not allowed to punish the younger ones with their bare hands. They must take a twig from a tree and beat them on the legs. Whipping a young person on the head and face is strictly forbidden. If they do give a slap with the palm of the hand, it must be meted out on the buttocks, just once or twice, not so hard as to inflict too much pain and to leave finger marks (Ngoetjana, D 1998: 5th December, Interview).

If the offence is very serious it must be referred to the parents, or to the immediate or nearest elderly relative to handle. Serious offences include grievous assault and wounding, i.e., spilling blood. Wrongdoing, evil and bad manners are dealt with immediately in this social order. Evil is eradicated from society from the root. The bud of evil is nipped before it grows (Ngoetjana, D 1998: 5th December, Interview)..

Parents are responsible for children. *Kgosi* [Chief] is responsible for the village or tribe. The *Badimo* are responsible for the wellbeing of individuals and families, and *Badimo* of *Kgosi* are responsible for the village and tribe. From the level of *Badimo* to that of the smallest child in the village, a network of responsibility is built for the sake of combating and eradicating evil, bad manners and jealousy promptly. Should people in this hierarchy neglect their duties, the whole balance of the hierarchy and social peace are disturbed.

In other words, pertaining to the concept of *MODIMO*, *MODIMO* is the balancing force of the social hierarchy. The social balance ensures peace with one another and peace with *Badimo* as prevention and eradication of bad manners.

MODIMO is the force of social balance. *MODIMO* brings all things into equilibrium. *MODIMO* is a neutralizing force, in terms of IT being the fulcrum on which social balance and stability are dependent. *MODIMO* is the essence of goodness in society.

Though God is thought of as the essence of goodness and the source of all good, God is also, indirectly, the source of evil; for by the principle of opposites, His (Her) goodness causes evil to come into being, since goodness has no meaning if evil does not also exist (Makalu 1990: 130)

Makalu's (1990: 130) definition is applicable to the STR concepts of *MODIMO* and how society is structured so as to combat evil and promote good, and to discourage or eradicate bad manners. In the context of the cultivation of good manners, Kamalu (1990: 130), like Sheddick (1972: 65), also says that God (sic) is the source of evil, which my fieldwork evidence contradicts. It was already evident in the testimony of the traveler Lichtenstein, who visited the *Tswana* in 1805, who reported that *MODIMO* was looked upon as the cause of all the origin of all the good and evil that happened. Fieldwork evidence contradicts this, as regards the cultivation of good manners. The missionaries and their *Khoi* interpreters had confused ideas and, at times, the word '*modimo*' would be interpreted as 'evil spirit' (cf. Chidester 1996; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Setiloane 1976 and p' Bitek 1971).

For Africans, good is conceptualized as social values such as respect, obedience, loyalty, cooperation, and well-being. Evil is lack of good social values, especially those that have to do with human relationships. But I agree with Kamalu (1990: 133) when he applies to Africans in general the idea that the world is inherently neither good nor evil. Good and evil have nothing to do with inanimate creation but much to do with how people behave towards one another. Even in STR it is appropriate to speak about morality of action and not that of essence. For example, the teaching that humans are sinners by birth would not make sense to the African. What has a new-born baby of one day old 'done' to warrant being

called a sinner? “Thus African morality defines good and evil solely in terms of human action” (Kamalu 1990: 133).

In other words, good manners and evil do not exist other than in humans. Good manners and evil are what people do (Kamalu 1990: 133). Besides this, the doctrine of consciencism, according to Kamalu (1990: 141), says humans are an end in themselves. In other words, the human conscience is supreme in matters of morality (choosing good from evil). I agree with this statement.

4.3.5.4. Misreading of African People’s Sense of Morality

On the subject of African morality Haule (1969: 74 - 77) said: “African morality and discernment of good and evil must not be judged ethnocentrically by Western morality. It is uncalled for to suggest that the Christian Western morality is perfect and pure and is a necessary fulfilment and maturation of African morality. It is grossly degrading to suggest that Africans have no philosophy and that Western philosophy is perfect. Any suggestion that, at any point of human history, Africans had no sense of morality must be rejected in no uncertain terms.”

It is absurd to think, as was reported by Pyrrard de Laval, mentioned by Chidester (1996: 36), that African people, at the time of their meeting with the missionary-colonizers and their Christian God (1850 - 1950), were savages. He reported that they were people without law or religion, were like brute animals, were wild and ate human flesh, raw meat and unwashed innards and intestines of animals which only dogs would eat. He said that Africans had no sign of human intellect, that they were savage and as stupid as could be, that Africans were without human features, language, government, manners, humanity and had no human institutions; that Africans produced animal sounds, chattering speech, clicks unfamiliar to European ears; and that Africans were as good as non-existent.

All this was reported to be so amongst communities which Setiloane (1976) said were organized and ran their affairs smoothly and, in his view, in a civilized

manner. But Chidester (1996: 14) interpreted the implications and the reasons for such reports, in the context of the missionary-colonization of Africans, as meaning that the missionaries were meant to justify their missionary-colonizer' actions of exterminating African people. Chidester (1996: 14) reports as follows, concerning missionary actions of self-justification:

As animals by comparison to Europeans, therefore, indigenous people who lacked religion also lacked any recognizable right or entitlement to the land in which they lived. Even when this implication was not explicitly stated, a theological, philosophical, and legal tradition of Europeans reflected on the status and rights of animals was implied in comparative observations about people who were indistinguishable from the beasts that perished precisely because they had no religion ... Animals, therefore, had no human rights to life or land ; neither did the indigenous people in the Americas, Australia, Africa, or the Pacific Islands, who were classified as beastly or brutal because they lacked religion (Chidester 1996: 14).

What followed was raging wars, made upon these people by British colonial Christian soldiers sent by the Christian God, together with the missionaries researching and spying on the indigenous people, giving information to colonial governors and the military. Bediako's (1997: 41) description of these actions of the missionaries was:

... war was justified because of the cultural primitiveness - the rudeness of their natures (Africans included) - that placed them in a lower order of humanity and meant that they needed to be under the domination of the prudent and wise for the welfare of all (Bediako 1997: 41, addition mine).

The end result of missionary colonization was not for the welfare of Africans at all but for their brutalization, subjugation and incorporation into the capitalist mode of production as wage slaves up till today. The whites dealt brutally with

Africans. To the Africans the legacy of a brutal Christian God is still present. Besides this, I would like to go on to relate the African idea of *MODIMO* as a source of life and death.

4.3.6. *MODIMO* as Source of Life and Death.

4.3.6.1. New Life from *MODIMO*

STR believes that newly born babies come from *MODIMO* and are a gift of *Badimo*. *MODIMO* gives new life. Elderly women attend to the young mothers when they give birth. They are in charge of midwifery. A special hut is designated for child-delivery, for the period of maternity and for the growth of the child, especially at the early stages. Small children can enter this hut after a week or ten days, or when the umbilical cord is broken. Other grown-up children are forbidden from entering this hut until the umbilical cord is broken. Men, including the father of the child, are totally forbidden from entering it (Letswara 1998: 16th January, Interview).

A reed is put across the door of the hut in which a newborn baby is accommodated. Everyone should know, from the sign of the reed, that there is a newborn baby there and that there must be no disturbance (Kgwale 1998: 8th February, Interview). The reed is in accordance with the STR myth of creation. The myth tells that humans originated from the bed of reeds in the river (Setiloane 1976). The symbol of the reed at the door of the hut of a newborn child tells that another human is coming out of the reeds. It is said of the woman who gave birth: *o mo lethakeng* [she is in the reeds]. Knowing that the *Sotho* believe that *MODIMO* is the molder of humans, the life of the child is, therefore, given by *MODIMO*.

At a suitable time, during daylight, the father of the child is allowed to come in to see the baby. The midwives - elderly women - are always on the watch. They make sure that the father of the child does not go near the mother or have an

opportunity to be romantic with her, up until the child is more than five years old, in some instances. The mother must finish breast-feeding before the father can come and partner her (Ngoetjana, A. 1996: 18th July and Letswara 1998: 16th January, Interviews).

4.3.6.2. Introduction of the New-born to the Ancestors (*Badimo*)

The *Badimo* are formally approached to be told about the birth of a new child. The *Badimo* wish the children to be named after them. This is one way of keeping Ancestors remembered. The names of the Ancestors will be heard when the child is called (Sefoka 1996: 9th May, Interview). The *Badimo* will be asked to tell the old unknown *Badimo* about the birth of a new child, so that none of them should complain that they were never formally introduced. This is where one normally hears the phrase *Modimo o motsha bolella Modimo wa kgale ...* [new Ancestor tell the old Ancestor...] (Lappointe 1986: 6).

Disobedience of these rules is taboo. The *Badimo* will be angry with the father of the child and people who are supposed to observe these traditional customs, and this will affect everyone in the family. Therefore such rules must be strictly adhered to. In STR, new life is carefully protected. In childbirth, *MODIMO* and *Badimo* give new life (Sefoka 1996: 9th May, Interview).

4.3.6.3. Life (*Bophelo*) as Wellbeing

The second way of speaking about *MODIMO* giving life is that of the concept of well-being. Life is well-being. When all is at rest the fields have no pestilence, the cattle are strong and healthy, there are no illnesses in the family, there are no stories of sorcery in the village, and all that happens is natural and expected, and life is predictable. *Badimo ba re robaletse* [Ancestors are asleep/ it is well with Ancestors], life is good. In that sense, *MODIMO* has given life as well-being (Motala 1998: 24th February, Interview).

The closest equivalent in STR to the concept of salvation, as understood by Christians, is *bophelo* [life]. It is *MODIMO* and *Badimo* who give this *bophelo* at birth and who sustain it throughout people's lives. In STR there is no 'salvation', in the sense of personal conversion or a transition to another spiritual world, soteriologically and eschatologically speaking. No one is saved into the world of *Badimo*. In STR no one is lost or saved. STR has no other-worldly eschatology, as is taught in Christianity. There is no savior, who came to die for the sins of humanity in order to make humanity right with 'God'. There is nothing like being 'made right' with *MODIMO* in STR.

But there most certainly is a notion of being made right with *Badimo*. If families are not right with *Badimo* they will not get *bophelo* [life] or have *boroko* [sleep]. They will suffer instead. In this particular case, the role of *Badimo* is equivalent to that of the Christian God as concerns the demand for righteousness. *Badimo* will pester you and demand that you make things right with someone you have. *Badimo* demand justice and righteousness (Masoga 1996: 16th March, Interview).

Bophelo is health and sufficiency. It is not about wealth and prosperity but about health and sufficiency. Wealth and prosperity are the privilege of *Kgoši*, though there are other wealthy families in the village as well. *Bophelo* includes what *MODIMO* has given in the form of nature and life, as experienced by human beings, including animals. This is not the other-worldly life, as Christians speak about eternal life found in Jesus Christ. *Bophelo* is experienced here and now. In STR *Bophelo* is everyone's right. *Kgoši*, with his wealth and prosperity generated by the community, has a greater responsibility for taking care of the whole community and seeing that all enjoy and have life in its fullest. The *Kgoši* himself was given *bophelo* by *MODIMO* and *Badimo* (Motala 1996: 21st July and Kgwale 1998: 14th April, Interviews).

4.3.6.4. Continuity of Life Beyond Death

On the question of the continuity of life beyond death, everyone goes to the world of *Badimo*, but not everyone becomes a *Modimo* [Ancestor] although every person is a potential *Modimo* [Ancestor]. According to Rathethe (1998: 3rd November, Interview), children are also potential *Badimo*, although Setiloane (1976) does not agree. Setiloane (1976) says children have too short a life to warrant being granted the status enjoyed by the elderly who, by virtue of their maturity of age and contribution to the community, attain the status of *Badimo*.

In describing what happens when someone is dead, Tsekelo (1999: 22 - 23) says: the corpse is put down on the floor in a room which was never used for making fire. The family members stop all routine chores, disengage from all luxuries of life and focus their attention on burying the corpse in a proper manner. There is no milking of cows, no working with soil, i.e., even building work must stop. And as far as it is humanly possible, all members of the family must be home before every sunset. The grave in which the corpse will be buried is dug in the early hours of the morning. The pelt of the cow that has been slaughtered the afternoon before the day of burial will be used to cover the corpse on the day of burial.

Tsekelo (1999: 23) says that burial is done as soon as possible and some of the persons' belongings are buried with his/her corpse. There will be a family recitation and praise poems will be said as the corpse is taken out of the house, all the way even when it is taken down into the grave. The last sayings and greetings are given to the person being buried to take to *Badimo*.

After the final funeral rites have been completed, the spirit departs and proceeds, some believe, to the ancient home at *Ntsuanatsatsi* or, others believe, to a home in the sky (Magubane 1998: 113).

As Magubane (1998: 113) has also observed, the 'Basotho beliefs regarding death and the after-life have been influenced by Christian proselytizing'. The idea of human 'spirits' going to a home in the sky is a Christian encroachment on the STR beliefs. Otherwise, the world of *Badimo* is not a specific place, conceptually. *Bophelo* [life] can only be experienced in this world before death, and only then continue in the unspecified abodes of *Badimo*. There is no future world in STR. The past, the present and the future form one unbroken continuum. Death is only a continuation of the present life in the unspecified world of *Badimo* (Motala 1996: 15th July, Interview).

The world of the *Badimo* is not another life, but is a continuation of the present life. The idea that the STR "underworld" is imagined to be the perfect form of this world must have been influenced by the Christian notion of this world as a temporal place, separate from other places like heaven and hell. Otherwise, there is only one world of STR and it is this physical world. *Bophelo* must be ideally enjoyed to its fullest in this world. *Badimo* are located in this world, monistically (Makgai 1998: 19th October, Interview).

At various levels, as said earlier, discipline is meted out immediately, so that corruption and disobedience do not ferment the community. In this way, good life, as given by *MODIMO* and *Badimo*, is maintained. Everyone is in charge of the maintenance of *bophelo*. *MODIMO* and *Badimo* are the ultimate custodians of *bophelo*. The Traditional Healers with their medicines and divination bones are meant to enhance and to increase *bophelo*.

I do not agree with all the observations made by Smith (1961: 120), as quoted below, where he says *MODIMO* is frequently mentioned and referred to when death is looming and when death has taken place. Smith (1961: 120) says:

...The name of this Being (meaning *MODIMO*)... is always on their lips when death comes to them direct from heaven. If any one is struck dead by lightning, no murmur is heard and tears are suppressed. 'The Lord

has killed him', they say, he is rejoicing; let us be careful not to disturb his joy (Smith 1961: 120. addition mine).

Firstly, one needs to be consistent in rejecting the notion that *MODIMO* is a Being, like the Christian God is claimed to be. *MODIMO* is the pervasive force that permeates all life and existence panentheistically (Setiloane 1976: 80ff). In STR it is believed that the death that comes through *MODIMO* should only happen in old age. It is accepted that old people die a natural death. Natural death must come without pain and strife. Old people must go to sleep like they would do every night. They must die in their sleep at night. Other people, such as the members of the family, must find them "asleep" (dead) in the morning. In that way, *MODIMO* has passed by and has taken the person. But, more accurately, the *Badimo* have taken them at their death (Motala 1996: 24th August, Interview and *Madupe* Herbalists 1996: 25th August, Group Discussions).

It is also accepted that old people die from illness (*Madupe* Herbalists 1996: 24th August, Group Discussions). They must not die all-of-a-sudden. They must not be ill for too long, such that their illness is unbearable to the family. The Traditional Healers must confirm that their illness was not caused by bewitchment. If their illness was incurable, the Traditional Healers and the family must be satisfied that the illness was that of *MODIMO* and that nothing more could have been done about it, after the family had tried all ways of healing them. That is the death caused by *MODIMO* and *Badimo*.

In the case of death, *MODIMO* is not conceptualized in the extremes, these being sudden death and prolonged illness and the endurance of pain. *MODIMO* is in the middle, between these extremes (*Madupe* Herbalist 1996: 24th August, Group Discussion).

Another manner of dying, in *Sotho* traditional society, is through being struck by lightning. The lightning might come through natural circumstances or through

witchcraft. In both cases the victim must be buried in the same way as described below by Krige and Krige :

If a person has been burned to death or struck by lightning, he must be buried in a wet place near the river or have his grave 'cooled' with special medicine obtained from the chief, lest drought ensues. Similarly, abortions or miscarriages, women dying in pregnancy or childbirth, twins killed at birth, babies dying before cutting their teeth or cutting the upper teeth before the lower, initiates dying in the circumcision lodge - all must be buried in a wet place (Krige and Krige 1943:275).

Burial in a wet place placates that which allowed the unacceptable sudden death to happen. The reasons for the cause of death, and the disapproval of it by *MODIMO* and *Badimo*, can be identified by the Traditional Healer through divination. Generally, especially with regard to death caused by *MODIMO*, it is unknown what the actual reasons for death are. What is generally known is that the dynamistic (celestial) powers of *MODIMO* can be detrimental to life. It is also said that people who call out the name of *MODIMO* unworthily are liable to die instantly. Thus, no one invokes the name of *MODIMO* for fear that they be struck dead immediately (*Madupe* Herbalists 1996: 24th August, Group Discussions).

4.3.6.5. STR Beliefs About Death

In STR, the following precepts about the occurrence of death and the consequences of death are believed. When death has struck, the fertility of crops is in danger. The crops are affected according to the social status of the deceased. The death of a child does not have much effect, and actually does not have any agricultural consequences. The death of a male person has dire agricultural consequences. If an elderly person dies during sowing times that person must be buried with seed, so that they do not take the expected harvest with them, [NB Here 'they' is used to mean ONE person! This is in accordance

to *Pedi* manners of showing respect. An elderly person is named 'called in plural terms] or cause sowing and harvesting to fail (Motala 1996: 23rd August, Interview; Letsoalo 1996: 12th August, Interview; *Madupe Herbalists* 1996: 24th August, Group Discussions).

The death of a *Kgoši* requires that even working with soil for a period of time, up to several weeks, is forbidden. All agricultural and building work stops. Harvesting is not allowed. Tilling the ground is not allowed. The death of a *Kgoši* affects the soil of the *Kgoši* to whom it belongs. Since the soil belongs to *Kgoši*, when he/she has passed away his/her belongings, specifically the soil in this case, must be left alone. They are contaminated for a certain period, usually up to a few days before the burial and a few weeks after the burial. In other words, the soil is defiled and is unworkable. After the burial the ceremony of the cleansing of the soil in which the *Kgoši* is buried is done and only thereafter may his/her people commence their normal daily routines (Motala 1996: 23rd August, Interview).

Appropriate rituals must be performed for the deceased and the family. One of these is that a gourd of seeds must be placed in the grave of the deceased. There must be some fire wood and a calabash of water for the deceased to take with them in the journey of death. The destination is the place of the deceased, which, in STR, is not geographically specified (Rajuli 1998: 26th August, Interview). The seeds must be scattered over the body of the deceased. The grain belonging to the deceased must be treated with medicine so that it remains fertile and free from the defilement that comes with death (Krige and Krige 1943: 243).

Children of up to teenage age are not allowed to see dead people, or to participate in burying them. Children are not allowed, as far as it is possible, to know about death and dying. In the traditional STR communities death was handled and approached with awe and reverence. Only elderly people carried out the burials. Death was a thing of *MODIMO*. It was very much respected (Ngoetjana, D and Ngoetjana A 1996: 12th July, Interviews), unlike today where,

in most Christian night vigils and burials, there is singing, dancing, the eating of food with salt and enjoying salads and puddings, and even excessive drinking of liquor and jubilation; things which were not done in the olden days (Motala 1996: 23rd August, Interview).

In olden days, only porridge and meat from the cow slaughtered for that occasion and prepared without salt were cooked for a burial. The drinking of traditional home-made beer was done according to the dictates of the burial rites. Men who were digging the grave may drink it, as well as elderly people who remained for a while, while the crowd dispersed (Motala 1996: 23rd August, Interview).

Most burials were done at the dead of night, when children were fast asleep (Letswalo 12th August, 1996: Interview) In their deep sleep the children were whispered to in their ears and were told that so-and-so had passed away. Some people were buried inside their own huts. The floor of the hut would be dug, the person would be buried, and finally the floor would be paved and smeared with cow dung, as they usually did. There would be no sign that a person was buried right inside the ground of the hut (Kgwale 1998: 14th April, Interview). The hut would be occupied by elderly people for as long as it was traditionally unacceptable that the hut be used by anybody in general (Motala 1998: 16th April, Interview).

Burials were also done in the cattle kraal. The deceased would be buried in the cattle kraal during the night. On the following morning the cattle kraal would be covered with *mmutedi* [dried cow dung] which usually covered the ground of the kraal and there would be no sign that a person had been buried there the night before. In STR, when reporting and speaking about death, it is said that the person was taken by a *Phiri* [Hyena]

It is also common to hear it said that *lefu le ke la MODIMO* [it is MODIMO'S death]; *O bolailwe ke MODIMO* [MODIMO has killed him/ her]. In other words, death can be caused by MODIMO, but MODIMO does not go about killing

people like a criminal, who kills in order to make a living. Actually, a person who has been taken by *MODIMO* has died a good death - even death in old age (Letswalo 1996: 12th August, ; Kgwale 1998: 14th April and Motala 1998: 15th December, Interviews).

MODIMO is responsible for and is in control of death. Death shows that *MODIMO* has been around, very close by, on earth. The way of going to *MODIMO*, or, more accurately, the way of going to *Badimo*, is through death (Brown 1969: 167). Once more, we see that *MODIMO* is that which gives life and causes death. Death and life co-exist in *MODIMO*. Death and life cancel each other in *MODIMO*. Therefore, *MODIMO* is ambivalent, in the sense that opposite forces cancel each other out in IT (*Madupe Herbalists* 1996: 24th August, Group Discussions).

4.3.6.6. Taboos Surrounding Hearing About Death Caused by Hearing the Word 'MODIMO' Pronounced

As established earlier, it was also believed in STR that mention of the word *MODIMO* could cause death to the profane people (people with hidden wrong doing e.g., hiding an abortion), when hearing it pronounced. The profane one does not have to mention the name *MODIMO*. Just hearing the name mentioned by someone else would cause death. No one would dare mention IT's name, lest someone profane, hear it and die. It was a very serious taboo to call the name of *MODIMO*. Death came by saying or hearing the name *MODIMO*. In comparison, it was also fatal to see *Yahweh* in the Old Testament. It was not allowed to use the name of *Yahweh* in vain).

But this taboo does not apply to chiefs, doctors of different kinds, mourners, or those on whom sorrow has fallen, or who are lost. To such the use of the name is permissible, as it is either their position that warrants them in its use, or the circumstances which excuse it (Brown 1969: 115).

This signifies that people who had the privilege of dabbling in the things of *MODIMO*, and those in privileged positions of representing *MODIMO*, together with those that are closer to being with *Badimo*, were safe against dying from the use or hearing of the word *MODIMO*. The chief is the custodian of the people of *MODIMO*. He governs on the soil/land of *MODIMO* and is therefore safe. Those who have just lost their beloved ones were close-by when *MODIMO* passed by to take the deceased. These have been very close to *MODIMO*, they are allowed to mourn in the name of *MODIMO* and are thus safe (*Gaphaahla* Teachers 1997: 19th December, Group Discussion).

Elderly people are about to die and to be with *Badimo*, and thus to be closer to *MODIMO*. Therefore they enjoy the privilege of calling the name *MODIMO*, in that they already have the potential to be *Badimo* and thus to participate in *Bomodimo* [divinity]. This group includes those who are terminally ill. They also can invoke the name *MODIMO* and not be hurt (*Gaphaahla* Teachers 1997: 19th December, Group Discussion)

4.4. *MODIMO* as Source of Ethical Norms

We have identified four institutions in STR which form ethical norms: the family, the peers, the circumcision school and the *kgotla* [traditional judiciary]. *MODIMO* is always mentioned as the one who legislates these ethical norms.

4.4.1. Moral Formation at Home

Motho o fiwa molao ka lapeng ka gabo [charity begins at home] is a common statement heard among the *Sotho*. The family is the primary institution for moral formation. Parents are responsible for ensuring that their children, as well as those of their neighbors, behave accordingly. ‘Moral responsibility is co-operate. It reciprocates between community and individuals’ (Kamalu 1990: 7). “There is an intense concern for educating the young in the ways of their ancestors, that they also may transmit the same ways to their descendants” (Setiloane 1976: 35)

Setiloane (1976: 32 - 33) continues to say: "Mutual respect is part of *Sotho-Tswana* group patterns. The group is the primary unit and the individual is measured by the group". The *Sotho-Tswana* are humans in community, and individuals find their significance in a particular pattern of social behavior, unlike the kind of society that the missionary-colonizers introduced among the Africans. "In fact the preeminence given to the nuclear family in capitalist ideology stems directly from that society's stress on the individual" (Grehan 1979: 8).

In STR, it is said: *Thupa e kobja e sale metsi* [a child is trained at youth]. *Ya oma e a robega* [it is too late to train an elderly person]. The meaning of these sayings is that children are molded when they are still young: when they are grown up there are no moral lessons you can teach them. It is actually too late to do so. Untrained children become rebellious when they are grown up. This is like the Christian proverb that says: "train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Prov. 22:6).

Life in a community is the aim of all training in childhood and youth; and adulthood is understood not as the attainment of age, but as qualification for, and admission into participation in, the life of society (Setiloane 1976: 36).

Further, *ngwana llela nakana mokura e sehle o mo neye* [when a child cries for a horn that carries fat of luxury, carve it and give it to the child / let the stubborn child go on; leave it to life; 'experience is the best teacher']. This proverb is about moral formation as well. It is said that, when a child is stubborn and does not want to listen, a parent is advised to let the child be taught by experience. A parent must let the child do what it wishes, and when it learns a good lesson it will realize that that was foolish. The Christian story of the prodigal son is a good example, like this moral lesson of STR (Luke 15: 11-31).

E maswi ga e e tswale [a good person does not always give birth to a good child]. Many good parents might try to do all they can to give their children a good

moral grounding. There are times when parents fail. In cases like that good parents are exempted from public rebuke and shame. Another proverb along the same lines is the one that says :

Lešala le tswala molora [a coal gives birth to ash]. This proverb is new in the *Sotho* language. Traditionally the *Sotho* did not use coal for making fire. They used dry wood and dried cow dung. But, the proverb is still valid as a way of showing that moral formation was the matter of the family in STR. *Lešala le tswala molora* [coal gives birth to ash] exempts the good parents from carrying the ultimate blame when they have done their bit and only the child was not cooperative (Tshipu 1996: 8th February, Interview).

MODIMO is responsible for moral formation and gives parents children, as well as the responsibility of grooming the young. This duty continues up to adulthood. Other social institutions carry on the task of moral formation from the guidance of the parents along the path of good morality. Moral integrity up to old age and till death becomes one of the qualifications for one to be a *Modimo* [Ancestor].

4.4.2. Moral Formation by Peers

Most of the time young people play and look after goats, sheep and cattle together. Some come from upright and strict families, some from not so strict families. During their daily conversations they relate to each other what their parents and elder brothers and sisters expect of them in terms of moral behavior (Letswara 1998: 17th January, Interview).

They also learn the ethics of looking after cattle, how to treat sick cattle and to report anything that they see wrong in the veld. They learn to tell the parents about other children who do not abide by the rules. They learn about which trees they must not cut or break. They learn about seasonal taboos such as not to play

with certain stones during the times when rain is expected (Hlokoa 1998: 20th October, Interview).

Concerning learning about which stones they must not play with during the rainy season, Mafokoane (1996: 15th November, Interview) tells that children were not allowed to play with white pebbles during the rainy season. It is said that, if they did, they would cause rain to come with hailstones, and the hailstones would destroy plants and crops. On the other hand, children are permitted to play with broken pieces of a clay pot, especially when they play *diketo* [a traditional game played by children, especially girls, preferably with small round stones].

Young shepherds are careful not to let their animals graze in someone else's field. Should that happen, all the boys implicated will be punished together. In this way they are all encouraged and admonished to be ethically responsible for each other. The same will happen within a homestead where, if a child cries, all the other children who are playing with him/her must explain the cause of the crying. If none of them can give a reasonable explanation why the child is crying, they will be punished together. Therefore, a child who is mischievous would be scolded by all the other children, to prevent and to protect themselves from being punished together with the naughty one (Ngoetjana, D 1996: 13th June, Interview).

Children remind each other how to greet people in the village. They help each other determine and remember who has achieved what social status and how such a person should be addressed. Young married women are greeted by the surname of their husband and no longer greeted as 'sister'. Young married women with children are greeted by the name of their first-born. All mature and elderly women beyond the marriageable age, whether with or without child, married or unmarried, are addressed as *Mama* (Mother) by all the children in the village. So, even an unmarried woman is given the status of 'mother' in this case (Ngoetjana D 1996: 13th June, Interview).

4.4.3. Moral Formation at the Circumcision School.

What happens inside the circumcision school has always been kept secret. Gradually, people are beginning to discover what happens in there. The circumcision school is called *koma* (secret or hardship). To be circumcised is called *go rupa/ go bolla* [untranslatable/ to be circumcised] (Setiloane 1876: 36ff; Chidester 1991: 197). Many young people go to the circumcision lodge because they are inquisitive but the primary aim is to go there to graduate and become *Banna* [Men] (Motala 1998: 17th December, Interview). They go there because they no longer want to be *Mashoboro* [the uncircumcised]. The circumcision school is one traditional institution that has been acclaimed for teaching moral values in a formal way for a period of at least one month, but up to six months in some instances.

Propriety with regard to sexual relationships and practice in and outside the home is given a very prominent place in *mophato* [circumcision school] teaching (Setiloane 1976: 38, addition mine).

The circumcision school has preserved traditional moral values over the ages. This is one institution which resisted the scourge of the missionary attack. Despite much vehement opposition and attack, this institution still survives to the present day.

According to Motala (1998: 17th December, Interview), the circumcision school belongs to *Kgoši* [Chief]. The advisors of *Kgoši* may always give advice that it is time to have a circumcision school. Then *Kgoši* will appoint the Traditional Healer who will be in charge of the school. Usually there are Traditional Healers of the royal family who are consulted and invited to take charge of the school. In other instances, *Kgoši* may appoint a Traditional Healer of repute who qualifies for this duty (Motala 1998: 17th December, Interview). The person who qualifies to take charge of *mophato* is usually knowledgeable in '*mekgwa ya morafe*' [tribal customs]. This person will be one who knows folk lore and tribal laws -

a person who is upright and exemplary in life and, it goes without saying, should himself have been circumcised (Setiloane 1976: 36 - 37).

According to Motala (1998: 17th December, Interview) the Traditional Healer who is appointed will divine to see whether the time is right for the school to commence. The Traditional Healer may say that, according to the divination bones, the time is not right. Then the decision to hold the school may be postponed (1998: 27th January, Group Discussion). Besides this, what determines whether or not the time is right is the availability of the son of the chief, if he is of circumcision age. The son of the chief will be the leader of the group. In most, if not all circumcision schools, the young people have a royal young person as their leader and he will be circumcised first (1998: 27th January, Group Discussion).

Should the go-ahead be given by both the Traditional Healer and the *Kgoši*, young boys of circumcision age will be invited to attend. By then the peer group of uncircumcised boys will have influenced each other to attend. Some of the boys go with or without the approval of their parents. Usually the parents who disapprove are those who are influenced by Christian teachings, which condemn African culture and customs. These are parents *ba setaseng* [from a mission station]. The missionaries were opposed to this tradition and, as Comaroff and Comaroff (1991: 245) record, missionary Rev. Lloyds was challenged by a chief who said to him “You told us we should not practice ours ... But we read in the Bible how God commanded Abraham to do it for his people. To each their own.”

Some elderly people who did not have the chance to go for circumcision during their youth would also be given an opportunity to go now. Each circumcision group has its own special praise name and praise poems. The school is a group of equals. The elderly people in the group become *thaka* [of equal of, peers] with every one in the *mophato* [group]. This is not degrading to the older folk. They have pride, in that this gives them an opportunity to belong to the company of men. No one can ever be regarded as a man unless he has gone through

circumcision school. Only circumcised men can qualify to speak in the village judicial court (Sefoka 1996: 12th May, Interview).

The Traditional Healer must have satisfied himself that all the required traditional medicines are available for him to commence the school. This includes medicine to protect the circumcision school itself, medicine to do the actual circumcision; and medicine he needs to protect himself and to protect *moloto* [the school] and medicine to help heal the circumcision wounds. The Traditional Healer must *theya molota* [strengthen/ protect the circumcision location/ lodge] with traditional medicine to prevent it from possible calamities, which can be caused by another Traditional Healer who is jealous of the circumcision school. Other Traditional Healers could be jealous because they had not been appointed to be in charge of such a prestigious duty. Calamity may also come from other spoilers like sorcerers (Motala 1996: 20th July, Interview).

As soon as it is time to go to the lodge, all the boys go to the circumcision school. Besides the actual circumcision, boys are taught about how they must behave towards women (Setiloane 1976: 38ff). They are also taught about traditional family life, how to bring up children, the manners and customs of their people, how to conduct themselves in the village jury, and how to defend their people against aggression from other rival tribal groups (Motala 1996: 21st July, Interview).

When they are finally healed from their circumcision wounds it is time to go home. A ceremony is conducted at *Moshate* [Royal Residence]. Families of the initiates come with gifts to celebrate at *Moshate*. *Moshate* itself would have slaughtered many cattle and prepared food for celebration. One of the beasts slaughtered for celebration would have been killed by the circumcision graduates with their own hands. After the celebration, the young men are finally taken home. The celebrations continue at home for a day or two. From then onwards traditional life continues once more. The boys have finished their initiation and are now called and regarded as men (Motala 1996: 21st July, Interview).

The Traditional Healer who conducted the school successfully is thanked with gifts from *Kgoši*. It is said that the Traditional Healer has brought out men who will continue to serve the village according to traditional norms and values. He has ensured the continuity of traditional culture and customs. Besides that, such a Traditional Healer is given high honor. He is the first, the champion, the strongest Traditional Healer in the village and is ranked very high. He is regarded as one who can *theya motse wa Kgoši* [protect the Royal Residence]. He is first among all the village Traditional Healers. This is a position other Traditional Healers envy very much (Motala 1996: 21st July, Interview).

4.4.4. Moral Formation at *Kgotla* [Traditional Judiciary].

“... the *Batswana* believe that [*MODIMO*] is the one who instituted their laws and customs and some would even say that it always existed since people were there” (Motswasele 1993:25).

The chief was the major custodian of the *Sotho-Tswana* laws and customs, but, was not an absolute dictator. The *Sotho* political and judiciary system was not totalitarian nor was it a dictatorship. In theory the chief was an absolute ruler and law maker, but in practice, the *kgotla* [judiciary] system was participatory and representative of all the households of the chieftainship (Matswasele 1993: 24; Setiloane 1976: 65).

In actual fact, the whole assembled *kgotla* made the tribal laws through elaborate discussion until consensus was arrived at. The chief validated the laws and made recommendations for amendments, if needs be, working within the oral tradition. In this way the chief worked under the *kgotla* (Motswasele 1993: 24). As Smith (1966: 82) witnessed: “... chief was never a dictator, a complete despot; he was always controlled by councils which represented public opinion”

The use of proverbs was prominent in the traditional judicial discussions. Many established sayings were also employed. The precedents that exist were used and

applied in subsequent cases. The wisdom of the elderly people and their experience was sought after in discussing problems and resolving cases. The word of the chief was greatly respected. *Lentsu la Kgoši le agebwa lešaka* [a kraal is built around the word of the chief] (Ngoetjana, D 1996 13th June, Interview).

The chief had three councils around him. One was the family council and was composed of both the maternal and the paternal royals. Their task was to give the chief the mind of the royals in matters which needed the royal opinion. Then there was a council of friends. These would be the friends of the chief and, in most cases, would be men who belonged to his own circumcision group. From time to time, at leisure time, friends would comment in a relaxed manner on how the chief was doing. To some extent, such informal opinions shaped the judiciary and the discernment of the chief (Motswasele 1993: 25).

Then there would be the village council - *kgotla*. This council was composed of elders of the village, all of whom were heads of families. This was the judiciary itself. In the case of the paramount chief, there would be an additional council called *khuduthamaga* composed of chiefs and the paramount chief. This was a confederation of tribes and villages. This council sat for cases that affected the whole tribe (Motswasele 1993: 25; Motala Johannes 1999: 1st March, Interview).

The chief was given a lot of respect, to the point that the *Sotho* would say *Kgoši ke Modimo* [chief is 'God'] (Motala Johannes 1999: 1st March, Interview). One chief Sekwati of *GaMasemola* of Sekhukhuni-land, in resisting the Berlin Missionary Society (BMS), told his people that they should accept no other 'God' except himself. Sekwati claimed that he was 'God'. This must be understood in the context of the struggle of the *Bapedi* against the Berlin Missionary Society (BMS), who, by then, had made war on them and had already annexed a lot of the *Pedi* lands. Sekwati was aware that, should he receive the missionaries in his area, the result would be 'conquest', like his other *Pedi* colleagues Malebogo and Sekhukhuni, to name just two, experienced. The BMS left *GaMasemola* and came to settle at *GaPaahla* where this research was conducted. *GaPhaahla* is

part of the *Botšhabelo* district which came to be ruled by Merensky as Paramount Chief (*GaPhaahla* Teachers 1996; 26th August; *Madupe* Herbalists 1996: 27th August, Interviews).

Nevertheless, traditional chieftainships proved resilient enough to survive. They continued to inculcate the kind of morality, laws and customs which worked for the remnants of the African people imprisoned in their own land (native reserves) by the capitalist market forces which were beginning to introduce market behavior and morality strange to Africans.

In all the cultures the judiciary, however it is constituted, is the legal custodian of society's ethics. The judiciary regulates ethical norms and ethical standards. It adapts from time to time to the ethical needs of the day. It is in accord with the manners of the people. It is the ultimate body of moral formation, especially in traditional communities. Should the *kgotla* [village judiciary] fail to mete out justice, *MODIMO* is believed and is trusted to be the one who will intervene on behalf of the victims - the African people. *MODIMO ga o je nkabo/ dibodu* [lit. God does not eat rotten things/ God does not contravene justice/ God avenges for the weak] (Setiloane 1976).

MODIMO ga o je nkabo [GOD does not eat rotten food] means that *MODIMO* does not contest the process and the implementation of justice. *Ntwa ya khutsana e lwana ke ditshosane* [the ants wage a fight on behalf of the orphan] means that *MODIMO* will bring justice to the victim, but will do so in mysterious ways (Setiloane 1976). It may take a long time to see the justice of *MODIMO* being done but, in the end, it will be done as it is believed. *MODIMO* is the final judge of the moral judicial integrity. In STR it is also said: *Tlou e bolaitwe ke tshoswane* [an Elephant is killed by an ant]. This simply means that *MODIMO* will see to it that justice is done toward African people. 'The Battle of the Gods' continues.

4.4.5. The Goal of Ethics in Sotho Traditional Religion

The goal of ethics in society is to achieve happiness for all. In a sense, moral values are utilitarian and hedonist. Since STR is a family religion it also aims at achieving happiness for the family and consequently for the whole community. STR is a eudaemonic religion, i.e. it aims at bringing happiness and joy. Typical of religions in general, including STR, they interpret moral commands as divine commands (Hubbeling 1987: 58 -59). “Morality is bound up with religion and receives its sanction as from the Creator, who gives the order of the world ...” (Parrinder 1969: 28 - 29).

Some religious values, those of STR included, are universal. Sogolo (1993: 119) writes about the values such as ‘good’ as possibly understood in the same manner universally, and yet understood in a specific manner provincially, contextually or personally. The provinciality of a moral value such as ‘good’ does not exclude its possible universal similarity and application in all cultures and situations, especially those which share more or less the same moral universe and frame-of-reference.

STR is a deeply ethical religion. It has been so from traditional times. Yet we cannot conclude that this means that African traditional communities had a deep sense of “sin”, but rather that they had a deep sense of interpersonal wrong and immorality. The concept of sin has Greek origins. It means ‘to miss a mark’.

In its Christian usage the inference of sin means that humanity is separated from God by virtue of being conceived and born human, since humans, it is believed, inherited the original sin from Adam. This is not the case in STR, where the notion of people being separated from *MODIMO*, because they are born in sin is non-existent (Adegbola 1969: 118).

Mnyaka (1995: 92) also considers that Africans have a concept of sin; though he sees some light in the sense that he comments that the Africans have a different

concept of it to that of the Christian religion. He continues to say that, not only is their concept of sin different, but also all their values and norms are different.

He also says that, for an African, a sin is not an offence against God (meaning *MODIMO*), for indeed God would be offended by sin. He stops short of saying that, to Africans, wrongdoing is an offence against fellow humans. It is scarcely, if ever, heard in STR that so-and-so has wronged *MODIMO*. In African thought, people who wronged *MODIMO* would be dead long before they could tell what happened.

For me, the use of the word “sin”, imposed on STR, hinders what we want to communicate, which is that Africans abhor the failure of interpersonal social relationships, as said before. In the words of Mnyaka (1995: 92 - 93), though he persists in using the word ‘sin’ in relation to STR (implied):

Sin is not merely an idea in an individual’s mind or merely a private interior reality but in reality, sin is the state of absence of care and love in interpersonal relations. A sinner is the one who does something which is anti-social (Mnyaka 1995: 92 - 93).

In STR to ‘sin’ is not to follow the traditions of *Badimo*, especially when one is instructed to do so (Mnyaka 1995: 93). Furthermore, in the Yoruba Religion of West Nigeria the ‘head’ represents personality and morality. The same concept exists in STR, though STR has no specific ‘head-cult’ (Adegbola 1969: 119 - 122).

It is commonly used in reference to children who do not obey instructions properly, and those who are defiant, saying: *ga bana tlhogo* [lit. They have no head/ they do not listen]. Besides the head, it is said: *ga bana tsebe* [lit. They have no ears/ they do not listen]. When children are extremely naughty it is said: *ke ditlhoko tsebe* [their ears are aching] or *ditsebe tsa bona di thibane* [lit. Their

ears are closed/ they are deaf/ they do not listen]. The similarity between STR ethics and Yoruba head-cult is that:

The man whose behaviour is unseemly, or who disobeys orders, refuses to go by the guidance of those who are older than himself, steals or tells lies, does not consider his head. The man who shuns evil ways and does that which is right has considered his head ... (Adegbola 1969: 123).

As it would be expressed in STR, the person who does right *o na le tlhogo* [has a head/ is clever/ listens]. That person *o na le tsebe* [has an ear/ listens]. This brings me to the conclusion of my discussion on the cosmology and ontology within which the concepts of *MODIMO* are conceptualized.

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter presented the structure and ethical elements of Sotho Traditional Religion. It described the world in which the traditional *Sotho* people live and the religio-ethical structure of traditional *Sotho* societies. It was within this social structure and ethic that the concepts of *MODIMO* were formulated.

This chapter spelt out the *Sotho* myths of origins, or creation. What was important in this was to show that no immediate parallels should be drawn between the Christian myths of creation and the STR stories of how things originated. The STR stories are about the beginning of humans and of livestock, not about the creation of the cosmos as it is understood either in our modern world or in the Biblical myths.

I showed that, once the structure and ethical elements of STR are studied, some concepts of *MODIMO* emerge, though I was not deliberately determined to demonstrate them yet. This, I showed, was because of the monistic and holistic nature of the structure of the world of STR. What was more important was to establish that the structure of the world of STR is composed of the celestial vault

and the earth, with humans in their communities and animals living there. The forefathers found this monistic cosmology already in existence.

I was cautious about 'smuggling' some Christian descriptions of the cosmos into STR. For example, in my study of STR I doubted the notion that there is an 'underground' place where the deceased go, since there is no specific place where either *Badimo* or *MODIMO* are located. I also showed that the *Sotho* world is not composed of divinities and demigods; that the *Sotho* Ancestors are not divinities but are merely departed parents.

STR is a family religion. It encapsulates the community, in that, in religious matters of community concern, there is collaboration at the community level. Thus, in such a religion, there are no believers or unbelievers. Otherwise the family and the community would be divided along faith lines. Yet, there are converts in STR. These are people who did not previously practice Ancestor religion, but who came to do so. There are backsliders in STR as well. These are those people who leave the practice of Ancestor religion to find spiritual fulfilment elsewhere, for example in Christianity.

I examined the use of the notion of the 'spirit world' in STR. The use of this notion is consistent with STR's holistic view of the world in that the material and the would be spirit world are located in this present cosmology. There is no 'other world' - a spiritual world separate from the present reality. This is caused by the implication that, in STR, there is this material world as well as another immaterial world. This is not so. STR is non-dualistic. It is monistic. The departed are understood to be with their families in the one whole celestial vault and the earth.

In the structure of STR, human beings are central. STR goes to the extent of speaking of humans in theocratic terms - meaning that traditional societies respected human beings and metaphorically spoke of them as 'God' (*Motho ke Modimo* - A human being is God). This should not be misconstrued to mean that

STR believed that human beings are deities. It is their culture to respect human beings.

This chapter also showed that, in STR, it is believed that *MODIMO* is the source of both natural and supernatural phenomena. *MODIMO* is conceptualized from the wonders of nature and is symbolically referred to as manifested in these wonders of nature, especially the more majestic ones. In short, this chapter has shown that, in STR, it is believed that *MODIMO* is the source of all things, including 'good' and 'evil' (both of which *MODIMO* allows), life and death as well as ethical norms. I showed that ethical norms were formed in the home, as well as by peers, at the circumcision school and at the tribal *kgotla*.

CHAPTER 5

5. THE ATTRIBUTES AND LOCAL APPELLATIONS OF *MODIMO*: A CRITIQUE OF THE CONCEPTS OF THE CHRISTIAN GOD

5.1. Introduction

The main task of this chapter is to present the local names used for *MODIMO* before the *Sotho* people encountered missionary Christianity. The local names of *MODIMO* are the un-Hellenized and un-Christianized concepts. Before I present these names I need to clarify how the word '*modimo*', as a linguistic and grammatical word, is used in the *Sotho* language. This clarification of the usage of the word '*modimo*' is essential, in that it removes the confusion that comes with it to those who are not used to the nuances of the *Sotho* language.

Naturally, the next point to clarify is the problem raised by the translation of the word '*modimo*'. Among all the local words / names referring to *MODIMO*, the all pervasive Deity, the Christian Bible translators have chosen '*Modimo*' as the equivalent of the Christian God. This chapter deals with that as well. Thereafter, I shall present the local names. Most of the names were collected during fieldwork done among the *Pedi* - the *Sotho* group I dealt with the most, in particular those of *Botšhabelo* district where the BMS operated. A few names were collected from sources such as Pauw (1960), Mönnig (1967), Dehnke (1978) and Brown (1969).

E. J. and J. D. Krige's (1943) work among the *Pedi* is also referred to. Interviews and group discussions played a major role in unearthing information concerning the names of *MODIMO*. The linguistic and grammatical usage of the word '*modimo*' and the traditional meanings thereof were discussed with the research groups and various interlocutors. This chapter also contains material from such oral sources. On the basis of the information about *MODIMO* and the usage of

the word '*modimo*', discovered in field work, this chapter presents a critique of the concepts of the Christian God as presented by missionaries.

5.2. The Problem of the Utilization of the Word '*MODIMO*'

Among the foreigners who were concerned about African religious beliefs was Pauw (1960: 12ff). On hearing the word *MODIMO* he realized that at times an Ancestor was meant and, at times, 'someone' who commanded a lot of respect at home or in the community was meant. In this sub-section I address this problem because, if not properly understood, many discussions about *MODIMO* could be grossly misunderstood.

There are eight basic ways in which the word *MODIMO* is used among the *Sotho*. The different understandings and ways of speaking about *MODIMO* give us a theological framework within which we can categorize each usage and meaning of the word '*MODIMO*' each time we encounter it. The following are the eight different ways the word *MODIMO* is used.

5.2.1. *MODIMO* as DEITY

The fact that the missionary-colonizers could not grasp the real meaning of the word resulted in strange interpretations and translations which I want to deal with in this chapter. Besides what Pauw (1960: 12ff) observed, Setiloane (1976: 64) affirms the complexity of the use of the word *MODIMO*. He says,

... on the other hand, the word '*modimo*' [sic] may be used, without any sense of inconsistency, of the biologically living: on the other hand, *MODIMO* is not conceived of as an ancestor (Setiloane 1976: 64).

Following Setiloane (1976: 79 - 86), where he discusses the attributes of *MODIMO* in *Sotho-Tswana* religion, *MODIMO* is the all-pervading one. *MODIMO* permeates all things. *MODIMO* is the source of life, the creator of

humans, the giver of rain and is not malevolent. The *Tswana* claim that they have known *MODIMO* from time immemorial. They described *MODIMO* in neuter gender terms like: IT, and this term is not spelled "it" but "IT". IT is not a "thing", not an inanimate object, but an animate "THING".

IT is *MODIMO*, the equivalent of ITSELF and nothing else - not the equivalent of the Christian God, who is the elevated personal being propagated in the Christian religion. The concept of *MODIMO* as IT gives us a sense that in it gender distinctions are accommodated, diffused and eliminated. *MODIMO* is neither male nor female. *MODIMO* is neuter. In fact, in *Sesotho* [*Sotho* language] the question of gender does not apply to *MODIMO* at all. *MODIMO* is not a human. *MODIMO* cannot be a human. Parrinder (1969: 27) sheds some light on how words like 'God' can be used conceptually other than the way they are used in the Christian religion. For instance,

... to use the names God, gods and ancestors, it is with the recognition that these words are useful but in the African context they are not to be fully equated with the more static conceptions of European philosophy and theology (Parrinder 1969: 27).

5.2.2. *MODIMO* the Equivalent of the Christian God

Although, [it was alleged that the interpreters] knew nothing about *Morimo* (which is supposed to be *MODIMO*), and *Sotho-Tswana* people in general, had forgotten everything they might once have known about *Morimo*, the Christian mission could appropriate this name for their God, because it 'was found by missionaries still floating (thinly remembered) in their language'. As a floating signifier in a frontier comparative religion, *Molimo*, *Morimo*, or *Modimo* eventually became the God of both the Christian mission and African traditional religion (Chidester 1991: 182, additions mine).

MODIMO, as printed in the Christian Bible, is used to mean the Father of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, as proclaimed by Christians. *Modimo* (as spelt and written the Bible) is understood to be, as it were, first *Jehovah* of Israel, then the Triune God, and then Jesus of Nazareth, who commissioned His disciples to make disciples of all the nations of the world.

In this thesis, whenever reference is made to the Christian God and the use of the word *Modimo* therefore, it shall be clearly explained so as to avoid the potential for further confusion. In other words, in every instance, the word '*MODIMO*' shall stand for the *Sotho* all-pervading deity (Setiloane 1976) and '*Modimo*' shall stand for the Christian God. After dealing with the issue of the usage of the word '*MODIMO*' I shall discuss the problem of translation in more detail.

5.2.3. *Modimo* the Departed Parent / Biologically Living Parent

The word '*Modimo*' is also used both for departed parents and for living parents. *Modimo*, in this regard, is called the Ancestor. Regarding the departed, in *Sotho* grammar the word is always used in the plural: *Badimo* [Ancestors]. The term 'Ancestor' does not mean only departed parents who have gone to be with those of a person's family in particular, i.e. a parent who has passed away but who continues to live in *Badimong* (abode of Ancestors). Ancestor (*Modimo*) also means (and can be applied to) someone who is still alive and is still with the family or the community at large. But, as shall be seen later, in most cases this will refer to an elderly person who commands respect, both in the family and in the community (Motala 1996 25th February, Interview).

The *Sotho* people have an understanding of the continuity of life after death. The *Badimo* [departed and biologically living parents] continue to live after death and also live as part of the family unit.

5.2.4. *Modimo* as a Totemic Animal

Another use of the word *Modimo* is as referring to *diano* [totems]. Totems are animals that people associate with for various reasons. Some associate themselves with a particular animal because it symbolizes bravery, royalty, or ritual power. Totemic associations emerge when people praise themselves, for instance because of victory in battle. A totem is respected by those who have voluntarily adopted it at times for simple reasons, such as because that kind of animal is abundant in their area, rivers or forests. Once named as totems, such animals are given much respect. Respect is a dominant virtue in *Sotho* culture.

Once you respect a thing you give it honor, dignity and awe. Once that happens to the totem, the totem assumes importance, but not divinity. Once it is important it develops to become a ritualistic symbol and must be preserved, especially by those who have adopted it. They may not kill it. They may not eat it. They may not take an oath in vain by it. That is how it becomes a *modimo*, a respected thing which has assumed awe and dignity, but it is never a *MODIMO* (Motala 1996: 24th February, Interview).

From the ecological point of view, that was how *Basotho* preserved nature in general, i.e. by not allowing people to consume anything which the totem animal used, including plants and animals. There were plants which were not cut at all. Others were not cut during certain seasons and occasions. Some were not allowed to be cut when, for instance, there was a death at home or a *Kgoši* [King/Chief] died. Nature was thus preserved and conserved (Motala 1996: 24th February, Interview).

5.2.5. *Modimo* as *Kgwara* [Uneasiness]

The use of the word '*Modimo*' as in the notion of *kgwara* [uneasiness] is derived from a common *Sesotho* expression referring especially to a person they are uneasy with; a person who is difficult to relate to; a person who is impossible to

handle or to please. At times it may not be a person: it may be a situation they feel uneasy with or burdened to deal with, a situation which gives trouble in the sense of irritation, a situation or person they would prefer not to face or to be in the presence of. '*Ke modimo*' [translated literally: it is 'God'] is used in a sense of feeling uneasy with it. Here *Modimo* is a feeling of uneasiness and has nothing to do with *MODIMO* the all-pervading deity. Whenever this meaning is referred to in this thesis, it shall be clearly indicated as '*modimo as kgwara*' [uneasiness].

5.2.6. *Modimo* as Ritualistic Plant / Ritualistic Animal

Another use of the word *Modimo* refers to ritualistic plants and animals. There are plants like *Legwame* (*Hypoxis villosa*), also known as *Titikwane* but properly called *Thokgola*, and animals like the anteater (*Thakadu*), which are regarded as *modimo* [ritualistic animals]. Such animals need not be totems. These plants and animals represent the departed parents and grandparents. *Thakadu* [anteater] as a ritualistic animal may be regarded as *modimo* without any reference to a departed parent.

A Traditional Healer may adopt an animal like an anteater as a symbol of traditional healing and of knowledge of the ways of *MODIMO* and *Badimo*. The most common animals adopted by Traditional Healers are the anteater, the pig, the snake, the crocodile, the leopard and the lion. But plants like *Legwame* / *Titikwane* / *Thokgola* are not adopted by people in a personal sense. By divination, *Thitikwane* can be prescribed to be planted in one corner or in the center of the homestead. In most cases, ritualistic plants are found in the homesteads of Traditional Healers as well as in the homes of people for whom they were prescribed for medicinal protective purposes, as required by *Badimo* (Motala 1996: 25th February, Interview).

5.2.7. The word '*modimo*' as the Anthropomorphic and the Anthropoidic Personalization of *MODIMO*

Phrases like *MODIMO* as father of light (*Ramasedi*) and father of all power (*Ramatlaohle*) are very close to the Christian attributes of God and we must be careful of such (p'Bitek 1971). It is possible that the *Sotho* have so absorbed them as if they were always the way they, especially the *Tswana*, spoke about *MODIMO*. But the *Tswana* people deny that *MODIMO* is our father who is in heaven, (Setiloane 1976). *MODIMO* as father is also found in some recently collected prayers of the *Sotho*. This does not dispel the suspicion that they have been influenced by the Christian teachings. The whole attitude of speaking openly about *MODIMO* was encouraged and instigated by Christian evangelization among the *Sotho* people. There was no 'worship' (in the Christian sense) of *MODIMO* among the *Sotho*. As a way of personalization and anthropomorphizing:

The word *Modimo* is also applied to highly venerated persons. Thus a chief, who after death will be adored as a god [sic], may be hailed by a grateful subject as *Modimo ao me* [my god]. Well-beloved missionaries may be spoken to or of in the same way; one of the most eminent of them was referred to after his death as *Modimo wa Lesotho* [God of Lesotho] (Smith 1961: 118, additions mine).

On reflection, the application of '*modimo*' as *kgwara* [uneasiness] to people with whom the community was uneasy, and whom they found difficult to contain, could have meant that such allegedly 'beloved' missionaries called *modimo* were in fact a nuisance. It all depends on the context of the usage of the word '*modimo*', and this could have been applied to missionaries, who really were liable to being a nuisance and a 'pain in the neck' of the indigenous communities. Chiefs and other members of the community could also fall under the same ironical usage of the word '*modimo*' as *kgwara* [uneasiness].

5.2.8. *Modimo* as Idol (pl. = *Medimo*).

There are no idols or belief in idols in STR, as the missionaries also discovered. There were no objects of worship traced among people they later classified as ‘ancestor worshipers’. There are no masks in STR, for that matter. Yet, in the search for the concepts of *MODIMO* for comparison with the concepts of the Christian God, I found that the *Sotho* now use the word *modimo* (singular) and *medimo* (plural) for idols - gods, made with human hands, carved from wood and other material, which they themselves do not have traditionally, but about which they hear in the teachings of the missionaries. The *Sotho* must have picked up the idea of *medimo* [idols] from their discussion with Christian missionaries. This naming of *modimo* as the idol became the *Sotho* equivalent for idol (false god) as taught by the Christian people.

In these eight ways in which the word ‘*MODIMO*’ is heard pronounced and used in STR, we have to be conscious of the various and varied usages of that word. We must always distinguish clearly which concept of *MODIMO* is referred to when the *Sotho* use it. From now onwards I will use these categories of the usage of the word *MODIMO* very strictly.

5.3. The Problem of the Translation of the Word ‘*MODIMO*’ as ‘the Christian God’

Conceptually, when speaking about Deity, the *Sotho* meant *MODIMO* the all-pervading force, whereas the missionaries meant God the personal deity of Christianity, the father of Jesus Christ. Translation, however, took no cognisance of this conceptual differences. This has been a problem which the mere translation of words could not solve.

The fact that missionaries in their translation of the Bible in different parts of Africa used mainly Africanized forms of the words ‘Satan’ and ‘devil’ (e.g. *satani*, *shetani*) indicates that in

most cases there was no direct equivalent for Satan in the traditional world-view (Daneel 1989: 146).

Similarly, there was no direct equivalent of *MODIMO* in the Christian religion (Setiloane 1976). Besides looking for equivalents and so on, the process of translation was not politically innocent and not without injury to the people who were being colonized and patronized. The motive behind translation from, the missionary point of view, was to understand indigenous languages in order to be able to dominate and control; to understand the inner logic of the African mind, in order to enter into a process in which the conceptual differences between the African and the European could be minimized or closed, but according to terms and dictates of the missionaries and colonizers (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 221).

In this respect, linguistic classification and translation were metonyms of an embracing process of conversion: the process of making differences into similarity, or reducing the lower order diversities of the 'non-European' (sic) world to the universalistic categories of the West (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 221)

Translation was a process of compromise and the ones most compromised were the Africans. In other words, the missionaries did not change their language to fit into African categories of thought, but the African world and thoughts were changed to fit into the European life-style, yet without gaining the benefits of being 'European'. In the whole process, the Africans had to abandon their own concepts and adopt the European meanings. Translation was a process well managed to fulfil the purposes and the ends of colonization, coercion and Christianization. •

Translation was about the transformation of a people and remaking them, from the depths of their cultural stronghold - language - recreating them to suit what the missionary colonial translators intended to do with them - to subjugate,

Christianize, colonize, and control. Translation was about the management of signs and symbols, to give them meanings which would suit the intentions of those who colonized (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). Even with the prospect of the 'conviction that language, a human creation, could be made into a global medium', that envisaged global language would not have been speculated as an African language or predominantly African in world-view, not by colonizers and Christian missionaries (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 214 - 6).

Missionaries in Africa generally succeeded in imposing their translations of indigenous terms. Backed by the colonial authority, literacy, and guns, they forced their translations upon an entire field of discourse, ... 'the kind of cultural translation which characterized the Christian missionary enterprise was very much a translation 'from above', a process of authorizing, selecting, editing, privileging and promoting certain African religious forms in favor of others (Chidester 1991: 196).

But this did not happen without African people putting up a fight, though all this caused further repossession of the meanings of things. In turn, the *Sotho-Tswana* found new challenges and new creative ways of appropriating some of the tenets of the Christian religion into their African religion. In the end, the process of translation served as a vehicle for further cultural encounter and cultural exchange. For example, as it was with the 'Bushmen':

... the Bushmen proposed their own comparisons, developing a kind of comparative religion 'from below'. In their efforts to make sense out of the new religion of the Christian mission, Bushmen translated its strange practices into familiar terms. ... they compared Sunday worship to their own rituals of purification and protection. In this Bushman's comparative religion, therefore, the Christian rituals of prayers, sermons, and songs was 'the white man's way' to make his encampment pure and safe (Chidester 1991: 196).

In comparison to that, the 'Bushmen' practiced their purification ritual on Sunday too, for their own protection and encampment against the vicious forces of white missionary colonialism. This became an open confrontation, a comparison between two religions, which could be termed 'the battle of the Gods'. For instance, for the *Sotho* the word *MODIMO* existed long before the missionaries came and is not an Africanized term. It, therefore, holds that the two words 'MODIMO' and 'God' are not conceptually equivalent, especially considering that deities are not just conceived in vacuum. The context in which 'God' was conceived was not the same as the one in which *MODIMO* was conceived. What 'God' meant was not the same as what *MODIMO* meant.

What was practical and real for the *Sotho* was not so for missionary-colonizers. The two words *MODIMO* and 'God' have historical and cultural differences in the sense that they have evolved around different religious vital cores. These words have evolved around different religious structures and ethical formations. They have been conceptualized in different cosmologies (world-views) and have had different functions in the various communities which used them.

Translation is necessary for people to start conversing from an apparent common ground. However, we know that in southern Africa there was no common ground, but always uneven ground between the missionaries and colonizers on one side and indigenous people on the other. Translation is a compromise of concepts, which makes people start talking from an apparent similar frame-of-reference and in this the African got the worst of the deal. As Setiloane (1976: 78) points out, unfortunately, the translation of the STR word *MODIMO* to 'God' in Christianity was done prematurely.

This has created a theological and missiological problem, in that the conceptualization of God, according to Setiloane (1976: 78ff), diminished the traditional concept of *MODIMO*. On the other hand, the Christian religion prides itself on, and claims that it is communicating, a supreme and a fulfilling concept of God, in that people can relate to God personally in the sense of enabling

personal contact, which is not possible with *MODIMO*. Ironically, it was only later that Moffat was to conclude that '*Morimo*' (sic) did not convey, to the mind of those who heard it, the idea of God (Setiloane 1976: 78).

But still the word *MODIMO* found its way into the Bible, because there it was going to serve some purpose. With all the doubts about whether *MODIMO* meant a 'Devil', according to an interpreter called Burchell, or stood for an impersonal force, as soon as the role of that word was found, it became good enough to find a place in the Holy Book - the Bible (Chidester 1991: 181).

In reconstructing the history of these translations, the intervention of *Khoikhoi* and *Sotho-Tswana* interpreters is significant. Serving as multilingual mediators conversant both in Dutch and in *Sotho-Tswana* dialects, interpreters were obviously agents of cross-cultural translation. However they were also used in retrospect, to certify the authenticity of the missionary appropriation of an African term for God (Chidester 1991: 181 - 182).

However, in their work of translation they had various variations of the same term *Mulimo* (sic) (apparently *MODIMO*), which Burchell's interpreter translated as 'Devil' (Chidester 1991: 181). But, in the colonizing work of the missionaries:

Although he (Broadbent) maintained that the *Barolong* (a *Sotho-Tswana* Clan) had no concept of a spiritual, invisible, or infinite Being, Broadbent determined, by a process of local comparison, that this term would serve to represent the mission's 'heavenly Father'. Furthermore, Broadbent, like other missionaries, took that term and put it in a book, the Bible, which he declared was the 'word of *Modeemo*' (sic) Through such acts of comparison, translation and symbolic appropriation, therefore, Protestant missionaries on the northern frontier created the lineament of a religious system for people who previously had no religion, no

marriage, and, as Braodbent emphasized, no book, no writing, nor any knowledge of letters (Chidester 1991: 183 addition mine)

Through dubious translation and interpretation the word *MODIMO* now was written, spelt and printed as *Modimo* in the Bible, to represent the Christian God and not the African Deity. Moffat tried to show the *Tswana* that what he was speaking about was not conceptually the same as what the *Tswana* said *MODIMO* was. The *Tswana* interpreters insisted that, that was the case. Moffat accepted the *Tswana* word - *MODIMO* and it was translated as the word 'God' in Christianity. From that time onwards, Bible translations entrenched the notion that *MODIMO* is God.

Currently, African Christian leaders and theologians like Tema (1985) feel that *MODIMO* is a personal God. My stand is that *MODIMO* is a panentheistic and impersonal deity. The concept of a personal *MODIMO*, who has personal attributes similar to those of Christian conceptual influences, is not the traditional notion of the all-pervading force.

Translation is acceptable as something which encourages theological consistency, facilitates the search for equivalents between the languages translated, points at the primacy of the vernacular, showing that the vernacular is an acceptable medium of speaking about God and a medium which God also uses to talk to the indigenous people. However, Sanneh (1989: 166), as will be shown below, does not mention the political implications of translation: 'provided that the motive is not that of transforming, compromising, distorting, or colonizing people and giving them into the hands of the capitalist British imperialists,' 'and that the basis of translation should be on relative common ground'. Moreover, Sanneh (1989: 166) says that:

Scriptural translation rested on the assumption that the vernacular has a primary affinity with the gospel, to the point of

being conceded by the adoption of indigenous terms and concepts for the central categories of the Bible ... (Sanneh 1989: 166).

How did this 'primary affinity' come about? This assumption of translation theory has the potential to be condescending towards indigenous conceptual forms and to distort the meanings of traditional languages. It does not reveal the domination of one culture by another and does not reveal the disdain with which African vernaculars are held by missionaries. African languages would not be trusted to hold, to keep and to convey the gospel accurately, without being supervised by English, Latin, Hebrew and Greek, which are seen to be the rightful bearers of the gospel (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 215).

Languages are not equal in terms of idiom, thought form, logic, cultural assumption and the communication purposes they serve. At worst, there can be equivalent meanings; some nearest estimations of meanings between two or more languages, even within the one language group divided by class and subcultures. All these inequalities of languages are, to an extent, demonstrated by translating words like "Satan", which one does not find in African religions, at least not among the *Sotho-Tswana*, into *Sathane*. [one cannot impose into a language a concept which was not there and not distort meanings]. From such translations Satan was introduced by imposition, for example into the religious thought of STR. African *Badimo* were translated as demons. But Hebrew ancestors remained translated as ancestors and not demons. Translation is thus a process flawed with cultural bias.

According to Sanneh (1979: 178), translation is acceptable as something facilitating the appropriation of the gospel without going through the Western filter; something which brings forward the indigenous conceptual framework as the basis for the assimilation of the message and which helps establish an indigenous church. Therefore it can, and should, result in that purported indigenous church, not resembling those which possess a different conceptual framework, if justice was done in the process.

But, as it is, the new religion (Christianity) which was brought to the Africans demanded the appropriation of concepts such as the Hellenized concepts of the Christian God, which did not necessarily equate to the indigenous imagination of the all-pervading force (*MODIMO*), to resemble the European Christian attributes. The gospel was always presented and proclaimed with urgency. No theological and missiological discussion with Africans was taken into account. In the process, justice was not done. The concepts of *MODIMO* were neglected, if not actually eroded, during translation.

In fact, the missionaries did not see the Africans as equals in culture, religion and sophistication, to warrant any intelligent religious discussion with them. The whole method and attitude of missionaries was triumphalistic and had no respect for local forms of thought. For the missionaries there was almost nothing to discuss with the indigenous people, except to conquer them spiritually and materially.

Sanneh (1978: 70) says that Africans, no doubt, jumped to conclusions about the demands of the new religion. It was not the Africans who jumped into conclusions about the dictates of the new religion. The Africans were rushed and coerced into taking decisions about the new religion, and, in southern Africa, by the might of the colonial British mercenaries. The method of presentation of the gospel was too hurried. Missionaries as evangelists assumed that the gospel had unquestionable rights and demands over the 'souls' of the Africans.

They assumed that the gospel was a superior message; the missionary was superior to the local people; his Christian God was superior, his culture was superior and his weapons were superior. Superiority was assumed on all counts. Despite this attitude, translation demanded more than mere transfer and exchange of words. It demanded a change in the mind-set (conversion) of people, to absorb them into an envisaged capitalist society where Christianized Africans would enter as wage earners and be paid slave wages, as it has turned out to date. Further, Sanneh (1989: 171) says:

... the Methodists were unpersuaded of the wisdom of embracing the *Zulu* term for God, *uNkulunkulu*, fearing that they would be conceding more than they wanted to. So they coined the unwieldy term *uJehovah* (Sanneh 1989: 171).

The problem was that the perpetuation of the assumption that, for the *Zulus*, the word *uNkulunkulu* was the indigenous term for the Christian God, exacerbated the problem. The *Zulu* terms *Unkulunkulu*, *Inkosi* and *Somandla* are not the traditional terms for 'God'. It is the word *uMvelinqange* which is 'Zulu - indigenous' - meaning 'the one who appeared first'. The missionaries preferred abstract terms to the proper names of the local deities. The word *MODIMO* translated as God was one, insisted upon by the *Tswana* on the one hand and preferred by the missionaries on the other, in the place of the proper names of the local deities. But, worst of all, is the fact that *uJehova* now used in the *Zulu* Bible, was actually a deity of the Hebrews who had made war with the Canaanite people, colonized them, demonized their deities, taken their land and given it to the conquering Israelites - the Hebrews. Now this [conquering *uJehova*] had to be a *Zulu* deity.

Further, Sanneh (1989: 171) concedes that the word *uNkulunkulu* was adopted due to yielding to pressure from the *Zulu* people in the field. But, Sanneh (1989: 171ff) does not elaborate on the preferences of the missionaries. The *Zulu* people in the field, the locals, played into the hands of translators by presupposing that *MODIMO* or *Umveliqange* is God, without considering the potential loss of conceptual content on the African side and the gain on the missionary-colonizers' and translators' side.

Certainly, the complex discussion about what terms to employ to describe 'God' suggests that competing forces were at work (Sanneh 1989: 173). Ultimately, words like *MODIMO* and *uNkulunkulu* were employed. In my view *MODIMO* must not be thought of in monotheistic, polytheistic, henotheistic, pantheistic or even deistic conceptualizations but panentheistic terms. *MODIMO* is one who

permeates all things and is integrated with the whole of life, community and individual, and is ever-present.

The missionaries felt justified in adopting the word *MODIMO* in their preaching and translation (Smith 1961: 117). Their immediate concern was conversion and not conceptual accuracy. After decades of preaching, apparently, conceptually at cross-purposes with African people, differing concepts of deity were propagated. The existing church among the *Pedi*, in particular, as the fruit of mission work, goes on without sorting out conceptual, theological, religious or missiological problems caused by translation done in the context of missionary-colonization.

5.4. The Continuity and the Discontinuity of *MODIMO* and the Christian God

In my comparison of the concepts of *MODIMO* in STR and those of the Christian God, I met a concern raised by Idowu (1970). It is a concern for the lack of the teaching of continuity between the African notions of God and the Biblical God. For us, the answer to this question of ‘continuity and discontinuity’ of deities may shed light on whether or not the concepts of *MODIMO* do have any continuity with the concepts of the Christian God. The assumption of this investigation is that there is a conceptual difference between the concepts of the Christian God and the *Sotho* concepts of *MODIMO*. Actually, there is as much discontinuity and difference between them as there is continuity.

The difference between the two is that the Christian God was conceptualized within the history of Israel. Israel claims the revelation of God only as revealed in their conceived history and experience of God. The *Sotho* concepts of *MODIMO* are conceptualized in the context of the need for rain, healing and wellbeing, and not from the need for salvation or deliverance from enemies as Israel would understand it. Salvation in *Sotho* religion is about comprehensive wellbeing. In fact, talking about ‘salvation’ is using Christian religious

terminology not STR terminology. In STR we would rather speak about *bophelo*, which means both life and health. Concerning the continuity and the discontinuity of the concepts of the Christian God and African concepts of God, once more Idowu's (1970: 12) observation sheds some light.

It was a serious mistake that the Church took no account of the indigenous beliefs and customs of Africa when she began her work of evangelization. It is now obvious that by a misguided purpose, a completely new God who had nothing to do with the past of Africa was introduced to her peoples. Thus there was no proper foundation laid for the Gospel message in the hearts of the people and no bridge built between the old and the new; the Church has in consequence been speaking to Africans in strange tongues because there was no adequate communication. In consequence, the Church has on her hands communities of believers who by and large, live ambivalent spiritual lives (Idowu 1970: 12)

Though Idowu would feel strongly that there must be and is continuity between the Christian God and 'God' in Africa, I feel that his assumption was influenced by the conviction and mission to communicate the Christian God to African people in a way that was not alienating to Africans. The concern was not to communicate the deities of Africa to missionaries, for example, but to make a contribution to the understanding of the Christian God and for the extension and propagation of the God of Christianity. But, from one Black Theological perspective:

It is not unknown for Christian preachers to present 'God's demands', linked closely to 'God's' power and omniscience, in a form of fear-inducing threats. 'Hell' will be the inevitable consequence for those who disobey, and 'Heaven' the sublime reward of the obedient. People are, in effect, bullied (though the preachers would call it 'exhorted') into submitting to God's demands (Ntwasa and More 1973: 20).

From the southern African experience, this comment by Ntwasa and More (1973: 20) in one way among others, shows us how Africans viewed the missions of the Christian God, as revealed in the sermons and actions of missionary-colonizers. This was the way Christianity and the Christian God were commanding, condemning, coercing, colonizing, conquering and Christianizing. This is irreconcilable with what *MODIMO* should be in STR - not choosing and making favors between IT's creatures; not calling some and conquering others; not colonizing some and subjecting others to perpetual poverty, landlessness and powerlessness. *MODIMO* is both good and weird, fearful and wonderful.

In other words, Idowu (1970: 22ff), understandably not a southern African but certainly conversant with such issues and concerns about mission, had readily accepted that the Christian concepts of God were better and supreme, and that they superceded the African concepts of deities. This investigation does not make that assumption. Idowu (1970) was concerned with affirming that the Christian God was indeed present in Africa and was doing important things in Africa, while, on the other hand, this Christian God was working and revealing Himself more clearly to Israel. The time had come for the Christian God to be communicated in Greek and Hebrew and Western thoughts in Africa. But what the missionaries looked for, according to p'Bitek (1970), was an African name for the Christian God, a search about which he alerts African scholars.

Therefore, it becomes unacceptable that the important things the Christian God might have been doing in Africa was to prepare Africa for the gospel (*preparatio evangelica*) (Mbiti: 1992). I wonder, then, why 'God' would choose this strategy and not save Africa without having to go through the history of Israel, and go all round Europe and America, before 'He' came to Africa through the missionaries.

The fact is that 'He' chose Europeans to communicate 'His' purposes to Africans in a particularly culturally, economically and politically alienating way. Be that as it may, history is past, and yet history is still with us. If the missionary-colonizers' method was the only way to know the Christian God the

question remains: who was in charge of the missions? Was it the British colonial empire, or the Christian God?

5.5. The Case of the *Batswana* Concepts of *MODIMO*

5.5.1. *MODIMO* in Relation to *Legodimo*

According to Setiloane (1976) *MODIMO* is intangible and mysterious. *Mysterium* (Otto 1923) is also the primary quality of *MODIMO*. *Legodimo* [celestial vault] is the primary manifestation of *MODIMO* (Setiloane 1976: 77, 78). Setiloane (1976: 77, 78) gives the impression that *MODIMO* has an etymological derivation from the word *godimo* [above] - meaning that the word *MODIMO* is constructed from an idea that has to do with the understanding of *godimo* [above]. This is the same impression about *legodimo* [heavens above/heaven] as an abode of the Christian God as it would be understood in the Christian religion. But, it would be erroneous to think that in STR the abode of *MODIMO* is *legodimong* [heaven]. *MODIMO* is everywhere, permeating everything (Ngoetjana D .1996: 14th July, Interview).

The evidence from STR is that the concept '*MODIMO*' in its traditional form has, etymologically, nothing to do with what the Christian religion conceptualizes as heaven, the spiritual abode of the Christian God. *Legodimo* [celestial vault] ends with the blue sky (Tema 1985). Reference to *legodimo* [celestial vault] must not be confused with the new Christian reference to *legodimo* as heaven - the abode of the Christian God.

In STR there is no cosmological location conceptualized as heaven. In other words the traditional concept of *MODIMO* is an all-pervading, impersonal force that has no spiritual, physical, metaphysical or even any metaphorical location conceptualized as heaven which is supposed to be IT's home. *MODIMO* has no home. In other words, *MODIMO* lives nowhere - meaning that it holds that *MODIMO* is everywhere and there is no fixed location of IT (Motala 1996 14th

August, Interview). In a sense, *MODIMO* is not conceptually equivalent to the Christian God, as far as the location is concerned .

MODIMO is more of a transcendental deity and *Badimo* are *MODIMO*'s immanent manifestations - meaning that, as far as belief in *Badimo* is concerned, the immanent needs are in the realm of *Badimo*. *MODIMO*'S immensity is unimaginable, and *MODIMO*'s actions cannot be comprehended by humans, according to Setiloane (1976). Setiloane (1976) argues that *MODIMO*'s immensity supersedes that of the imaginable Christian God. The Christian God is imaginable in terms of the anthropomorphic, the anthropoidic and the Christological analogies. But *MODIMO* is not imaginable in those terms (Kgwale 1998 5th May, Interview).

Further, Setiloane (1986: 25) describes the notion of *MODIMO* through the analogy of ink poured on blotting paper. The ink permeates the paper. *MODIMO* is conceptualized as a deity which permeates, penetrates, percolates and spreads like ink in blotting paper. *MODIMO* is panentheistic. *MODIMO* permeates all creation. The presence of *MODIMO* permeates the whole creation.

In pre-Christian times, so far as can be gathered, the Tswana believed in a high god (sic) named Modimo (sic), who was regarded as the creator of all things and the moulder of destiny. He was vaguely (sic) associated with the phenomena of the weather, and punished innovations or departure from established usage by sending wind, hail, or heat, and withholding rain; and death, if not attributable to sorcery, was spoken of as an act of God (Schapera and Comaroff 1991: 53).

Schapera and Comaroff (1991: 53) should be careful of introducing the notion of *MODIMO* as a deity that is located in the sky or heaven by bringing in appellations such as 'high god'. The *Batswana* did not profess this about *MODIMO*. It must also be recalled that it is rare for *MODIMO* to punish. It is *Badimo* who punish members of their own families. Otherwise it is the traditional

society which punishes members who deviate from the norm. The *Mošhate* [Royal Residence] is where wrong-doers are punished. The *Kgotla* [tribal tribunal] which presides in *Mošhate* is the final court of appeal.

5.5.2. How Does *MODIMO* ‘Speak’?

Dehnke (1969) reports that, among *Batswana*, a person called Mongae claimed that at one stage *MODIMO* spoke at *kgotla* [tribal tribunal] on behalf of the victim when justice was contravened. What could have happened there is that, usually, in traditional societies there is a person who sits down to listen carefully to how the case is treated. At the end, after all people have given their opinions, this person is allowed to pronounce the last word of wisdom and judgement. This person is normally credible and trustworthy, is knowledgeable about tribal law, has lots of experience in matters of tribal jurisdiction and is usually an elderly person. His word was taken as the wisest judgement. That is possibly how *MODIMO* could have spoken at *kgotla*.

This is not to deny that there were oracles [‘god-responses’] in their own right in STR, just as reported in the Christian Bible (I Sam. 3: 1 - 21), but it was the Ancestral voices, those of *Badimo* not *MODIMO*. In STR the divine auditions of *Badimo* continue and are common up till today. The *Badimo* continue to speak clearly in dreams as well. Strange voices are still heard, even in daylight. The interlocutor the late Albertina Mashiye Ngoetjana, in her last days on earth, heard such voices. One day, the voice directed her to sing a hymn. She was a long-standing Lutheran Christian in the *Botšhabelo* district. The voice she heard was that of her father. Her father was one of the early Christian converts of BMS, converted to be Lutheran in the same district (Ngoetjana A. 1996: 19th December, Interview). Above all is the Supreme Being (sic) says Parrinder (1874: 24); and

... there is much more general belief in him than has been thought in the past. Often he is considered to be so remote that men do not pray to

him regularly. But in time of great distress many Africans turn to God in desperation. He is the final resort, the last court of appeal, and he may be approached directly without an intermediary ... (Parrinder 1974: 24).

But, concerning the *Batswana*, what Parrinder (1974: 24) says about the general belief in *MODIMO* holds water. It is also true that the *Tswana* consult *MODIMO* like all other *Basotho* in times of need and that there are those unusual occasions when *MODIMO* can be approached directly. It must be remembered that *MODIMO* would be prayed to directly when all other efforts at finding solutions have been exhausted, such as, first and foremost, consulting *Badimo* and Traditional Healers.

5.5.3. Is There Any Hierarchy of Deities in STR?

Mbiti (1970: 12), with whom I do not agree in terms of my observations, records that the *Tswana* people have an hierarchical concept of 'God'. The descending order of that hierarchy has spirits at a lower level under 'God', with humanity at the lowest level beneath the spirits. What I observe is that among the *Sotho* including the *Tswana*, the hierarchy exists only in the social setting.

There is no hierarchy in the religious setting. There is only *MODIMO* and *Badimo*, and they are not conceptualized in an hierarchical structure but more in a monistic structure. The observation of any form of hierarchy among *Badimo* would have to resemble that of their former position in society and their families. In other words, the hierarchies exist in the living community.

5.5.4. About the Personal Names of *MODIMO*

Brown's (1969:113) observation mentioned below is closer to what I find, although he is not critically conscious of the conceptual differences between

MODIMO as an impersonal deity and the Christian God as claimed to be a personal being. He says:

...but there is also a being whose presence pervades the universe, whose handiwork is everywhere manifest, who is the great unknown and invisible, but, nevertheless, real. The God whose name is too holy to be used in everyday speech, or by every child of the race, and to whom no personal name at all is given (Brown 1969: 113).

On the contrary, the *Sotho-Tswana* have personal names for *MODIMO*, e.g. *Hlaa-hlaa-macholo*; *Kgobe* (and many others to be mentioned and presented below). The personal names given to *MODIMO* must not be interpreted as implying that *MODIMO* was conceptualized as a personal deity. To repeat, *MODIMO* was not conceptualized as a 'being' but as a deity. 'Being' denotes existence in an imaginable sense, which could have a definable form. The *Sotho* notion of *MODIMO* is not able to be conceptualized in a form. In STR, *MODIMO* is conceptualized as amorphous (Sefoka 1996: 13th May, Interview).

Further, Mbiti (1970) makes certain comments about the *Sotho-Tswana* religious concepts of *MODIMO* which must be considered at this point. In particular, his comments on the issue of the *Tswana*, who Setiloane (1976) and Tema (1990) claim have a concept of a personal *MODIMO*, equivalent to that of a Christian God. However, Setiloane (1976) believes that there is more of *MODIMO* in *Tswana* than the missionaries realized.

Mbiti (1970) says that the African people do not consider 'God' to be a human, and rightly so. But Africans, he claims, have anthropomorphic and anthropoidic descriptions of 'God'. Contrary to this thesis, those descriptions are seen as the personalizations of *MODIMO*. Otherwise, *MODIMO* the all-pervading deity, is not conceptualized as a human.

5.5.5. *MODIMO* as Father

If we were to assume, as Mbiti (1970) claim, that the concept of God as Father is an authentic African idea, conceptually speaking, since the African communities teach that every person of one's father's age is one's father, then *MODIMO* would be conceptualized polytheistically, since every father in the village would be a representative of the image of *MODIMO*. In other words, there would be as many *MODIMOs* as the number of fathers in the village, multiplied by the number of children and all those who must acknowledge them as fathers, socially speaking. This would be misleading, since the STR concepts of *MODIMO* are not polytheistic.

In addition, *MODIMO* could be conceptualized henotheistically, in that all other fathers were acceptable as fathers, besides the biological father, without the biological father demanding his individual right and recognition as the real, the only true and authentic biological father. In STR the authentic biological father does not need to affirm his sole right to be the only father among the many fathers in the village. This is not like the Christian God who, as Father, is the only Father, the only true Father, as Christians claim. The STR concept of *MODIMO* is not polytheistic, nor is it henotheistic. IT is monistic. The logical conclusion of Mbiti's (1970) idea would therefore cause us to jump to false conclusions, i.e. that there was a possibility that, in STR, *MODIMO* was polytheistic and henotheistic.

On the subject of 'father'; in STR there is no 'Father in Heaven'. The closest geographical location of the abode of *MODIMO* is the hole at the place called *Loowe*, about which the myth of the origin of human communities is told among the *Batswana*. In STR, it is the essence of *MODIMO* that matters most, and not IT's residence (Setiloane 1976).

Mbiti (1975: 92) continues to say that some of the *Tswana* people address 'God' as 'Father of my father'. It could be that this expression began to be used after

the arrival of Christians. Besides that, it could mean that *MODIMO* moulded the Ancestors (Motala E. 1996: 28th July, Interview). In addition to that, the *Tswana* conceptual meaning of such an expression means great-grand-father. It has nothing to do with *MODIMO* as a pervasive force.

In other words, from another perspective, *MODIMO* can be conceptualized as great-grandfather or great-grandmother, *Khukhukhukhu* in *Sepedi* [great-grandfather or great-grandmother], in *Setswana* that person is called *Nkoko* socially speaking. From henceforth they will be referred to as *Khukhukhukhu-Nkoko* [great-grandparents].

5.5.6. Is *MODIMO* the Omnipotent?

With the *Tswana* included, Mbiti (19075: 12) says they:

... see God's omnipotence in terms of his being more powerful than the spirits which otherwise are generally considered to be more powerful than men. In this context, power is viewed more hierarchically, so that God is at the top as the omnipotent, beneath him are the spirits with lesser power, and lower still are men with comparatively little power or no power at all (Mbiti 1975: 12).

The problem with Mbiti (1975: 12) is that he observes the *Tswana* world-view from a Eurocentric viewpoint, uses the scholastic views of 'God' and applies them uncritically, as if they were the absolute images of what deity is. For instance, the STR view of *MODIMO* is not articulated in terms of omnipotence. Rather, the whole of experienced reality is an encounter with all pervasive power. As said earlier, *MODIMO* is manifested through natural phenomena, especially rain and lightning (Setiloane 1975: 58ff).

The *Modimo* [Ancestor] who matters most may not always be the most elderly but the one who is active, who draws the attention of the family. But, when it

comes to regulating social life, where there is no ceremony of appeasement, a proper protocol is followed. The pervasiveness of *MODIMO* is axiomatically assumed. IT's power is not just called upon.

The living take for granted that all is done under that presence of *MODIMO* without having consciously to acknowledge IT. The living pass on their message to the nearest *Modimo* [Ancestor], which is the deceased parent or one who has recently died, to pass the message on to the *Badimo* [Ancestors] of old, to whom the family no longer relate directly. Once again, it is on this point, i.e. the concept of *MODIMO* as the deity that people do not relate to, which coincides with *Khukhukhukhu-Nkoko* [great-grandparent] as *Modimo* [Ancestor]. Yet, we must remember that *MODIMO* is neither an elevated nor a deified *Modimo* [Ancestor]. IT is an all-pervasive THING.

I think it was due to Christian evangelism that Mbiti (1975: 12) claimed that the *Tswana* consider 'God' to be omnipotent, supreme, transcendent, remote, the only creator, originator and cause of all things, and the moulder of the destiny of each individual (1975: 16, 47 - 54). In STR, *MODIMO* created people as a community and not as individuals.

5.6. *MODIMO* as a Philosophical Concept

5.6.1. *MODIMO* is an Existential Experience

MODIMO is both a philosophical concept and much more, an existential experience. In STR, people encounter that which they cannot comprehend. Life is full of surprises. The only answer that people can give to the surprises of life, in order to feel coherent and to have meaning, is *MODIMO* (Motaung 1997: April 21st, Interview)

For instance, Mr. Isaac Tshipu (1997: 1st August, Interview) tells of the mysterious healing of his daughter *Moipone*, who was born a cripple. Up to the

age of six this young girl could not walk. One of the villagers who was visiting told Mr. Tshipu to place his daughter at the opening of the goat's kraal in the morning when the goats were released into the pastures. Mr. Tshipu did this. When the goats came to pass through the opening of the kraal, before they could trample on the little girl she jumped up and walked away. From that day to this she has been able to walk. Mr. Tshipu thanked *Badimo* for this mysterious healing of his daughter. Tshipu told me this story when he was explaining the surprises or miracles which *MODIMO* did in olden days.

5.6.2. *MODIMO* is a Community Experience

People who live as communities, in cultural and geographical proximity to one another, have similar religious encounters and similar questions about the impact of the unknown. This sense of mystery experienced by the people is collectively termed *MODIMO*.

New members of the community, especially children, hear about *MODIMO* first from the community (family). The community relate what they have gathered over the years concerning *MODIMO*. The story of *MODIMO* is passed on from generation to generation. Though, in STR, there is no conscious evangelization of community members, in the process of socialization the community is conscientized about the notion of *MODIMO*.

In STR, it is most likely that ceremonies that involve the invocation of *MODIMO* are performed at the communal level. It is at the communal level that the continuous conscientization and propagation of the notion of *MODIMO* takes place. This is what makes *MODIMO* a communal experience.

5.6.3. *MODIMO* Conceptualized as a Numinous Awe

MODIMO is conceptualized as a numinous awe (Otto 1923), though he was speaking about the Christian God. But, when it comes to the immanent concept

of *MODIMO*, it is the *Badimo* who take pre-eminence. *Badimo* are the immanent presence, and *MODIMO* is the transcendent absence, who is invoked only for particular reasons, especially to bring rain, as mentioned earlier.

MODIMO in philosophical terms is best presented by Whitehead's (1978: 243) process theology. According to process theology the whole of experienced reality is interrelated and coherently integrated. Though Whitehead (1978) was in fact not referring to *MODIMO* of STR his process theology best expresses what *MODIMO* is. Since, thus far the present research indicates that *MODIMO* is an impersonal deity conceptualized in philosophical terms, it is appropriate to speak of IT as the chief example of metaphysical principles. Since I agree with Whitehead, I shall speak as if Whitehead was referring to *MODIMO*, so that we don't confuse the usage of the word 'God' and *MODIMO*.

In STR cosmology, *MODIMO* is the binding factor and the ultimate objective of the search for the meaning of life. In STR's abstract thought, *MODIMO* is the most abstract of that which can be imagined as the molder of life. But, when it comes to the practical imagination of the reality of *MODIMO*, it is *Badimo* who replace *MODIMO*. *MODIMO* remains in the abstract realm, *Badimo* remain in the practical realm.

The *Sotho* people have thought about the beginning of the emergence of humans. The beginning, in STR, is with human societies. *MODIMO* for them is as old as the beginning of human societies. In Whitehead's (1978: 343) thinking, *MODIMO* is as old as creation. *MODIMO* arrived with creation; not before creation but at the same time as creation. Without creation there is no *MODIMO*. Translated in the *Sotho* thought pattern, without human societies there is no *MODIMO*. *MODIMO* and creation are co-existent. *MODIMO* does not feature without creation. *MODIMO* is irrelevant without creation.

The existence of *MODIMO* is conceptual and lacks the fullness of actuality (Whitehead 1978: 343). This is another way of saying that *MODIMO* is abstract,

not concrete. As for *MODIMO*, IT has never ever been conceptualized in concrete form. IT is not concrete, not human at all, and IT cannot ever be human. The Christian religion conceptualizes the Christian God in abstract form, but it also claims that 'God' appeared in concrete (human) form in the person of Jesus Christ (Jn. 1: 1 - 14).

5.6.4. MODIMO Originated by Conceptual Experience

From the observations, on the human side, *MODIMO* originated by conceptual experience. Humans were firstly sunk by the realization of life and the consciousness of life. There was a plurality and a multiplicity of existent things and many unanswered questions about the meaning of existence, the purpose of existence and the threads of existence. There was a need to bring forth questions in search of answers, which culminated in seeking what is called *MODIMO*. *MODIMO* is the infinite reason for all mentality, the unity of vision seeking physical multiplicity (Whitehead 1978: 348).

The possibility of conceptualizing *MODIMO* became the hope for the unfolding of the perplexities of life. The doctrine of aseity (autonomy of deity / self-existence/ self-origination) of *MODIMO* is about the concept of the ancient existence of *MODIMO*. *MODIMO* was not created. *MODIMO* created ITSELF. *MODIMO* did not come to be. *MODIMO* is ancient-existence itself. Aseity is the attribute of *MODIMO* ITSELF.

Aseity claims that there was no time when *MODIMO* was not existent. *MODIMO* has always been there pre-existently (in ancient times). Existence, not creation, has no beginning and no ending. There is no beginning or ending to *MODIMO*. *MODIMO* is from everlasting to everlasting, from pre-existence to eternity, or post-existence. The aseity of *MODIMO* is also about INFINITY. This fits well with the notion of the Christian God.

Taking this matter to its logical conclusion would mean that, if *MODIMO* has no beginning nor ending, and if there was no beginning nor ending with IT, therefore, there would be no starting or finishing with IT. And, if there was no starting with IT on one side, there is no beginning with IT. In other words, saying that there is an ancient-existence with *MODIMO* is the same as saying there is ancient-unknowability with IT. In most cases, what humans are experiencing is the ancient-unknowability of *MODIMO* more than the ancient-existence of IT.

5.7. The Personalization and Personification of *MODIMO*

5.7.1. The Personalization and Personification of *MODIMO* in Parents

There are a lot of personifications of *MODIMO* in STR. These personifications are more convincing than if *MODIMO* could have been conceptualized as a personal deity, especially with the *Tswana* people. The *Pedi* and *Basotho* have no convincing data on the personal attributes of *MODIMO*. The *Tswana* concepts of the person of *MODIMO* seem to have more evidence that they originated long ago, before the advent of Christianity. But, the *Tswana* express the names of *MODIMO* in abstract and non-gender terms. This confirms that for them *MODIMO* is an impersonal deity. *MODIMO* has no gender. *MODIMO* is neuter.

But, there is a common center, which we find among all the *Sotho*-speaking people, that the biological parent (*Modimo*) is the core of the personalization of *MODIMO*. In other words, the personal attributes of *MODIMO* are revealed in the person of the parent. STR specifically says that a parent is *Modimo* in the sense of parents characterizing *MODIMO*. Parents are representatives and symbols of *MODIMO*. At death, especially, parents remain as Ancestors (*Badimo*).

A parent is *Modimo* in a symbolic sense and not in an ontological sense. In other words, a parent is *Modimo* but *MODIMO* the all-pervading force is not a parent,

is not a biological being nor is conceptualized in anthropomorphic terms, nor is *MODIMO* conceptualized as a being like humans and animals, which exist as created beings.

In our observation we must be aware of the Christian personalizations of God intruding into the STR personalizations of *MODIMO*. We must also keep in mind that we are looking for the concepts of *MODIMO* in STR and comparing them with the concepts of the Christian God. Tema (1895) and Kgatla (1992) have this issue of the personalizations of *MODIMO* as a parent.

Parents are highly respected in the *Sotho* traditional communities. *MODIMO* is even more respected by the *Sotho* people. Respect carries more virtue than love for *MODIMO*. Respect is demanded more than love for parents in STR. The presence of *MODIMO* in African traditional communities is symbolized by the parent (Tema 1985: 16).

The divine Fatherhood is thus projected to the existential situation by the physical biological parent-agent. This implies that God (sic) is ever with and behind the biological father (sic) (Tema 1985: 16).

According to Tema (1985: 18ff), therefore, the biological 'father' is the image of *MODIMO*. On the question of the femininity or masculinity of *MODIMO*, Tema (1985: 18ff) says that this is not a subject for consideration. *MODIMO*, he says, is beyond doubt always perceived in masculine terms. *MODIMO* is regarded as a true and personal father. Yet, the femininity of *MODIMO* is not totally absent. The femininity of *MODIMO* comes when SHE is associated with the earth, as Mother Earth (1985: 18). But, in my experience, the *Sotho* conceptualize *MODIMO* in neuter gender terms. Remember that Tema's (1985) focus was on the 'realization of true humanity through liturgy' and not on a conscious comparison of the conceptual contents of *MODIMO* and the Christian God.

Tema (1985: 18ff) continues to say that the prefix 'Ra' denotes father or masculine gender. The following names of *MODIMO* confirm it. *Ra-matla-ohle* [omnipotent]. *Ra-masedi-a-poloko* [the glorious savior, father of lights]. These names are not genuinely *Sotho* but are Christian by origin. All the personal attributes denoted in the names mentioned above are clearly Christian. The notion of God as father of lights is Hebraic in its roots. The notion of God as omnipotent comes from the higher middle ages' scholastic Christianity and is Thomist in its roots. There is the greatest possibility that these concepts were brought in through Christian teachings.

But Tema (1985: 18) continues to say that *MODIMO*, 'remains at all times the living spiritual reality worthy of being symbolized in living physical parenthood of 'father'. According to Tema (1985), *MODIMO* permeates all that is and denotes the very spirituality of the Christian God. It must be noted once more that Tema (1985) is immersed in the Christian ethic and: thus is bound to confuse the usage and the concepts of *MODIMO* and those of the Christian God. This is a problem the *Pedi* have long lived with, ever since the coming of Christianity. We are going to have to live with this problem longer, in the African theological world, unless we start de-Hellenizing the African concepts of deity.

5.7.2. *MODIMO* and the Notion of 'Spirit'

For God to the *Pedi* is nothing else but Spirit, an ever-present spiritual father-being who can see and hear, because man (sic) speaks with him in prayer (Tema 1985: 18).

Still, Tema's position is riddled with problems. When the *Pedi* say *MODIMO ke MOYA* [GOD is SPIRIT], they mean 'wind' or 'air' which occupies space - the atmosphere, but, as we said before, they do not mean that the wind and air are *MODIMO*. When Christians say God is Spirit they refer to a non-material and yet spirit-body being, which would have been a creature if it was an angel (not just meaning a messenger) but a creature with a spirit body. When Christians refer

to God as Spirit, they mean the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit and not just 'wind' or 'air'.

In the *Pedi* cosmology there is no spirit world. There is only one reality where the living and the deceased co-exist. In STR there are celestial dynamistic powers, not spirit. Only special people like the Traditional Healers are able to harness dynamistic (celestial) powers for good or for evil. *MODIMO* saturates all this reality as well, thus making *MODIMO* the sum total of all dynamistic powers. This expression must not be interpreted as meaning that *MODIMO* is all-powerful, in the sense of omnipotence, but that *MODIMO* is an aggregation of natural powers of both the earth and the celestial vault. *MODIMO* is dynamistic and not animistic.

What Tema (1985: 15f) says about *MODIMO*, seeing, hearing and receiving prayers can only make sense when referred to a personal being. But *MODIMO* is not a being. *MODIMO* is a deity. The personal attributes of *MODIMO* are merely personalization. We must take into account the allegation of Tema (1985: 15f) that:

...the state of African concept of God (sic) is rather too deceptive and misleading to people of non-African origin or those superficially acquainted with African tradition and traditional values. To the African, God is never a thing but always a conscious personality, towards whom a personal relationship and attitudes are mostly expressible through his psychic and physical actions and reactions...(Tema 1985: 15).

This is where Tema (1985) differs from Setiloane (1976), on the issue of whether *MODIMO* is a 'thing' (object) or a THING (numinous awe). This thesis takes the position of Setiloane (1976) and maintains that this THING is not metaphysical 'spirit' thing. Tema (1985: 18) continues to emphasize that:

...when viewed with genuine understanding, everybody gains conviction that the African's concept of God is that God is impersonally and personally involved with him, as the work of his own hands. Yet as a result of traditional practices along the 'go hlompha' [to respect] principle, God's names have fallen so much into disuse that the impression has developed that the African has a limited knowledge of God, and that if he ever had any, he is, in any case, an impersonal deity, too remote from the affairs of man (sic), leaving a vacuum only filled by the spirits of ancestors, whom he worships (Tema 1985: 18)

In my reading of STR, *MODIMO* is not personally involved with individual humans in the same way in which the Christian God is said to be personally (meaning spiritually) involved with individuals. Further, when Setiloane (1976) refers to *MODIMO* as *SELO* [A THING] he uses *Tswana* poetic language. A THING in this sense is the most venerable person. This veneration is given to chiefs and valiant people such as brave warriors. There is a sense that a THING has the connotation of a monster, a dreaded animal. When *MODIMO* is referred to as a THING the concept employed is not that of a dreadful monster but the image of someone approached with awe and religious reverence, something of Otto's (1923) notion of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, a numinous God.

In STR *MODIMO* is regarded as *SELO* [A THING]. *MODIMO* is not *selo* [a worthless object/ thing]. Even if *MODIMO* has no history of victories in war, IT was never conceptualized as a useless thing. There was always, whenever it was appropriate, an attitude of respect, awe and reverence for *MODIMO*. Otherwise it would be better for traditional *Sotho* people not to engage themselves with *MODIMO*. It would be advisable for all, except Traditional Healers, to stay away from *MODIMO* rather than to get too close and too acquainted with IT, especially in an individual, 'spiritual' way.

5.7.3. The Conversation About *MODIMO*

It was a most amazing experience for the *Sotho* to see how Christians could speak so freely about their God. The *Sotho* would never do that with *MODIMO*. The same would be the case with relating to parents and elderly people. Children do not just initiate a conversation with parents or elderly people, especially when there are adult visitors present. There is always a proper way of relating to parents and the elderly, i.e. with respect and according to the social norms and hierarchy, otherwise the young ones would be scolded, or even punished for their lack of respect and manners. On the other hand:

Usually, a parent may not call his own child by name if such is named after its grandfather or grandmother, i.e. named after its father's parent. Should the parent call that child by its name, it is implied that he/she has intentionally insulted or dishonoured God, whose authority is embodied in and projected through his/her mother or father (Tema 1985: 16)

The parent is the projection of *MODIMO*. The person of *MODIMO* is reflected and represented in that of the biological parent. For the sake of respecting *MODIMO*, the all-pervading deity, I would rather say that the parent is *Modimo* [Ancestor], just to differentiate between the two. In other words the parents are not *MODIMO*, ontologically and essentially. They are *Modimo* by reverence, social hierarchy and by virtue of having given birth to the child and are responsible for its well-being and nurturing. The same respect for a parent as *Modimo* is seen when:

...someone's father-in-law's name, or a syllable of that name, denotes an article or substance like salt (*letswai*), the daughter-in-law must never pronounce or use that word. Calling or mentioning it will be regarded as her having insulted God whose authority over her is projected through the father-in-law. She will have to formulate a word or name to denote salt (*letswai*) (Tema 1985: 16).

For example, instead of saying *letswai* she would rather say *monoko* (salt) or use a self-made name instead of a synonym. We further observe that the authority of *MODIMO* is passed through the biological parents. Conversation with biological parents must be undertaken with much caution. The life force of *MODIMO* is passed on in the social hierarchy through the biological parent. The eldest person in the family has a more powerful life force than the youngest. Even when that eldest person has died, the power of the life force which emanated from *MODIMO* remains in effect.

The effectiveness of this life force can only begin to wane in the fourth and fifth generation. It is only when *Badimo* have faded from the memory of the living that their life force becomes ineffective. In this way the continuation of the life of a parent depends on remembrance by the progeny. The more the Ancestors fade from the memory of the living the more conversation with them is taken seriously. The elderly Ancestors can only be conversed with through other Ancestors in their hierarchical sequence, according to age and former hierarchy in the social organization.

Even then, when deceased parents fade away into oblivion or have gone to *badimong* [abode of Ancestors], the more remote they are and removed from life, the more important it is that people should never ever tamper with them. The more they become *Khukhukhukhu-Nkoko* the more they assume the invisible, dynamistic powers of what is conceptualized as *MODIMO*, who also must not be tampered with and must just be left alone. So is *Khukhukhukhu-Nkoko* as *MODIMO*. *Khukhukhukhu-Nkoko* is *Modimo wa Badimo* [Ancestor of Ancestors]. *Khukhukhukhu-Nkoko* is *motswadi wa Badimo* [parent of Ancestors]. *Khukhukhukhu-Nkoko* is *Modimo wa bo Rragolo le bo Mmakgolo* [God of Great-grandparents/ Great-grand mothers and fathers]. Yet, in STR there is a clear distinction between *MODIMO* as Deity and *Modimo* as parent. But, when it comes to the vicissitudes of life, *MODIMO* as GOD is always overruled by *Modimo* as parent. That is why there is more conversation with newly-departed

Ancestors than with ancient, elderly Ancestors (Mafokoane 1996: 27 - 29th December, Interview).

The 'remembrance ceremony' as a medium of communication and conversation with Ancestors (*Badimo*), depends on the remembrance, the propitiation, the appeasement and the visitation of the community to the active and newly-departed *Badimo*. If the community is not encouraged to remember *Badimo* and *MODIMO*, as was the case in traditional *Sotho* communities, *MODIMO* will surely not feature a lot in their real life world. Conversation with and about *MODIMO* would become totally unheard-of.

As it was, *MODIMO* was not central, nor was *MODIMO* a key element in STR everyday conversations. The active role-players in STR are the family elders, the maternal uncles, the paternal aunts, *Dingaka* [Traditional Healers] and *Badimo*. On the other hand, the Christian God is said to be very involved with and personally active among humans, and responds to their daily prayers.

5.7.4. MODIMO as Head of Family

Kgatla (1992: 20) says:

From many a story we hear that God (sic) and the original man (sic) were in a very close relationship. It was like a family relationship in which God was the parent and the men were children (Kgatla 1992: 20).

In the *Sotho* hierarchy of society it makes sense to conceptualize *MODIMO* as occupying the headship of a family, since the heads of families were regarded as *Modimo* (and head of family does not mean a male person). We observe once more that the hierarchy is in the family and not in the religious realm.

But, the fact that *MODIMO* was like a family member amongst humans must not be taken literally. The fact that *MODIMO* was very close and that people could

talk to IT is only a religious image, a personification and personalization. It only means that traditional communities adhered to strict norms. The values of respect, obedience, humaneness, kindness and hospitality were cherished and held onto tenaciously.

The point we are making here is that *MODIMO* is axiomatically conceptualized as head of the family, as in a traditional *Sotho* family setting. *MODIMO* is also conceptualized as a member of the community, in the sense that *MODIMO* permeates all of society. I imagine that the awareness of the presence of *MODIMO* in the community would yield manifold responses.

The community should live very strictly, and should abide by the social regulations, so as to make sure that they do not upset the social balance or the social coherence, lest *MODIMO* (as ‘head’ of society) be terribly disappointed, the repercussions of which might be unbearable. The community should also feel that their needs would be met, since the power to respond to needs, i.e. *MODIMO*, was with them as their head, leader and provider. At this point we observe that *MODIMO* is ambivalent, in that IT can be desired as part of the family and of society, and yet feared as a dangerous one to associate with.

5.7.5. Speaking About *MODIMO* in Pronouns

Among the *Tswana* there are other traditionally developed concepts of *MODIMO*. Among them it is permissible to speak of *MODIMO* using pronouns such as *Ona* and *One* ([IT] both non-gender pronouns for Deity). *MODIMO* is neuter gender. There is no debate among the *Sotho*, especially among the *Tswana*, as to whether *MODIMO* is male or female. In fact, *MODIMO* is not conceptualized in generic terms. *MODIMO* is not human nor is *MODIMO* a being. No gender is attributed to the *Sotho* DEITY. The *Tswana* have names which are composed of pronouns like *Ona / One* which are used for *MODIMO*, the all-pervading DEITY.

In *Tswana* traditional religion *Modimo* was used with the pronoun *ona*. The interpreters who accompanied the first missionaries used this word to translate the word "God". His name was placed under a strict taboo and one referred to him only with the pronoun. The pronoun occurs in traditional names like *Thatayaona*, *Gaongalelwe*, *Otukile*, and so on. Such names are definitely not of Christian origin (Dehnke 1968: 2 unpublished paper).

The following are more such names: *Gaongalelwe* [IT cannot be turned against/ defied / ignored]; *Godiraone* [IT is working / acting]; *Goitsione* [IT knows]; *Keolibile* [I am facing IT]; *Oabile* [IT has given / distributed]; *Ompiditse* [IT called me]; *Onkgopotse* [IT has remembered me]; *Otukile* [IT is burning/ angry/ not happy]; *Samodimo* [It belongs to IT]; *Setswamodimong* [It comes from IT]; *Sewagodimo* [It fell from IT/ from above]; *Thatayaona* [IT's might] (see Setiloane 1976: Addendum).

The above-mentioned *Tswana* names for *MODIMO* are really astounding. They have the unquestionable connotation that *MODIMO* is a 'personal' being, in the sense that long ago the *Tswana* conceptualized IT in terms of personal attributes. In the names mentioned above we observe that IT has knowledge, IT is mighty, is calling or has a voice, IT is active, working, distributing goods (*sewagodimo*) [things / goods descend from IT] and that people can look up to IT and know that they belong to IT. I have been consistent in this thesis in saying that *MODIMO* is non-human, is not necessarily active and is impersonal, and that such personal attributions are personalizations of IT. That still holds. "Among the *Bechuana* (sic), God is never looked for in material things, nor even in the *badimo* [ancestors], but only in man" (Brown 1969: 121).

The *Sotho* personification and personalization of the attributes of *MODIMO* are found in people such as parents, chiefs and legendary heroes. Despite the astounding revelation of the knowledge of *MODIMO*, as seen in the names used by the *Tswana* for *MODIMO*, the *Tswana* do not conceptualize IT as becoming

a human being such as one finds with the Christian God in Jesus as a human (Jn. 1: 1-14; I Tim. 3: 16; Heb. 1: 1 - 8; I Jn. 5: 20).

Other names, found especially among the *Tswana*, which personalize *MODIMO* are: *Modiri* [maker/ worker]. *Montshi* [originator/ first-one]. *Mothei* [founder / originator] (Setiloane 1976: addendum).

5.8. The Local Names and Roles of *MODIMO*

In STR there are various names given to *MODIMO*. In my search for the concepts of *MODIMO*, these names were found both in the literature consulted and in *Sotho* communities. In order to extract the concepts of *MODIMO*, I looked into the meanings of and explanations for these names from the available literature and fieldwork data. I also looked at the roles of *MODIMO* as revealed through these names. I was cautious about the possible intrusion of the concepts of the Christian God and discarded those views which were apparently Christian. I consciously wanted to de-Hellenize the Christian influences on these concepts as far as possible. In other words, I wanted to discover and unearth what the genuinely *Sotho* concepts of *MODIMO* were before the Christianization and Hellenization of *Sotho* deity concepts occurred. The following are the local names that were discovered.

5.8.1. *Thobega*

MODIMO is called *Thobega* by the *Bahurutse* (an ethnic group among the *Tswana*). *Thobega ga a dire sepe, mme go a diragala* ["Thobega is not doing anything, but it happens"] (Dehnke 1968: 4). *Thobega* is symbolized by *maru a phatswa* [thunder clouds]. From *Thobega* issue destruction and blessing. In comparison to the Judaeo-Christian God, here there could have been some correlation with *Jehovah*, the God of fire and clouds. But, *Thobega* is not necessarily conceptualized as the creator, judge or finisher of the world, but represents the abolition of opposites, these being destruction and blessing.

When there are extremes in life, extremes like good and evil affecting a situation simultaneously, *MODIMO - Thobega* is the only deity that can contain the contradiction and the confusion which is brought about by these opposites. Thus, in that sense *MODIMO* is 'neutralizer' or abolisher of opposites. *MODIMO* is one who is able to neutralize the destructive forces of evil as well as the overwhelming forces of good. To me this is not far from the Judaeo-Christian concept of God from whom come good and evil.

Thobega is "a projection of the sum total of the powers which go beyond human comprehension and control" (Dehnke 1968: 4). These powers may be both threatening and desirable at the same time, e.g. lightning and rain; fire and water; good and evil, and so on. *MODIMO - Thobega*, as a neutralizing deity, holds these powers together.

A Traditional Healer called Mongae was interviewed by Dehnke (1968: 4). Mongae claimed that *Thobega* was once heard speaking at a place called *Motswedi* during the reign of Sebogodi (Dehnke 1968: 4). This was common during the tribal *kgotla* [court], especially when full justice was not done, as mentioned earlier. *MODIMO* would be heard speaking in the interests of justice. The *Tswana* usually say, again as mentioned earlier: *MODIMO ga o je nkabo* [GOD does not eat rotten food; meaning that God does not exonerate injustice]. *MODIMO* in this case is not neutral with respect to the execution of justice. *MODIMO* does not curry favor. IT cannot be flattered.

5.8.2. Tintibane

Tintibane and *Thobega* are both earth-born gods (sic) (Dehnke 1968: 4ff). My response to Dehnke (1968: 4f) is that there are no gods in STR. Dehnke has imposed a foreign notion which is found in Greek philosophy. A notion of gods, which are believed to be in charge of certain areas of jurisdiction in life, like war, beauty and so forth, is unknown in STR. The word 'gods' is used here as it is

understood by Dehnke (1968: 4ff). Otherwise we should use the categories of *MODIMO* and *Badimo*.

As Haule (1969: 62) observes, except for Hellenic appellations, the ‘*Bantu*’ (African people) of Africa “believe in one God and have no idols ... They believe there is one God in heaven and that the soul is immortal” (1969: 62). Mbiti (1970: 23) adds to that by saying:

As far as it is known, there are no images or physical representatives of God by African peoples ... This is one clear indication that they do not consider him to be physical even if they may use physical metaphors to describe him, and may take certain physical phenomena as objects of his manifestation (Mbiti 1970: 23).

Tintibane and *Thobega* are not gods or idols. The earth belongs to *Tintibane* as well as to *Thobega*. There is a belief in STR that the earth belongs to *MODIMO*, in the sense that no one can claim ownership of land. The ownership of land is controlled by *Kgoši* [Chief]. *Kgoši* is in charge of the distribution of land both to his/her subjects and to strangers. ‘Individual’ or family ownership of land was assured only so long as a person still use the land. People may not sell a piece of land allocated to them by *Kgoši*. A piece of land may be passed on to progeny. Over a long period of the possession of a piece of land, a sense of family and *Badimo* ownership is naturally created. Yet, *Kgoši* remains the main custodian of all tribal land (*GaPhaahla* Teachers Research Team 1999: 2nd December, Group Discussion).

Thus, it makes sense that in STR *Kgoši* is *MODIMO*, *Mong wa mobu* [owner of the soil / land] as Sekwati of *GaMasemola* (one of the *Pedi* chiefs) claimed, meaning *Kgoši* has the dignity and the responsibility of leading people in faithfulness regarding the distribution of human and civic rights, including land rights. Land-occupation was more like a ‘privilege’ in this situation, ie something which can be withdrawn, whereas a ‘right’ generally cannot be withdrawn. As

MODIMO, *Kgoši*'s word must be adhered to in the sense that, like *MODIMO*, dealing with *Kgoši* directly should be dreaded and revered. *Kgoši* can rightly be said to be *Tintibane*, the deity of the land, in charge of the distribution of the land and of justice regarding land issues. The name of *Tintibane* is associated with the names of deities that came from the caves and the rocks at *GaLoowe*. *Kgoši* Matsieng when praised, is said to be the *MODIMO* who came out of the rocks at Matsieng. Schapera and Comaroff describe these deities as:

demi-gods associated with cave engraved footprints on the rocky outcrops (as in the *Kwena* and *Kgatla* Reserves). Offerings of meat, corn, and beer were occasionally made to them, together with prayers for rain, fertility of crops, and success in war, but on the whole they seem to have been of minor importance (Schapera and Comaroff 1991: 53)

Tintibane was not a demi-god. There are no demi-gods in STR. *Tintibane* was yet another way of speaking about *MODIMO*.

5.8.3. *Cosa*

Brown (1969: 11) says that *Cosa* is the *Tswana* most 'High God'. *Cosa* is *MODIMO* of the beginning of all time; *MODIMO* of destinies who stood at the beginning of human history and allotted life to humanity. This *Cosa* is said to have mapped out the course of events that should befall humanity. *Tswana* people begin to count time from *Cosa's* advent. If one was to extract a concept of *MODIMO* from the name *Cosa*, one could say *MODIMO* is a scary deity and that IT is like a dreaded weapon.

But I must warn that this concept must not be inflated to mean that *MODIMO* in general is conceptualized as a dreadful deity. Setiloane (1976: 77 - 86) also gives the same warning. *Cosa* is said to have come before *Bilo* (Brown 1969: 112ff). Here again, *Cosa* is another way of speaking about *MODIMO*.

5.8.4. *Bilo*

Bilo is the first-born son of humans. This concept of *MODIMO* is a concocted expression of a misinformed and distorted concept of Jesus Christ, the Son of God acclaimed in the Christian faith. It is as if someone heard of the Son of God, who is the only begotten of the Father and is the first-born of the resurrection of the dead. It's as if this person could not recall what the teaching of Jesus was all about, or the person did not understand what it meant. Then he/she began to tell the story and gave it as the meaning of *Bilo*. *MODIMO* is not a human being. IT is not counted among the humans, like *Badimo*. *MODIMO* has no sons or daughters. IT does not give birth to sons and daughters (Brown 1969: 112ff).

5.8.5. *Nape*

Another *Tswana* name for *MODIMO* is *Nape*. Brown speaks of this in terms of *Tswana* 'gods and demi-gods'. *Nape* is said to be a spirit-born god (whereas *Tintibane* and *Thobega* were described as earth-born gods). *Nape* is said to be the deity of the female initiation ceremony and is mentioned in various acts of divination. *Nape* is also a deity of soothsaying and divination, according to Brown (1969: 112ff).

Moitse-a-Nape is a person who practices necromancy, divination and soothsaying. Literally speaking, *Moitse-a-Nape* means a person who knows *Nape*. *Nape* is believed to be *MODIMO* who reveals things through divination bones. A person who knows *Nape* is expected to be acquainted with the powers of *Nape*, the powers of *MODIMO*. *Boitsi joa Nape* is the act of divining or soothsaying or knowledge of *Nape*. *Nape* is the manifestation of the mind of *MODIMO*, or of the gods (sic), as Brown distorts it (1969: 112).

5.8.6. *Modimako*

Modimako is deity [in Brown's (1969) terminology] of *Bogwera*. *Bogwera* is the second session of the male circumcision ceremony. The first session is called *Koma*. Literally, *Koma* means secret or hardship. The actual circumcision takes place in the first session, *Koma*. *Modimako* is symbolized by an approximately two metre long stick, as thick as an index finger. This long stick, *Modimako*, is carried by a circumcision initiand. On arrival at the royal kraal, each initiand places the stick upright in the ground in front of himself. From then on the final ceremony of the first session of the circumcision school process is conducted at *Kgoši's* royal residence. In other words *MODIMO*, represented by *Kgoši*, is the custodian of the circumcision school.

5.8.7. *Tlhongwathongwe*

Tlhogwathlongwe is deity of *Boyale* or *Bjwale*, which is the female circumcision ceremony (Brown 1969: 111ff). Just as there is a male deity of *Bogwera* - the second session of male circumcision, so there is a female deity of *Boyale*. I think Brown (1969: 111) has overstepped the mark here. Unless the deities of the circumcision schools for boys and girls are named after the *Badimo*, who are male and female, there cannot be a male and a female deity in STR. *Badimo* can be male or female in STR, but not deities. Attaching gender connotations to these deities is Brown's own invention. Besides, I still wish to reiterate that there are no god in STR.

5.8.8. *Kgobe/ Kgobeane/ Hubeane/ Hwebeane/ Khuzwane*

In my view, the differences in the pronunciation of the terms used for deity mentioned above, i.e., *Kgobe/ Kgobeane/ Hubeane/ Hwebeane/ Khuzwane*, is merely a difference in dialect and clan grouping. In STR it is believed that *Kgobe* is the creator of all things and the molder of humans (*Mmopabatho*) (Mönnig 1967: 46). *Kgobeane* is the name used superficially about *Kgobe*, who is said to

have created humans. In the *Pedi* language the word *Kgobe* means 'integrity' or 'a good person' when applied to a well-behaved person. *Kgobe* is thus conceptualised as a deity who possesses integrity. Often I have heard the expression '*Batho ba Kgobe*', meaning people of *MODIMO* or people of *Badimo* (Motala, Johannes 1998: 13th March, Interview).

According to Motala Johannes and Mafokoane (1996: 27th November and 1998: 13th March, Interviews) *Kgobe* is the name that best suited the concept of the Christian God as the creator of humanity. The *Gaphaahla* Teachers Research Team, the University of the North and Stoffberg Research Group and the *Madupe* Herbalist and Traditional Healers Association all said that the local name *Kgobe* was the one most suited as an equivalent for the Christian God. The name *Hubeane*, which is found among the *Bakwena* as mentioned in Dehnke (1968: 3), could refer to the same deity as the one called *Kgobe* among the *Pedi*. There are a lot of *Bapedi* who have the *Kwena* [Crocodile] as a totem animal. Thus it is likely that *Kgobeane*, or *Kgobe* [itself], is identical to *Hubweane*, who is the *MODIMO* of the *Bakwena* people. And yet, it is not always the case that, when people share the same family name or even a totem name, they are necessarily related.

Hubeane is compared to light and is conceptualized as a female deity (Brown 1969: 111f). She is identified with wisdom, knowledge and revelation. The attributes of *Hubeane* seem to be like the attributes of the Holy Spirit in the Christian religion. The Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is given feminine attributes of the Godhead, although the Holy Spirit is not consistently described in feminine terms. For example He, not She, is called the comforter (Jn.14: 16, 26). Attributes such as those given to *Hubeane*, by Brown, e.g. wisdom, knowledge and revelation are given to both Christ (the second person of the Trinity) and the Holy Spirit. For example, in I Cor. 1: 30 Jesus Christ is called our wisdom, (cf. Eph. 1: 17), the Holy Spirit is also called the spirit of wisdom.

The Holy Spirit is the spirit of Jesus Christ. *Hubeane* may be compared with Jesus too. Jesus is the light of the world (Jn. 12: 46). *Hubeane* is compared with light in STR, according to Brown (1969: 111). This parallelism does not mean that *Hubeane* is Jesus or the Holy Spirit of the Christian religion. Even the manner in which Jesus and the Holy Spirit operate is very different to that of *Hubeane*. I think Brown's (1969: 111) eisegesis has failed again and must not be taken too seriously.

Hwebeane, a personal name of *MODIMO* according to Tema (1985: 19), seems to be identical with what Mönning (1967) calls *Kgobeane*, 'the son of *Kgobe*'. The following is a praise poem recited to *Hwebeane* and recorded by Tema (1985: 19). From it I extract more concepts of *MODIMO*.

*Ke Hwebeane a holi-a-hohlo,
Motho wa mmopa botsi magogomo-gomo,
Motho wa go bopa dithaba le maswika.*

translated:

He is *Hwebeane* of the celestial vault,
The person-being, the molder of all things
The person who molded the mountains and the rocks (translation mine).

Tema (1985: 19) prefers to translate the first line as: "He is the unidentifiable one of the universe" (1985: 19) rather than my 'He is *Hwebeane* of the celestial vault'. The most problematic concept of his translation is that Tema (1985: 19) gives the impression that *Hwebeane* is God of the universe. I try to hold to the concept of *MODIMO* within the celestial vault, with no notion of universe yet. The traditional *Sotho* communities do not speak about the universe in the way it is understood in the Bible (Gen. 1 : 1 - 31) and in the scientific age (circa, 16th - 18th C).

Thus, *holi-a-hohlo* is better translated as celestial vault to be consistent with the STR cosmology. According to Tema (1985:19) mentioned earlier, we learned that the *Sotho* cosmology consists of *lefase* [earth] and *legodimo* [celestial vault] which he rightly translated as celestial vault and not heaven or universe. Therefore he cannot now translate it as meaning the universe.

Here too the translation of *Hwebeane* as the person-being is only a personification of *MODIMO*. *Hwebeane* is *MODIMO* and not a person-being. That *MODIMO* is '*Motho*' must not be taken literally. It does not mean that *MODIMO* is conceptualized as a person. Tema (1985: 19) translates *go bopa* as: 'to cause'. I would prefer to translate it as 'to form' or 'to mold' and not 'to cause' or 'create'. Molding is more consistent with *MODIMO* as creator. The STR creation stories do not give the sense that *MODIMO* caused things to happen. What I observe from the STR creation stories is that people emerge from the earth with their cattle and implements, whereas creation as 'existence' has always been, since time immemorial.

According to Kgatla (1992: 40) the characteristics of *MODIMO* are truthfulness, purity and innocence. These characteristics mentioned by Kgatla could have been influenced by the Christian attributes of God, especially the attributes of truthfulness and purity. The Christian God is said to be Holy and truthful. This does not mean that, therefore, *MODIMO* is unholy and untruthful. The objection is that the STR does not speak about *MODIMO* in the categories of holiness and truthfulness. Rather, STR speaks in categories of *MODIMO* as good and just (Hine 1996: 6th September, Interview).

As a reminder, the problem we are facing in this research is that of the lack of conceptual differentiation by missionaries, Christian anthropologists and African Christian theologians between the various ways in which the notion of *MODIMO* is used. When the name of *MODIMO* is mentioned in almost all the cases thus far, most interlocutors think of the concepts of the Christian God. For example, one

African Christian theologian's characterization of *MODIMO*, Kgatla (1992: 40) says:

It is clear, therefore that God [*Modimo*] is seen as the personalization of all truthfulness, cleanliness and purity [...] The whole conception of *Kgobe*, as well as that of his son *Kgobeane* has practically been lost as a result of the influence of Christianity (1992: 40).

Kgatla's lamentation of the loss of the attributes of *MODIMO* is a concern of this thesis. But, the attributes of *MODIMO* as 'truthfulness, cleanliness and purity' are considered to be Christian conceptual intrusion. In STR, *MODIMO* is conceptualized as integral (*Kgobe*) and benevolent.

In Christian preaching only the word '*Modimo*', representing the Christian God as it would be translated in the Christian Bible, is mentioned. But the word '*MODIMO*' as an abstract concept needs representational content for it to have meaning. The way things should have developed is that the translators should have decided to use one of the local names for *MODIMO* and assumed the representational content of what that meant as being properly applicable to the Christian conceptual content of God. I suppose that the proper name should have been *Kgobe* (Motala and Mafokoane 1996: 19th August and 1996: 9th November, Interviews consecutively). For Jesus Christ, *Kgobeane* the child of *Kgobe*, would have been the perfect translation (Barnard 1998: 25th April, Interview).

In STR thought, does *MODIMO* need to have only one name; say, *Kgobe* preferably?. No, *MODIMO* does not need to have only one name. IT is very vast, conceptualized by many peoples in many places, cultures and subcultures. Each of these peoples have the right to give it a name that suits what they conceptualize. Does *MODIMO* need to be one? No, *MODIMO* must have many names and be many in the sense of henotheism - a theological concept in which there are many equal deities, each one being valid in the culture in which it is

conceptualized, and which co-exist in harmony, helping humanity with the uncountable problems of the world. For example, in *Sotho-Tswana* only:

The word [*modimo*] expresses, at one and the same time, both the awe which is felt in the presence of seniority and authority, and the respect which is owed, not only by man to man, but by those very seniors to children growing into men, by chiefs to those over whom they are set in authority. Beyond this purely human reference, it expresses both the awfulness of *MODIMO* and, by derivation, of *badimo* who are IT's agents, the true seniors and effective authorities of each kin-group; and the loving care with which they oversee the affairs of their descendants (Setiloane 1976: 21).

5.8.9. *Thanakana*

Another name for *MODIMO* found among the *Tswana* is *Thanakana*. This may be a deification of an ancient hero. Ancient heroes are people in whose names oaths are taken. Oaths can be taken in the name of *MODIMO* too. For example, *Ka MODIMO* [through GOD] - meaning that *MODIMO* is my witness, or I am telling the truth. In the same way a person can say: through *Thanakana*, I swear - meaning, I am telling the truth. There could be a coincidence of the root of this name with that which means to take an oath in *Sotho*, i.e., *go ikana*. *Thanakana* could then be *MODIMO* through whom an oath can be taken. In STR an oath can be taken through a parent as well. This is commonly practiced among the youth and is not encouraged by parents, since it can be derogatory. For example *ka Mmago* [through your mother] is not encouraged (Leseamo 1997: 24th April, Interview).

5.8.10. *Hlaa-hlaa-macholo*

The name of *MODIMO* - *Hlaa-hlaa-macholo* is popular among the Southern *Sotho* (Motoboli 1999: 8th March, Interview). Besides the confirmation given by

Motoboli (1999: 8th March, Interview), the same name was mentioned to me by Motimele (1997: 15th February, Interview) and by Thamaga (1998: 29th October, Interview). But, when I interviewed Rev. Joel Rajuli (1998: 26th August), who was, in my experience, very informed about the Southern *Sotho* traditions, to my amazement he did not say much about it.

Nevertheless, this is the very *MODIMO* also called *Hlaa-hlaa-macholo* by Setiloane (1976: 80). This name means *MODIMO* originates in antiquity. *MODIMO* is the Ancient of Days, the Ancient of the forefathers (Setiloane 1976: 80). This name for *MODIMO* could be a good connecting point with another concept of the Christian God, who is also called the Ancient of Days.

5.8.11. *MODIMO wa Sedibeng*

MODIMO wa Sedibeng [DEITY of the Well] was mentioned to me by Nchabeleng (1998: 3rd October, Interview). Nchabeleng tells about the *MODIMO* of the Well from his personal experience during the circumcision school period. I have recorded his words in this manner verbatim:

There is *MODIMO* of the Well. During the period of circumcision we go to get water from this particular Well. The whole lodge carries buckets to the Well to fetch water. The journey to the Well is taken at midnight when no human being is moving about except for the people in the lodge and wild nocturnal animals. When we near the Well we sing songs for calming down the *MODIMO* of the Well. We ask *MODIMO* of the Well to fall asleep so that we may get the water. We also ask *MODIMO* of the Well to allow us to get this water. We also pray in song to *MODIMO* of the Well to give us the water.

When we are satisfied that *MODIMO* of the Well has heard us and the water is calm, we come nearer and then get the water. When all of us have finished getting the water we start singing again. We sing songs of giving thanks to *MODIMO* of the Well for keeping asleep and for giving us water.

When *MODIMO* of the Well calms down and sleeps, it means all is well. The lodge can get the water. Should the Traditional Healer in-charge of the lodge be uncertain that it is well with *MODIMO* of the Well, no one would venture to draw the water. This is consistent with the belief in STR that, when *Badimo* are asleep, it is well with them. When *Badimo* are awake and are standing on their feet, it is not well. With regard to *MODIMO* as an all- pervading force, it is well when IT does not interfere in human affairs. Should IT wake up and interfere, no one would be able to cope with the consequences. All would be fatally injured.

We cannot trust water which comes from home, i.e., water brought by family members of the young people at the lodge. Even the food which comes from home is divined first, before we eat it. You know that members of our families bring food for us to the mountain. They shout aloud when they are still far off, to alert us that they are coming with food. They put the food far enough away from the lodge that they do not see anyone in the lodge. According to traditional belief, no one is allowed to see the lodge. Then, after they have left, they signal by means of a loud shout that they have left the food. Then we go to take the food. But, as for water, we get it from *MODIMO* of the Well.

In STR, it is believed that traditional bewitchment medicine is more effective in water than in solid food. There are cases where most men are bewitched through putting *sejeso* [traditional poison] in sorghum beer, rather than in porridge. This is because poison spreads faster in the human body by means of liquid than by means of solid food. Poisoning by means of solid food can be discovered and the victim can be made to vomit and be saved. But poison in liquid goes into the blood quickly and spreads fast into the whole body, and is difficult to vomit. By the time it is discovered it has spread all over the body. That is why we trust only *MODIMO* of the Well for water. *MODIMO* of the Well is known to be in the form of a Snake. This Snake is unlike the one which is taken to be *Modimo* as an Ancestor.

Regarding *MODIMO* of the Well to be in the form of a Snake is a personification, a symbolization and embodiment of *MODIMO*. It must not be taken literally. In the next subsection I elaborate on *Modimo* as an Ancestor appearing in the form of a Snake.

5.8.12. *Modimo ka Sebopego sa Noga*

Modimo ka sebopego sa Noga is an Ancestor in the form of a Snake. The traditional reference to *Modimo* in the form of a Snake is to the Ancestor and not *MODIMO*. In other words, there are times when *Badimo* appear in the form of snakes. In STR, when a snake is seen, especially inside the hut, it is not killed. The killing of a snake around the yard of the homestead is forbidden. The elderly people teach that the Snake is *Modimo* [Ancestor] or that *Badimo* visit in the form of the snake. It is believed that the Snake brings good luck. *Badimo* in the form of the Snake come to protect the family against something terrible which is going to happen to the family (Nchabeleng 1998: 4th October, Interview).

In a few cases, *Ngaka* is called in to divine and confirm whether the snake came from the *Badimo* or from enemies. A snake can be sent by an enemy of the family - a Witch. When a bewitchment snake is killed, it is said, it is found to weigh very little. The weight of the snake confirms and tells one that indeed it was *meleko* [bewitchment] i.e., it was a human-made snake and not a natural snake. This means that *Badimo* come in the form of natural snakes. There is no particular snake through which *Badimo* prefer to come (Nchabeleng 1998: 4th October, Interview), though there are well-known and common snakes which are said to stand for *Badimo*, and which are themselves *Badimo* e.g., the python.

The python is one of the well-known Snakes representing *Badimo*. It is big and said to eat livestock. The commonness of the python seems to support the idea that, of all snakes, it will be the first to be mentioned regarding the phenomenon that it symbolizes the presence of *MODIMO* or *Badimo* visiting the family (Makgai 1998: 5th October, Interview).

But, in STR, neither the python nor any other snake is worshiped. Families respect and protect snakes because of the belief that they are *Badimo* or *Badimo* come in their form (Nchabeleng and Makgai 1998: 5th October, Interview).

Contrary to the Christian teachings. The snake denotes Satan, the Devil and evil. One of the names of Satan in Christian teaching is the Dragon, the big snake. It is only when Jesus is symbolized as a savior when a bronze snake is used to represent him (John 3: 14 - 16).

5.8.13. *Malope/ Khuduthamaga/ Khupamarama/ Modimo ka Polelo Ditaola*

Modimo ka polelo ya ditaola is about Ancestors in the language of divination. I inquired about the big sea shell among the divination bones. I was told that it was *Khupamarama*, literally meaning 'close your mouth tightly'. I was also told that the very same big sea shell is *Khuduthamaga* - meaning 'a meeting of distinguished people - dignitaries; a closed meeting of the royal family and a meeting of chiefs with the paramount chief'. This was confirmed by all the Traditional Healers: *Ngaka* Thaubele Jack Motala (1996 - 1998), *Ngaka* Rosina Makola (1998), *Ngaka* Apheus Hlokoa (1998) and group discussions with six members of the *Madupe* Traditional Healers Association (1996 - 1998: Group Discussions). All of them said that the big sea shell is *Khupamarama* also meaning 'deep secret', also literally meaning 'keep your mouth tightly shut' and 'don't let the breath in your mouth come out, so that your cheeks may be bulgy because of the breath inside'.

In the *Sotho* language, when speaking about *Khupamarama*, they say it is *Sepipimpi se pipa molomo, Khupamarama re hwa nayo* [the deep secret closes our mouths, we will not reveal the secret, we will die with it]. *Khuduthamaga* is a special royal council. Only the royals attend it. These royals are strictly the blood relatives of *Kgoši* [Chief] only. The members of *Khuduthamaga* are *Magoši* [pl. *Kgoši*] themselves (Motala 1996: 14th July, Interview). *Khuduthamaga* is called for the discussion of secret things of royalty and matters of the tribe which call for its attention. Otherwise, tribal matters can be discussed by *kgotla/ kgoro* [tribal judiciary], usually attended by men of the village. *MODIMO* as *Khuduthamaga* is called for attention to more serious things that face the tribe. Otherwise *Badimo*, elderly people and *Dingaka* are there to solve

matters pertaining to the vicissitudes of life (Motala and Makola 1999: 14th July, Interviews)

Another name for the big sea shell is *Malope*, the one who resolves matters that other divination bones cannot handle nor tell. When diviners begin to point at *Malope* and to interpret from *Malope*'s viewpoint and perspective, one knows that they are looking for ultimate answers and are appealing for the revelation of deep secrets (Chiloane 1999: 8th December, Interview).

From this information I conclude that, in STR, *MODIMO* the all-pervading one by implication is Great Secret, Great Mystery. *MODIMO* is the congregation of the royal family, especially when the royals have gathered to discuss the hidden, the deep, the most difficult and the most secret affairs of the royal family, matters affecting the whole tribe and matters threatening the general life and wellbeing of the tribe. *MODIMO* is also ineffable (i.e. IT cannot be described). The best way to talk about IT is to keep quiet in that *Khuduthamaga* [meeting of dignitaries] and *Khupamarama* [closed meeting] which discusses confidential matters. It means do not talk unless you certainly know what you are talking about. It is commonly heard, in STR, that when you open your mouth to talk you must know what you are talking about.

Besides the big sea shell, other divination bones represent *Badimo* and the tribal social setting. When the Traditional Healers speak to the divination bones they refer to them as *Badimo*. These *Badimo* are men and women. Among the bones, some stand for boys, girls, and relatives. The divination bones represent a traditional homestead, the tribe as well as the cosmology and ontology within which the tribe live. They are a symbolization of tribal life, politics, economics, history, morphology, relationships, manners, customs, hierarchy and so forth. They are a simplified sample of tribal life and from them you interpret what is going on among the people (Hlokoa 1998: 21st July, Interview)

Further, the divination bones comprise bones of totemic animals, shells, black and white painted pieces of rectangular wood, coins, hooves and pebbles. As in the case of bones representing *Badimo*, these ornaments also represent *Modimo* in the form of totemic animals. The Traditional Healer can divine for people more accurately by interpreting the ornaments that represent that family's totemic animal. Hlokao (1998: 21st July, Interview) specifically pointed to *Thakadu* [Anteater (a totemic animal)] as *Modimo* in the language of divination. He elevated the Anteater above other totemic animal bones and told me it was his special totem, specifically given to him by his Ancestors when they gave him the gift and practice of divination.

5.8.14. MODIMO Bjalo ka Thokgola/ Legwame/ Titikwane

Kgwale (1998: 10th April, Interview) explains that *Thokgola* is the traditional, respectable name for the plant *Hypoxis villosa* [*Legwame*], which in STR is a ritualistic plant. This plant is called *Modimo wa fase* [Ancestor on, or of, the ground] and because it is found in the mountains it is called *Modimo wa theba* [deity of the Mountain] and is planted on the ground. *Badimo* ceremonies are conducted on it. *Thokgola* is *Modimo*, says Kgwale. The diminutive of *Thokgola*, which came through Christian converts, is *Titikwane*. The naming of *Thokgola* as *Titikwane* by African Christian converts was a way of showing disrespect towards the *Badimo*, who are represented by *Thokgola*. The other traditional African name of *Thokgola* is *Legwame*.

When there is a need to protect someone in the family who would, because of his/her wrongdoing suffer bewitchment or *letswa* [revenge medicine], it is said 'let us make *Sethokgolo*' - meaning let us ask the *Badimo* at *Thokgola* to protect the wrongdoer. Kgwale says that *Badimo* are able to protect people, even if their own family member was in the wrong and was supposed to suffer the consequences (1998: 10th April, Interview).

Ordinarily, anybody, including the Traditional Healer, who attempted to protect a wrongdoer would have to suffer the consequences him/herself. The punishment would be removed from the wrongdoer and would fall on the one who conducted the healing. In such cases Traditional Healers suggest that *Sethokgolo* be made because, in this regard all humans will suffer if they try to help, but *Badimo bona ba ka phema* [Ancestors in their power and mercy can protect] (Kgwale 1998: 10th April, Interview).

This means that traditional medicine does not affect the *Badimo*. It also means that *Badimo* cannot be bewitched. As a result, *MODIMO* cannot be bewitched. There is a *Sepedi* [*Bapedi* language] saying that goes *MODIMO o phala baloi* [GOD is better than Witches]. So, *MODIMO* the all-pervading force also has power over traditional means of wrongdoing (Kgwale 1998: 10th April, Interview).

5.8.15. Kgoši Bjalo ka MODIMO

Mosotho (*GaPhaahla* Teachers Research Team 1997: 22nd December, Discussion Group) specifically mentioned that *Kgoši* Sekwati of *GaMasemola* declared that there was no other *MODIMO* except himself. The paramount chief said this when he was objecting to the incursion of the Christian religion into his region in the *Botšhabelo* district in the Limpopo Province. To me, Sekwati's objection was a statement of political protestation against the land-hungry missionary-colonizers of the BMS, who had reached his region and were asking him for a piece of land to do their mission work among his people. As usual, the missionaries said they were carrying the message of peace and good will and were coming to introduce the Christian God among his people. At that time *Sekwati* claimed religious sovereignty as much as he claimed political sovereignty since he was trying to protect himself and his vulnerable people, who would inevitably have had to face Christian conversion.

Sekwati would not permit the BMS missionaries to preach that there is a God in Heaven, and that Jesus is also God and is the Son of this God (Mosotho 1997: 22nd December, Interview). Sekwati claimed to be *MODIMO* at the time that the *Bapedi* sold their rights and human dignity by giving themselves to the protection of the whites against their enemies in a series of wars fomented by the presence of the BMS mission and the British colonial forces. Apparently Sekwati did not need protection from whites. He, thus, was able to reject their God and their religion (Mosotho 1997:22nd December, Group Discussion). Otherwise, in STR, if it has to be said that a human is God (*Motho ke MODIMO*):

... This means much more than the English, 'there is something of the divine in every man'. It is basic to *Sotho-Tswana* behavior that a representative is he whom he represents, the part contains the whole, the symbol mediates all of that which it symbolizes using the symbol with the essence, yet without being merely metaphorical, a man may address his chief as '*modimo*', and so also a child he regards his parents (Setiloane 1976: 21).

Regarding the saying that there is 'something of the divine in every [human]', if the missionaries had inquired about *MODIMO*, not for the sake of enslaving Africans with capital markets and forcing them to work on mission farms on the very land taken from the *Sotho*, this would have been in accord with what they taught as the image of the Christian God. That the 'part contains the whole' means that, for example, if Sekwati had sent me to take a message into the village, those who received me would regard me and receive the message I passed on as if they received it from Sekwati himself, in the sense that I would be almost transformed to be Sekwati at that moment. This is the kind of African thought the missionaries should have mastered in order for their message to have made sense to the *Sotho*.

The concept of '*Motho ke Modimo*' expresses the mystery that the human is a portion, a tributary of the Supreme Force (*MODIMO*) itself.

This is ignored in human relationships at great peril to those who do so
(Setiloane 1986: 42).

5.8.16. *Kgomo Bjalo ka MODIMO*

I enquired from my interlocutors about *Kgomo* [a cow] as *Modimo o nko e metsi* [a deity with a wet nose]. Besides the observation that cows always have wet noses, I was told (by the group of my research team of teachers of *GaPhaahla*, of theological students of the University of the North and Stoffberg Theological Seminary, of *Madupe* Traditional Healers and Herbalist Association and of individuals such as Mrs. Letswara, a *Tswana* language teacher at *Lofentse* High School in Soweto) that *Kgomo* [a cow] is named this respect because it joins people and families together (1996 - 1998).

When any important family or tribal ceremony and celebration is performed, a cow is slaughtered. The pelt [skin] of a cow is used to cover a corpse for burial, i.e., *Badimo* go to the graves with the pelt of a cow. The pelt of a cow makes *Letata* [blanket]. In short, *Kgomo* gives both clothing and food. It is used for ploughing. It is a very useful animal. It is *Modimo* [deity]. It is a provider and a community builder (*Kgomo e kopanya meloko*) (Letswara 1988: 18th January, Interview).

So much for the local names of *MODIMO* and their meanings, including the other usages of the word '*modimo*' like the last one considered (a cow), which do not necessarily apply to the all-pervading deity. Here and there I tried to show where missionaries could have found some points of connection that would have enabled them to have some sound theological discussions with the *Sotho*.

Unfortunately, this is an opportunity lost, and yet is a 'long conversation which still goes on' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). As I have presented the local names of *MODIMO* and IT's attributes, in order to give a comparison, I now

want to give an evaluation of the concepts of the Christian God, in addition to the legacy of the images left by the missionary-colonizers.

5.9. The Evaluation of the Christian God

In this subsection an attempt is made to evaluate the concepts of the Christian God. A lot is dependent on the work of Oesterley and Robinson (1930), and Muñoz (1990). These works give the historical background of the conceptual evolution of the Christian God and what the relevant Christian God should have been.

We have to confess that we do not know for certain whom or what Israel worshiped in pre-Mosaic times, and must depend to some extent on conjecture based on the statements supplied to us in the Bible (Oesterley and Robinson 1930: 131).

Oesterley and Robinson (1930: 133) say that the common word for 'God' in Hebrew is '*Elohim*'. This is the plural term of a form of '*Eloah*', not found in the singular except in comparatively late Hebrew writings. In I Sam. 28: 13, '*Elohim*' was equivalent to the Latin '*Manes*', an 'animistic' plural with no singular, and was applied to the spirits of the dead worshiped by many 'primitive' people. To Oesterley and Robinson (1930: 136) it was clear that *Yahweh* (sic) was worshiped by many peoples in the Canaanite world before Israel came into contact with Him.

The ancient Hebrew derivation suggested by Exodus 14 - I AM THAT I AM - has been suspected of implying too advanced a metaphysical conception of God for an early nomad people (Oesterley and Robinson 1930: 136).

According to Oesterley and Robinson (1930: 137), Biblical references give a clear explanation of the character and attributes of *Yahweh*. As conceptualized

in later generations *El* - the God of the mountain - developed into *Yahweh*, who was thought to have His proper abode on Mount Sinai or Horeb, even after His dwelling was established in Jerusalem.

In Israel, God's character as a fire-god 'is attested by the ancient tradition which spoke of His presence in the pillar of cloud and fire' (Oesterley and Robinson 1930: 137). *Yahweh* was also conceptualized as a warrior. This was because the ancient Semitic gods were, in the mind of the 'primitive' communities, involved in numerous wars. The character of *Yahweh* was a combination of clouds, fire, wilderness and so on (Oesterley and Robinson 1930: 138).

This combination of mountain spirit, storm and volcanic deity, and wilderness guide, clearly goes back to the nomad period of Israel's history. That *Yahweh* was more, much more, than this, was a lesson which Israel learnt slowly through the centuries (Oesterley and Robinson 1930: 138).

The claiming of one God for one tribe was fully accepted in ancient Semitic communities. It was also acceptable that deity was a natural member of the people to whom it belonged and was inconceivable apart from it. This tallies with the concept of the Gods of covenants. They are one with the communities with which they covenant, and the God and the community are thus conceptualized as bonded by the covenant to belong together for as long as the covenant lasted (Oesterley and Robinson 1930: 142).

Then it was believed that a '*Jinn*' was a wild God who had lost oneness with a community and had no community to rule. This '*Jinn*' was conceptualized as a 'masterless and an isolated spirit, retaining some of its powers, but practically none of His prestige' (Oesterley and Robinson 1930: 140). Thus, if *Yahweh* had not successfully led Israel through the 'wilderness' to the promised land, *Yahweh* would have been a '*Jinn*' - a wild God.

As time went by, *Yahweh* was further conceptualized by His people as King, Lord and Judge. He could make His will known, He could guide His people in war, He could mete out punishment and resolve disputes among His human members - Israel (Oesterley and Robinson 1930: 142).

As discussed earlier, it was unlikely that the ancient Hebraic conceptualization of God was spiritual and metaphysical. What is most likely is that it was cultic and concrete. There were physical objects that Israel venerated and knew that God resided in, such as the Ark of the covenant, the Tabernacle and Mount Sinai. It is also more likely that the stone tablets on which the law was written and given to Moses on Mount Sinai, which were kept in the box of the Ark of the covenant, related to the concept of the Gods residing in stones or rocks. Moreover, the worship of the bull made of gold and the snake made of bronze was common amongst the neighbors of Israel, Semitic nomadic cultures and religions. So, God was conceptualized in concrete forms and that conceptualization was influenced by the surrounding concepts of deities (Oesterley and Robinson 1930: 144).

According to p'Bitek (1971), during the time of the transition of some of the parts of the Hebrew religion to the Christian religion, in the time of the Hellenization of Palestine, *Yahweh* came to be dressed in strange Hellenic attributes. This happened despite the fact that the Hebrew *cum* Christian thinkers resisted many forms of Greek and Roman religion, and yet accepted Greek metaphysical thinking. It was in this Hellenic clothing that the missionaries wanted to dress the deities of the New World. This they did to the deities of the people of southern Africa, which I am here attempting to 'undress' - to de-Hellenize.

According to Muñoz (1990: 14ff) the Christian God is conceptualized as the opposite to idols and is expressed as the living and true God. This suggests that the idols are 'not God' or 'dead Gods'. The idols are 'nothing'. That the idols were dead Gods must not be taken to mean that they had ever been alive, had life, or were ever conceptualized as living. From the Christian viewpoint they had

always been thought of as inanimate and dead. Muñoz continues to say that the living Christian God was referred to as God who is an:

... infinitely perfect Being, creator of the heaven and earth; and [...] a God who is 'unique' in Trinity of persons ; one of whom is Jesus Christ as the incarnate Son (Muñoz 1990: 14).

This Christian God is said to be the God of individuals and communities - meaning that it is through the historic actions of individuals and communities that the Christian God is known. This God is seen in the actions and words of individuals and communities. As such, it can also be extrapolated that the actions of the white Christian missionaries and colonialists who carried the name of the Christian God demonstrated the nature of this God to peoples of southern Africa.

All believers can in fact witness to the fact that God, before being 'my' God, was for me the God of someone, or of a specific community, the God of people who not only spoke to me of God, but who showed God in their way of living to others (Muñoz 1990: 70).

In the present case the Christian God, thus far, was the God of the missionary-colonizer community and was shown in their actions of conquest, conversion and capitalization by coercion. This Christian God dispossessed the Africans of their land, chieftainships and cattle, killed some and subjected the rest to the capitalist market economy.

But, for Muñoz (1990: 91 - 92), this very same Christian God is also the God of those who are being tortured. It could be confusing, for those who are being tortured, to realize that they owe allegiance to the same God as that of their torturers, and also that this God has the same desires for both the torturer and the tortured and looks at both without discrimination. This seems to be inconceivable to those who suffered and who are continuing to suffer under the Christian God.

5.9.1. The Emergence of Monotheism

Monotheism had, indeed, been implicit in the teaching of earlier prophets; but never before had it been explicit, never before had there been the reiterated insistence upon the truth as expressed by these prophets. God is the Creator from everlasting, the eternal and only One ... (Oesterley and Robinson 1937: 299).

The monotheistic passages pronounced by the prophets were pronounced during the period of the fall of nations like Israel, the impotence of Babylon and their disillusionment with the Gods. A need therefore arose for a supreme answer to the crises facing the nations. One contribution of religion to that answer was the provision of a supreme God who was articulated in monotheistic terms (Oesterley and Robinson 1937: 299ff).

One point I need to make here is that the notion that the *Sotho-Tswana* had a concept of a supreme, high and an only true God should be rejected because, besides the fact that these are proclamations from a foreign context, *MODIMO* cannot be circumscribed by finite notions.

In fact, the concepts of mystery and 'holiness' are thought to provide a successful characterization precisely because they imply that delimiting concepts are inadequate in this domain. Non-delimiting concepts fail to provide for the intelligibility of their 'object'. They fail to articulate the nature of what is ultimate and unconditioned (Vaught, in *Religious Studies*, vol 6(3) 1970: 225, 226).

In the words of Mbiti (1970: 27):

[...] God confronts men as the mysterious and incomprehensible, indescribable, and beyond human vocabulary. He is the mystery of mysteries, the marvel of marvels, the very *mysterium tremendum par excellence* (Mbiti 1970: 27).

In other words, the essence of deity cannot be explained by means of rational attributes. Rational attributes of deity do not give humans a glimpse of what the essence of deity is. For me, the doctrine of the ineffability of deity is helpful, in that the only valid way of speaking about deity is to keep quiet. If people make doctrinal propositions of what deity is, they must simultaneously admit that these are statements of belief and not proof of the knowledge of deity. For example:

If in one religion God is considered to be personal, i.e., as having an ego-structure, and in another religion he is considered to be impersonal, i.e., as having a neutrum-structure, the two views contradict each other (Hubbeling 1987: 41).

This is the situation when one compares the personal Christian God and the STR impersonal *MODIMO*. *MODIMO* is an impersonal deity. The Christian God is a personal deity.

5.10. Conclusion

This chapter presented the attributes and local names of *MODIMO*. Throughout, the concepts of the Christian God were continually critiqued as they were compared with those of *MODIMO*. One of the confusions that this chapter tried to clarify was the usage of the word *MODIMO*. I showed that, in STR, there are at least eight ways of speaking about *MODIMO*. Whenever the word *MODIMO* is pronounced, depending on the context and content of the conversation, one of these eight things might be implied.

The subsection on the ‘continuity and the discontinuity of *MODIMO* with the Christian God’ tried to answer the question as to whether or not the deity conceptualized and revealed in the Bible was the same deity as that experienced among the *Basotho*. I found that this was not the case. They are different deities. Whereas some West African theologians are inclined to say that it was the same deity who eventually revealed Himself (sic) fully in Jesus Christ, others held a

different opinion. They realized that this was another deity but they were committed to seeing these different deities reconciled. However, the moral attributes of these two deities are irreconcilable.

I then addressed the question of whether deity is personal or impersonal. Within that inquiry I addressed the issue of the personalization and personification of deity. I concluded that *MODIMO* is believed to be an impersonal deity, whereas the Christian God is a personal deity. It was also established that, in STR especially among the *Batswana*, there are numerous examples of the personalization and personification of deity. This we saw in the names they have always had, from long ago.

At the end of the chapter I presented the local names of *MODIMO* and the roles of *MODIMO*, as revealed by the explanations of IT's local names. I identified sixteen local names of *MODIMO*. Some names were found in the literature consulted, but most came from the field research. Some local names, it was discerned, referred to *MODIMO* as DEITY and some to the word '*MODIMO*' in its various local usages.

CHAPTER 6

6. POSSIBLE POINTS OF ALIENATION, CONCILIATION AND COMMONALITY BETWEEN THE CONCEPTS OF *MODIMO* IN STR AND THE CONCEPTS OF THE CHRISTIAN GOD

6.1. Introduction

What this concluding chapter seeks to do is to find out from the findings of this research whether there are some points of alienation, commonality and conciliation between the concepts of *MODIMO* in STR and the concepts of the Christian God. The points of alienation consist of those areas where there is irreconcilability between the concepts of *MODIMO* and the concepts of the Christian God within their respective religions which is STR and Christian religion. The points of conciliation are derived from the contents of the thesis itself. These are points which may be regarded as possible entry issues for mutual theological and missiological discussion. The points of commonality are those attributes which are identical and do not necessarily distort any of the deities concerned.

The discussion on the points of commonality engages the concepts of *MODIMO* and the concepts of the Christian God as matters that relate to discussion about religion. These are areas where a discussion is undertaken on deities as matters of faith and not knowledge. That means that humans know deities by faith and that deities are not subject to proof. The other area under discussion is that of deities as ultimate symbols of religious imagination, and the area of 'speaking about deities as symbolic'. After the conclusion of this chapter, a summary of the thesis is given.

6.2. Possible Points of Alienation: *MODIMO* and the Christian God Part Ways.

The translation of the word 'God' as the word '*MODIMO*' was done prematurely and without deep insight into the differences between these concepts and how these religious elements were used. Setiloane (1976: 78) records that, in fact

...according to John Mackenzie, the idea of translating one Christian God with '*Modimo*' was no suggestion of the missionaries, the *Bechuana* (*Tswana* people; also *Sotho* people) interpreters, after hearing concerning God in the Dutch language, said that their name for 'him' was '*Modimo*' (Setiloane 1976:78).

The *Tswana* were speaking in terms of the approximation of the names and not in terms of the content of the concepts of deities. *MODIMO* has always been conceptualized in all-pervading terms, as opposed to the terms describing the personal Christian God. Once more, Setiloane (1976: 78) continues to say:

It was only later that Moffat was to conclude that '*Modimo*' did not convey to the mind of those who heard it the idea of God (sic), and the whole of the narrative at this point suggests that he and the *Tswana* were continually talking at cross-purposes. The fact is that there was much more to '*Modimo*' than the missionaries dreamed of, rather than the much less which they came to think (Setiloane 1976:78).

For instance, the *Tswana* speak of *MODIMO* as of *Borara* [Father/ Forefathers]. This is very similar to the concept of *Yahweh*, and of the forefathers and patriarchs of Israel. To a certain extent, *MODIMO* was conceptualized as the one the *Sotho* forefathers revered. But *MODIMO* is not exclusively the *MODIMO* of the *Sotho* forefathers. *MODIMO* is of all the people of the earth. *MODIMO* has not chosen

the *Basotho* to be IT's special people like Yahweh chose Israel as 'His' chosen people and believers and unbelievers in Jesus Christ are in different camps. *MODIMO* excludes no one. *MODIMO* has not made war with anyone or carried favor with anyone. It is not IT's character to curry favor with humans and choose between IT's creatures.

Besides this, *Borara* [Forefathers] did not claim that they met *MODIMO* at certain places, who then gave them special words (revelation) for the *Sotho* to pass on to the following generations and to take to the nations of the world. *MODIMO* has not chosen people at all. It is actually not congruent with the character of *MODIMO* to make favors with individuals, families or nations. *MODIMO* does not deal with humans, and humans in STR are advised not to deal directly with IT.

When *Basotho* say *MODIMO* is ONE, this is not an affirmation of a need to assert a 'God' among other Gods or gods. In point of fact, this thesis regards the concept of *MODIMO* as ONE with great suspicion; it considers that, that concept could have been smuggled into STR during the encounter with the concepts of the Christian God. In any case, in STR, to say *MODIMO* is ONE is not a declaration of war upon other Gods or gods around it.

MODIMO, whether theoretically in a polytheistic or henotheistic situation, suppresses no other 'gods' or 'Gods'. Theoretically in a polytheistic situation *MODIMO* should transcend all Gods. In a henotheistic setting *MODIMO* should coexist with other Gods. In the instance of *Badimo*, *MODIMO* coexists with *Badimo*. On the other hand, the Christian God does not coexist with African *Badimo* (Ancestors). In fact, the Christian God seeks to destroy *Badimo*.

MODIMO should not be subject to national or personal ownership. In other words there is nothing like *MODIMO* of *Basotho*, except an instance where one

missionary was given such an honor. But that is another way of speaking about *MODIMO*. We have been shown that, in STR, a person, especially a parent, can be called *Modimo* for reasons such as respect.

There is also no such thing as having a personal relationship with *MODIMO*, such as most missionaries would teach that people can have a personal relationship with God or Jesus Christ. *MODIMO* belongs to all people, preferring no one, sending no one, giving no special privileges to anyone, is known by no one and does not categorize people as heathen versus believers.

On the other hand, when *Yahweh* is said to be One that is a declaration of war and the destruction of other gods and Gods. It is alleged there is no other god or God besides *Yahweh*. This Hebrew God is jealous and wants no other gods to be worshiped. *Yahweh* chooses Israel and sends and blesses her, and whoever wants to be blessed must be aligned with her and her promised Messiah, within Israel. Those who do not comply are enemies and must be destroyed. We have seen this attitude in the way the missionaries conducted themselves in their work of the conquest of other peoples in the New World (Majeke 1952).

Long ago, when this Christian God of the missionaries met *MODIMO* of STR, influenced by the world they came from and the theories that formed their world-view, the missionaries had declared *MODIMO* to be no 'God' or, at best, god of the heathens (Chidester 1996). When ultimately 'God' was translated as *Modimo* [Christian God] the concept of *MODIMO* was devalued from its awesome numinousness to a person humans can relate to (Setiloane 1976).

Consequently the *Sotho* were left with two deities. In this encounter of two deities the result was that one way of speaking of deity - the Christian notion of a personal *Modimo* [God] - was alienated from the local ways of speaking about deity - i.e., *MODIMO* as all-pervading, and *Modimo* as parents, the deceased,

plants, ritualistic animals and so on. The latter ways were looked down on and condemned as paganism and heathenism. Christian communicators of the concepts of the Christian God gave the impression that there is a unified concept of God in Christianity. This is not so.

...the term 'God' is similar to the term 'game' in that there is no single cluster of characteristics that defines the *definiendum*. There is no single set of conditions that constitutes His essence or that unequivocally defines Him. There are literally thousands of possible clusters of attributes that may be taken as the *definiens* of God (Gastwirth in Religious Studies Vol. 8 (2) 1972: 151).

The attributes of deities are human descriptions and appellations. Human words run short of describing the essence of deities. No one description of deities should claim finality and authenticity above all others. The descriptions of deities should be left open ended. Being dogmatic about truth claims is not helpful.

On the STR side, though the word *MODIMO* is not in everyday use, the STR's silence about IT is their acceptance of the fact that speaking about IT can become an unending, fruitless discussion. The *Sotho* people realize that there is no possible conclusion as to who or what *MODIMO* is and who or what IT is not.

It is a sentimental fallacy to hold that the millions of believers in the vast variety of religious faiths in the world all worship and pray to the same God. They have different and unique and irreconcilable God-beliefs. There is no general concept of God that could unite them in prayer and devotion (Gastwirth in Religious Studies, Vol 8 (2) 1972:151).

There are many religions and religious beliefs in the world . These are difficult to classify simplistically. The theory of there being four religions in the world with

which the missionaries operated is inadequate. Besides that, the alienation and divergences of the concepts of deities within religious world-views is exacerbated by sub-cultural beliefs and denominations within religions. As Gastwirth (1972: 151) says, religions and concepts of deities are different and unique.

Each religion has its own vital core around which it revolves. Some are sophisticated in prayers, some in written theology, others in mystical experiences and so on. That STR, for example, is not a literate religion should not make it less sophisticated in other aspects of belief in which other religions may be found wanting.

The paternalistic approach of the missionaries has been very alienating to STR. The hostility and antagonism with which STR beliefs and concepts of deities were held has added to the alienation that resulted. Conversion by coercion has been another factor which created alienation between the concepts of the two deities concerned.

This inadequacy becomes even more apparent when *MODIMO* is described as *Selo* (Thing / Monster). Whether or not He (sic) is a pronoun suitable to the Christian God, it is proposed to denote *Modimo* [God] as IT (Setiloane 1976:77).

At no point must IT be conceptualized in an anthropoidic (of animal nature) sense. IT, awesome as it is, is not a dreadful THING but a weird ONE, the revered ONE, the numinous, the fearfully mysterious ONE. In addition, in no way is *MODIMO* referred to in anthropomorphic terms. IT is never referred to as a human being. The current translation of *Modimo* as the Christian God, described in anthropomorphic and Christological terms, does not make sense to the *Sotho* and is not the same as *MODIMO*.

Another point of alienation relates to *godimo* [above] and *legodimo* [sky]. In STR, *godimo* and *legodimo* do not suggest that *MODIMO*'s abode is in the sky above or in heaven. These references have to do with the numinousness of *MODIMO*. As for the abode of *MODIMO*, STR is not specific, but certainly *MODIMO* does not abide in heaven. *Legodimo* [sky] is the primary manifestation of *MODIMO* (Setiloane 1976:78). *Legodimo* is *leratadima* [blue sky], not Heaven as the abode of the Christian God.

It is important to state here that in STR cosmology there is no heaven or hell, which is another point of irreconcilability with the Christian God, who abides in Heaven. Thus there is no way that *MODIMO* can be conceptualized as living in heaven or to have created hell in order to punish *Batho* [people] and IT's enemies. It is beneath the nature and dignity of *MODIMO* to have enemies among humans or among other gods or Gods.

The images of the Christian God left in the minds of the African agrarian societies cannot be reconciled with the STR concepts of *MODIMO*. The images of the Christian God are those of an aggressor who grabs the African lands and resources. The notion of individual ownership of land at the expense of other members of the community does not sit well with African people. The issues of greed and the amassing of riches by individuals, at the expense of others, does not accord with the African idea of mutual ownership and communal care. The elevation of race, culture and language to a state where these became instruments of conquest was not received well by Africans.

These legacies continue to affect the communities of southern Africa. The struggle for the repossession of land and for African identity is now raging. The struggle for the economic emancipation of African masses in a sense of the struggle to find a place in the market economy from which they cannot turn back in southern Africa is central to the quest for total liberation in the region. The place of culture,

race and language is still a thorn that the Africans feel must be dealt with in order to reconstruct African selfhood in post-missionary and post-colonial southern Africa.

6.3. Possible Points of Commonality

6.3.1. *MODIMO* and the Christian God are Not Matters of Knowledge but of Faith

Some eternal and natural attributes of the Christian God, as Mbiti (1975) presents them, are comparable with the attributes of *MODIMO*, including the STR categories that IT is Unknown and is Spirit. These are attributes such as aseity and ineffability, but more specifically the notion of the ineffability of God - the idea that the preferred way of speaking about deity is to keep quiet.

But the moral attributes of the Christian God are not comparable to the moral attributes assigned to *MODIMO*. In most instances, when the *Sotho* people attribute the moral attributes of the Christian God, like love, mercy and kindness, to *MODIMO* it is because they have learned them from Christian people like missionaries. The *Sotho* specific moral attribute of *MODIMO* is that IT is good (p' Bitek 1971) and that it is awesome (Setiloane 1976)

But this does not and must not suggest in any way that *MODIMO* is malevolent. *MODIMO* is good and benevolent, but is also ambivalent and impersonal in the *Sotho* belief. *MODIMO* is ambivalent in the sense that both life-threatening and life-enhancing forces are coexistent in IT. *MODIMO* does not need to be personal in order to be benevolent and ambivalent. All the intentions of *MODIMO* are good, though most or some of those intentions are realized through *Badimo* [Ancestors]. The same applies to *Badimo*. Their intentions are generally good (Setiloane 1976).

The ineffability of *MODIMO*, in STR, does not mean that therefore there is no God or that God does not exist among the *Basotho*. To say that God does not exist is not proof that God in fact does not exist. God exists by faith for those who believe. This does not mean that to believe is not to think, but it is to acknowledge the human experience of deity, even if that experience cannot be proved. As regards this statement, the *Sotho* concept of *MODIMO* as 'One Unknown' fits very well (Mafokoane 1996: 17th November, Interview).

In terms of this unknowability of *MODIMO*, there is some common conceptualization between the Christian religion and the STR, although the Christian missionaries and preachers gave the impression that the Christian God could be known in the manner that another person, such as a relative, wife, husband or friend could be known. It is not so in STR (Mafokoane 1996: 17th November, Interview).

The finite (i.e. humanity) cannot comprehend and know the conceptually infinite *MODIMO*. It will always be the case that the creature cannot know the creator. Only the creator can know the creator itself. Similarly, only the creator can know the creature, whether the creature is a moral agent like humanity or is not. In terms of the knowability of *MODIMO*, the situation is the same, since it is impossible for a sculpture to know the sculptor or a painting to know the artist. This does not mean that humanity is inanimate, it only emphasizes that humanity cannot know *MODIMO* personally, in the way that the Christian God is claimed can be known. Even though humanity is imbued with intelligence, in STR human knowledge of the divine will always be inadequate, if not impossible, and even then only by faith.

If the 'being' (experience) of *MODIMO* is 'being' (existence) itself, the 'being' (existence) of *MODIMO* cannot be understood as the existence of a 'being' (person) alongside others or above others. In other words, if *MODIMO* could be

conceptualized as a 'being' (person), IT would be subject to the categories of finiteness (Diamond 1974:332). It is not so in STR. *MODIMO* is not a person and thus is not subject to the categories of finiteness.

This is how the *Sotho* people comprehend *MODIMO*. This STR *MODIMO* is never subject to categories of finiteness. Concerning whether *MODIMO* is a 'being' (existence), I need to be careful not to give the impression that the *Sotho* religion's concept of *MODIMO* is pantheistic - a doctrine that says that all is God and God is all - but rather that *MODIMO* is panentheistic- permeates all things (Setiloane 1976).

Speaking about *MODIMO* as a 'being' (person) would be inappropriate. The *Sotho* conceptualize *MODIMO* as 'Deity', the equivalent of a divine experience, and never ever as a 'being'. *MODIMO* is more a 'numinousness' and never one conceptualized as possessing a body, even if that body was said to be a spirit body. *MODIMO* is totally bodyless (p'Bitek 1971).

MODIMO is not accessible through direct human relationships. There is no direct contact with *MODIMO* in STR, only indirect contact, though the elderly and *Badimo*, who are believed to be nearer to IT, or through the Traditional Healers who are said to be allowed to communicate with the it or, at best, through the Ancestors. The 'Unknown', even the 'Unknowable', is not material and not obvious to humanity. What has already been said about this 'Unknowable' and 'Unknown' does not even begin to give a clue of what IT is.

What humans are capable of commenting on are claims of the experiences attributed to *MODIMO*. Humans give reports of events based on the unusualness and strangeness of certain human experiences. We hear claims which exaggerate descriptions of IT, especially that these unusual human experiences possibly emanate from IT.

Obviously, each of us will believe and should believe that the conception of God which fits the evidence is the true conception of God, but we cannot pre-suppose what the true God is and then fit the evidence to our view: (Bestocci, in Royal Institute of Philosophy (RIPL) lectures, Volume (2) 1969:18).

What *MODIMO* truly is cannot be known. Measuring and judging *MODIMO* in terms of true or false is misleading. In other words, in STR there is no false *MODIMO* or true *MODIMO*. Human judgement about that which is above their comprehension is prone to fallacy. *MODIMO* of STR, as an *eus necessarium* (necessary 'being'), can only be interpreted as abstract, without concrete contents and 'characteristics' (Hubbeling 1987:205).

Humans may use extraordinary appellations for referring to *MODIMO*. And yet even the most descriptive words that humans can use say nothing about the knowability of IT. The early church fathers spoke of the invisible God as an unbegotten, nameless, eternal, incomprehensible, unchangeable Being (Berkhof 1968:29). *MODIMO* of STR fits these categories very well, except for the notion of unchangeability in that *MODIMO* is not conceptualized as a static THING. *MODIMO* is dynamic and dynamistic.

Humans cannot know the essence of *MODIMO*, but only concepts or images of IT, according to Setiloane (1976). Moreover, human knowledge of *MODIMO* is subjectively conditioned. The ideas about *MODIMO* are confined to the human encounter with what they conclude IT is, because of the weirdness of that experience (Setiloane 1976).

Diamond (1974:91) affirms this point that "The transcendent God is not supposed to be accessible to sense experience". The transcendent attributes of *MODIMO* are inaccessible to humans. Thus, speaking about *MODIMO* as transcendent is

not a description of an observable phenomenon. *MODIMO* is not an observable phenomenon. Thus speaking about transcendence is tantamount to using highly descriptive words which ultimately do not reveal much about *MODIMO*. Dependence on extra-sensual experience is too subjective to base any visible argument on. Variations of *MODIMO*'s 'revelation', through hearing and intuition, further complicate the already concept-riddled 'IT'.

Hartshorne's principle of dual transcendence says "...God is infinite as no one else is, but also finite as no one else is" (Hartshorne in RIPL 1969: 162 - 163). This reemphasises the point that *MODIMO* does not exist in the same way that creation does. *MODIMO* is in another mode of existence, which no human can dream to fathom. This also strengthens the point that *MODIMO* cannot be known. Words like eternalness, immutability and ineffability can be used to conceptualize IT. The concepts that these and many other words represent help the human imagination, but say nothing substantial about this *MODIMO*.

MODIMO can only be affirmed as a necessary condition of the intelligibility of our experience (Clarke, in Madden *et al.* 1968:16). Our descriptions of *MODIMO* go only as far as our experience and the words we use to express that which we perceive about IT. *MODIMO* is a necessary conclusion from what the STR people experience about nature and how it behaves.

...the terms in which we positively describe God are not so much direct representational concepts, grasping some essence, as metalinguistic notions calling attention to the fact that the content of meaning is susceptible of transmittal prediction and directing us to affirm them of God as the best way of speaking about him (sic), if we are to speak about him at all, as indeed we must, I believe, if we are to need the powerful drive of our minds in quest of total intelligibility (Clark, in Madden *et al.* 198:19).

"*Finitum non possit capere infinitum*" (the finite cannot comprehend the infinite). Anything conceivable is not worthy of ultimacy, it is an idol (Diamond 1974:316). One can imagine how many idols have been created through human words, in our desire to know and to articulate Deity. *MODIMO* does not fall into categories of subject and object. IT is 'Wholly Other' (Otto 1923). The dimension in which *MODIMO* operates cannot be known. It is a trans-relational dimension.

The impersonal *MODIMO* of STR is certainly in this trans-relational dimension. *MODIMO* does not relate to people as a person, and yet is most concerned about the plight of people. IT gets involved, as an impersonal *MODIMO*, only when necessary, in that IT is always panentheistically existent within and without the community, and this *MODIMO* works through *Badimo*. In fact, it is the *Badimo* who do the work more directly with families and humans, rather than *MODIMO* itself. In fact, *MODIMO* delegates duties to *Badimo* (Motala 1997: 18th December, Interview,).

The Christian religion does accept the fact that the perception that the Christian God cannot be known is valid. The Christian religion continues to speak about the revelations of 'Him'(sic) and yet has confessions that 'God' can be known by faith. Faith is the apprehension of that which is beyond our knowledge. But what is beyond our knowledge? There is absolutely no way that we can meaningfully describe that which is beyond our knowledge and also be conclusive and definitive about it.

That which is beyond our knowledge is simply unknowable and has not dawned in our realm of life at all. What we claim to know about is that which we think has dawned in our minds. That which has dawned in our minds, and which is part of our understanding, falls short of being integrated into belonging to the realm of faith. Faith believes and grasps the unknown. What can be known, therefore, is that which is within human experience. To say that human experience is the

knowability of the Christian God, or *MODIMO*, is grossly inferential.

The STR *MODIMO* is not found in Jesus, for IT cannot be human. But the concept of *deus absconditus* expresses what *MODIMO* is - a hidden deity. *MODIMO* is hidden in the whole of creation and is hidden from all humans. *MODIMO* is not revealed but is encountered through the whole of creation, especially through lightning, pestilence, drought, heat and rain. These natural phenomena come through *MODIMO* and that is how *MODIMO* can be spoken of (Setiloane 1976). Otherwise, in STR, *MODIMO* cannot be known. *MODIMO* is hidden.

MODIMO is past and beyond finding. IT is incomprehensible. IT'S *seriti* [divinity / dignity] wholly escapes all human senses. The use of words such as 'divinity' is a way of making a difference between the mundane and the sacred. *MODIMO* is past finding. This must not give one to think that there was once a possibility of finding IT. Some African myths tell about the ancient times when deity dwelled near the forefathers. Such myths are a way of trying to make sense of the mysteriousness and hiddenness of deity. STR is not the only religion that has such myths.

MODIMO of STR is conceptualized from experiences with nature and not with the scriptures, as is the Christian God. Nevertheless, STR is not strictly speaking a nature religion but an ancestrology / ancestrolatry - a system where Ancestor anamnesis dominates most of the religious activities - a system of consultation with parents, for appeasement and propitiation, especially when the parents have passed away. The concept of 'God' is generally the result of a feeling of absolute dependence. This feeling

makes God (sic) continuous with the world ... recognizes only a God
that can be known by human experience and manifests Himself in

Christian consciousness as absolute causality, to which a feeling of absolute dependence corresponds (Berkhof 1968:24).

What is closer to the STR concept of *MODIMO* in the thinking above is that *MODIMO* is continuous with the world. *MODIMO* is not deistic but immanent in the sense that *MODIMO* is involved with the community, albeit in awesome silence, having delegated duties to *Badimo*, elderly people and community leaders to see to it that equity, peace and 'comprehensive well being' are maintained.

6.3.2. *MODIMO* and the Christian God are Ultimate Symbols of Religious Imagery

Discussion about *MODIMO* and the Christian God must be conducted within the discussion about religion. *MODIMO* and the Christian God are, by origin and nature, subjects of religion. A discussion of *MODIMO* and the Christian God outside the premise of religion is likely to cause more confusing dynamics on the subject, which in itself is fraught with divergent views. Therefore, we shall be well advised not to speak about *MODIMO* and the Christian God outside the subject of religion. We, thus, assume that *MODIMO* and the Christian God are ultimate symbols of religious imagery.

Religion is that which seeks to give meaning to humankind's ultimate concerns. After taking care of all other human concerns, concern about *MODIMO* and the Christian God remain an unsatiated need. Human beings, especially religious humans, cannot be satisfied with simplistic answers to questions about deity. They find themselves constantly searching for deity to give more meaning and fulfilment in their lives.

Religion is that which relates to the most profound meaning of humankind's existence (Streng 1985: 7). That profound meaning is given when, in STR, there

is social tranquillity. Otherwise none of the religious activities satisfy to the utmost. In STR the divine is encountered in Ancestor consultation and anamnesis.

People who happen to experience the divine are changed by it. Some seem to lose their minds, others shout 'born again!' Some demonstrate supernatural powers, others become *Dingaka* [Traditional Healers]. Some become *Baruti* [Priests], depending on which religious cosmology they experience the divine in. To a large extent, none of them is able to give a satisfactory account of what happened to them. The experience of the divine is subjective.

If you ask what the *Sotho* people feel and experience when they relate to *MODIMO* and *Badimo*, in most cases neither those who had a dramatic experience nor those who did not have a dramatic experience with IT are able to give a satisfactory answer. Usually the response is: we feel nothing but we know it has happened (Mosotho 1997: 14th December, Interview).

The same applies to those who profess that they are 'born again'. None give a satisfying answer when attempting to explain what happened to them. The experiencing of the divine is beyond human comprehension and therefore beyond human expression. This confirms the fact that religion is that which deals with the whole fabric of existence, both the visible and the invisible, in that having had an encounter with the 'Other' who saturates the whole of existence, no one is able to comprehend it, since it belongs to the Unknown.

The whole fabric of existence is astounding and astonishing to humans. Experiencing the Ultimate, Divine, Other is even more astonishing. People become so enthused that their whole lives become transformed by their encounter with the Divine. True to what Streng (1985: 12) says, religion is "... that transforming power in the recesses of consciousness that draws people beyond what they can measure with their senses".

It is actually the Divine which brings about such radical change in people who encounter IT. No human can remain as they were before, after an encounter with the Divine. The substance of religion is supernatural beings, supernatural forces and Deities in relation to humanity. The ultimate of these supernatural powers is *MODIMO* in STR and the Christian God in the Christian religion.

MODIMO and the Christian God are experienced within consciousness of existence and the threat of death. Becoming conscious of being (existence) cannot be separated from the wonder of existence, which generates feelings of inadequacy in humanity. Thus, religion begins with a special feeling of wonder toward and dependence upon the whole cosmos. The feeling itself does not necessarily have anything to do with morality, rational knowledge, or any particular concept of deity.

It is this very feeling of wonder and dependence on the whole cosmos that initiates a religious imagination that conceptualizes *MODIMO* and the Christian God as ultimate symbols, which seem to represent it adequately. Religious leaders and founders among the *Sotho* people, as well as in Christianity radiate these religious feelings and, as symbol systems, retained the aura of that feeling and used this as a means to turn the feeling on again and again by repeated re-enactment.

Feeling is perpetuated through the repetition of ritual processes, repetition of the same teachings about deities, repetitions of the stories and myths that re-emphasize the concepts of *MODIMO* and of the Christian God. These create a solid conviction and aura which, through this repetitive ritual process, can be tapped again and again to produce the same responses of awe and worship of the Divine.

The spirit (*geist*) can be understood as the mind. This is about consciousness of being a creature. Though a person is said to be manifesting the One within

oneself, the point made is that this One is the Ultimate, whom the *Sotho* people call *MODIMO* and Christians call God. But, since the One is manifested in the mind or conscience or spirit of a person, the One must be, and is, subjectively conceptualized.

Since the One is beyond human imagination in terms of its essence, it must also be objectively reflected. The metaphysical systems, such as the religion of each age, are symbols of the way the world was experienced, in history and context, by that age, just as its art and literature are. The divine is the human reflection and conceptualization of deities.

The Christian God and *MODIMO*, therefore, are the ultimate symbols of the adoration of these metaphysical systems, and are accordingly conceptualized within the confines of history, geography, time and religious culture. Therefore, one must be aware that there are historical, geographical and cultural elements in the conceptualizations of deities. We must be aware of the contexts and questions, to which humanity was responding in their particular communities, which resulted in calling upon deities in that context at that particular time.

Therefore, in the comparing of concepts one against the other, there cannot be a better or a worse concept of the divine. Each concept was meant to be a response to particular questions of life. Each concept was devised in order to solve certain problems and to answer certain questions, which were not necessarily asked by people in another context or time.

What matters is that, at the time when *MODIMO* and the Christian God were conceptualized, they provided the ultimate meaning, social coherence and destiny for those particular communities in response to their respective and particular questions, e.g., questions of the need for rain, in STR, questions of defense against neighboring nations in the case of Israel in the Old Testament, or defense of the

Christian religion under persecution, or the need to incorporate 'slaves' in the capitalist economy under the British Empire, as was the case for the missionaries in southern Africa (Majeke 1952).

It follows that the divine are productions of inner contradictions, or they were conceptualized as the ultimate symbols of religious imagery, which brought meaning and purpose to people who were perplexed as a result of their inner contradictions. In this thesis, those contradictions were caused by consciousness of 'being' (humanity) and the fear and awe of death. That which is not conscious, and which does not experience the wonder and fear of death, cannot develop the contradictions or the need for the divine.

6.3.3. Talk About Concepts of *MODIMO* and Concepts of the Christian God is Symbolic.

If we talk about the concepts of *MODIMO* and those of the Christian God in relation to humans as conscious beings which fear death, as people who are confined to time and space (as elements of measurement and as elements of an existence within which people can conceptualize things), then we must note that humans are too limited in all respects to comprehend that which is above their comprehension. Human talk about deities can only be symbolic.

In other words, deities are the religious realities encountered, which, by their nature, should not be confined to time and space. Deities are believed to have created and provided these elements (time and space) as parameters for humans to use. How much of the will of deities can humans begin to understand?. Humanity cannot know the will of deities. Humanity cannot do the will of deities unless the divine fulfils it through them, or else accomplishes it without them. Humans' claim of the knowledge of the will of deities is relative. There is no need to impose human versions of deities and what humans have comprehended symbolically in

dogmatic terms.

We begin to appreciate the difficulty in which humans find themselves, in attempting to grasp the will of the divine. At least STR readily accepts that humans cannot know the will of *MODIMO* (Mafokoane 1996: 17th November, Interview) and, to be precise, the *MODIMO* of STR does not make such demands on humans. The Christian religion, on the other hand, describes the plan of God, has doctrines on how to know 'God' and God's will for individuals, and makes demands and sets imperatives for humans to find that will, to learn it, know it, do it and teach it. It is not so with *MODIMO*.

What makes it more difficult to know the will of the divine is that religious talk itself is symbolic, it is not literal talk nor does it have literal meaning. Symbols are representatives of that which is outside them. Symbols are not the actual thing. Symbols carry multiple interpretations of what they represent and multiple interpretations complicate the talk by giving it many meanings. Symbols say more than what they are describing. Symbols are inclined to be extremely subjective. They cannot be relied on solely for seeking and finding the will of the deities.

For example, take two believers holding tenaciously to the truth of their own claims. Let's say it is a claim of a concept of *MODIMO* or a concept of a Christian God, using symbols, faith, intuition, revelation, scriptures, church authority and many such bases for religious understanding, including parents, *Badimo*, Traditional Healers and so on. Basically, no one can resolve the problem because, cosmologically speaking, these believers are arguing from divergent viewpoints and from unrelated religious philosophies.

In other words, they are not in the same frame-of-reference, even though conceptually they seem to talk about the same thing e.g., *MODIMO* or God. In many cases, trying to resolve such problems of tenacious adherence to differing

truth claims is exasperating. Gastwirth witnesses to this fact in the following words:

Faith, intuition, revelation, inner experience, and the claimed autonomy of religious discourse cannot be counted on to decide between the rival truth-claims of two believers (in *Religious Studies*, Vol. 8 (2) (1972:152).

This sort of impasse can happen when holding on to the claim that the translation of a concept such as '*MODIMO*' in STR is precisely equivalent to that of a corresponding concept of the Christian God. This can only appear to succeed when differences in the conceptualization processes are overlooked, neglected or excluded. One ends up frustrated that we, as people of different religions, are speaking at cross purposes (Setiloane 1976).

But, the point being made here is that only a comparatively few people are able to interpret for all the others both in STR and the Christian religion. Only specialists or authorities in these religions can tell others how to know what the will of *MODIMO* and the will of the Christian God are. In all cases, they themselves do not have full access to the knowledge of the will of deities and are incapable of knowing this will, on account of the incomprehensibility of deities.

This problem has been exacerbated by Christianity, which has opened up to individuals the liberty and possibility of finding out for themselves the will of the Christian God for their individual lives. Thus one has numerous individual experiences of the divine, each claiming to have discovered what the will of the Christian God is for their individual lives. This openness has obscured this knowledge because of the immensity of the subjectivity in the whole matter of knowing the Christian God. On the other hand, in STR, individuals are not encouraged to seek the will of *MODIMO* for their individual lives. Usually, it is

the will of *Badimo* that is sought and even then not by everyone as a religion demand (conversion or allegiance to *Badimo*). It is only those with whom their own *Badimo* are dealing who seek to know what they want. Ancestor religion is not a routine religion like Christianity.

Beyond that, knowledge of the will of deities is primarily a matter of conscience. Conscience is the primary factor that brings the concerns of deities to humans. If it were not because of the conscience, which comes as a result of the consciousness of 'being' (humanity), there would be no religion, no awareness, no struggle for the conceptualizing of deities, no struggle to know the will of deities. The following are concepts of *MODIMO* extracted from the theological discussion of who *MODIMO* is in relation to missionary Christianity.

6.3.4. *MODIMO* in Relation to the Missionary Concepts of the Christian God

It needs to be said again that *Basotho* did not engage in long theological discussions about *MODIMO*, because their cultural setting did not encourage such theologizing at that time (Setiloane 1976). This is culturally acceptable among *Basotho* - to respect *MODIMO*, and to have the right to do so. Besides that, theirs was not an evangelizing religion but a socializing religion. In other words STR has no 'great commission' of going out to witness and to make disciples of other nations. It is through the process of socialization that children get to know about *MODIMO* and *Badimo*.

The apparent remoteness of *MODIMO* must be understood in IT's apparent absence (Setiloane 1976). For the outsiders like the missionaries it would seem as if the *Basotho* communities only knew and were willing to speak about *Badimo* and not *MODIMO*. This, inadvertently gave a false impression of STR having no concept or knowledge of *MODIMO*. In other words, the outsiders could

erroneously conclude that there was no need for *MODIMO* in STR. The notion of *MODIMO* has always been there among *Basotho* but was not a subject for everyday idle talk.

MODIMO was conceptualized as the cause of death and the source of relief on difficult matters such as the lack of rain and unhealed sickness. In STR thought, the *Badimo* should be able to solve such problems concerning rain and illnesses through the Traditional Healers' ability to do so. In the process, the person who caused the problem must be found. If no such person is found, then *MODIMO* could be invoked to assist in the last resort. If no solution could be found, a fatalistic attitude would be adopted to the problem. Yet, because the matter was referred to *MODIMO*, the *Basotho* found relief and solace (Motala, Johannes 1996: 25th July, Interview).

MODIMO is an impersonal experience. IT encounters *Basotho* in special moments. There are testimonies of people experiencing *MODIMO* through miracles - inexplicable events - that *Basotho* people speak of (Tshipu 1996: 9th February, Interview) . For example, there was an incident where a 12 year old school child fell three hundred metres down a cliff at *Magoebaskloof*, near Pietersburg. It is said that the child was not hurt at all. Ultimately, the child got help to get out from the bottom of the cliff. It is said that only *MODIMO* made this possible. There are many such miracles that people relate and attribute to *MODIMO* (Sefoka 1996: 14th May, Interview).

STR is not entangled in Goddianism (Uka 1991), the notion that a certain religion's concept of deity is supreme. The apparent supremacy and superiority of a certain deity is a strategy for evangelization by belittling and despising the concepts of deities of other religions in order to dominate and control the evangelized communities (Chidester 1996) The STR does not evangelize.

MODIMO is the sum total of dynamistic powers. In this regard IT is powerful in the sense that those who are able to harness dynamistic powers, such as Traditional Healers and Witches, ultimately get their permission and the power to do so from *MODIMO*. In other words, in STR it is believed that, unless *MODIMO* and *Badimo* wish anything good or evil to happen, it will not happen. The ultimate power and sanction resides with *MODIMO* (Sefoka 1996: 24th May Interview).

MODIMO is also henotheistic in the sense that IT does not militate against other people and their religions. This is unlike, *Yahweh* who is called ‘a man of war’ (Ex. 15: 3). *MODIMO* of STR did not fight wars in IT’s history. It is not within the nature, culture or dignity of *MODIMO* to fight. The same pertains in the culture of *Basotho*: humans are not encouraged to fight about *MODIMO*.

The following is a discussion of the concepts of *MODIMO* in comparison with the concepts of the Christian God in the context of African Traditional Religions (ATR). In this instance some African philosophers are consulted in order to clarify the *Basotho* concepts of *MODIMO*. So, a discussion with African Traditional Religions (ATR) is taken into consideration in order to locate our study of the STR concepts of *MODIMO* within ATR, where the corpus of this study belongs.

6.4. Possible Points of Conciliation

The following points of conciliation between the concepts of *MODIMO* and the Christian concepts of God are not put in any order of priority. But, from the investigation undertaken in the field research, the name of *Kgobe* would have been the choice of the *Sotho*, especially the *Pedi*, for the equivalent of the Christian God. *Kgobe* is the name for *MODIMO* which stands for integrity, goodness and the wellbeing of people (*Gaphaahla* Teachers Research Group; *Madupe*

Herbalists and Traditional Healers Association; University of the North and Stoffberg Theological Seminary Students Research Group and interviewed Interlocutors) (1996 - 1999).

Another point of possible conciliation is the concept of the Deity of the mountains, the 'God' of Fire mentioned by Oesterly and Robinson (1930: 138), who claim that in the Old Testament the God of Israel (who eventually became known as the Christian God) was conceptualized as the Fire-God and 'God' of the mountain. In STR, the Deity of the mountain and the Deity of the Ground were symbolized by *Legwame*. In this concept lies a potential connection and comparison between *MODIMO* and the Christian God.

In STR, *MODIMO* was conceptualized as Deity of the Ancestors (*Badimo*). Remember, there was a clear differentiation between *MODIMO* and *Badimo* in STR. The 'God' of Israel, *Yahweh*, calls Himself (sic) the Deity of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Ex. 3: 16) - Ancestors of the Children of Israel. Also, there was no confusion in Israel between *Yahweh* and their forefathers. Here also was a point of possible connection and dialogue between the concepts of *MODIMO* and the concepts of *Yahweh*.

Yahweh was revealed by the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day. *Yahweh* (= the Christian God) was known as the giver of rain. In STR there was *Thobega* (Dehnke 1968: 4), a local name for *MODIMO* conceptualized as thunder clouds and the giver of rain. Here also was a possibility for comparison, connection, conciliation and dialogue.

Oesterley and Robinson (1930: 142) record that, at one stage of the development of the concept of 'God' in Israel, the Israelites conceptualized God as King, Lord and Judge. In STR, there was an idea and opportunity for acceptance that the chief was the custodian of the land, and that the chief is *Modimo* in the sense of

Kgoši being the sovereign ruler representing *MODIMO* among *batho ba Kgobe* (people of *MODIMO*). This is another starting point for fruitful conversation concerning deities.

Oesterly and Robinson (1930: 144) say there was a time when Israel identified and located their deity in physical objects. Here they referred to the Ark of the Covenant, the Tabernacle and Mount Sinai. They also say that it was not strange for the neighbors of Israel to conceptualize their gods as being located in mountains, rivers, stones, gold and forests. In STR it would not be strange to identify the location of *Badimo* in the same areas. In fact, the locations and abode of *Badimo* are in mountains such as *Modimolle*, Krantzkop near Nylstroom, and forests such as *Thokgweng sa Serole Mohlakaneng ga Mongatane Mashabela*, and *Mohlonong wa Leopa la Mmapulane ga Mmakopa* (Motala, Johannes and Jack Thaubele 1998: 6th March, Kgatla 1992: 43; Mafokoane, Rajuili, Sefoka, Motala, Hine, Ngoetjana D., and all research groups: 1996 - 1999). This was another point for discussion and conciliation.

Another possibility of conciliation could come from how the Christian God was conceptualized as the opposite of idols. In the current investigation it was discovered that the *Sotho* were not idol-worshippers. The *Sotho*, especially the *Pedi*, without discriminating between the local names of *MODIMO*, would consent to the idea that *Kgobe* is the true 'God'. In addition, it would be acceptable that *MODIMO* is the creator of the celestial vault and the earth. As Muñoz (1990: 70) says, the Christian God was the deity of individuals as well as of communities. This idea would be acceptable to the *Sotho* as well.

It would also be acceptable to conceptualize *MODIMO* as ineffable and as 'mystery' (Hubbeling 1987: 4; Mbiti 1970: 27). These are points in which there lies fertile ground for inter-religion, missiological and theological discourse between the *Sotho* and the missionary-colonizers' Christian God.

6.5. Conclusion

This was a chapter on findings derived from the thesis, which were given within the topics points of alienation, points of commonality and points of conciliation between the concepts of *MODIMO* in STR and the concepts of the Christian God. Among the points of alienation, two areas are conspicuous: the area of the conceptualization of deities, and the area of the premature translation of the word 'God' as meaning the word '*MODIMO*'.

In the discussion of the points of common ground, we realized that when we speak about deities there is agreement if the discussion acknowledges that we are dealing with matters of faith and not of fact. There is also agreement when we acknowledge that we are dealing with religious imagery and religious symbols.

There was also the realization that there are points for fruitful theological and missiological discussion. For example, there can be discussion about deities conceptualized as the givers of rain, as being symbolized by fire and clouds, and as being attributed with integrity and mystery. These are some of the areas which contribute to the potential conciliation between the concepts of *MODIMO* in STR and the concepts of the Christian God.

6.6. Summary

The central argument of this thesis is that the concepts of *MODIMO* in STR are different from the concepts of the Christian God. Superficially, this sounds like an obvious observation. However, it is not obvious. There are political, cultural, economic and theological reasons that are deeply embedded in this assumption. Some of these reasons have acted destructively for generations on end and, unless revealed for what they are doing to humanity, they will remain a puzzle and a menace for ages to come.

The missionaries, most of them consciously, supported the advent of colonialism. Generally speaking, they were in cultural and political agreement with the reasons and the purpose of colonialism. They understood and cooperated with the political and religious mind-set from which the colonial and the missionary motivation came. The differences between the political colonial forces and the 'religious' missionaries were blurred. In fact, the two blended with each other. What worked well for the political motivations of colonialism also advanced the cause of religious Christianization, and whatever favored Christianization was also to the advantage of and advanced colonialism.

Missionary work produced churches which were politically and liturgically separated in South Africa. The churches which were ultimately produced by the missionaries, after the development of the mission stations, continued their mission work in the same manner as the missionaries had done it. Since my central concern was the kind of deity the missionaries presented, I discovered that this deity was worshiped by the succeeding generations of white society which the forces of colonialism and mission produced. The images of the Christian God were pictured as those of a deity of land, power and privileges. The white successors of the missionaries in fact worshiped the power and privilege they had over African people and they substituted this for the worship of the living God.

The wealth that the white successors of the missionaries discovered, and which they amassed for themselves at the expense of the African people, was another temptation into which they fell. The making of profit became their primary aim, even over the need to care for humanity, especially African people. In fact, the African people were used as part of the profit-making machine of the capitalist economy.

Another image that emerged as a legacy of the missionary teaching was that of the worship of race, culture and language. For African traditional people it was very

confusing to hear the missionaries preach about the God of love, and yet to see them in the forefront of the making of war against Africans and the dispossessing of them of their land, labor and dignity. African chiefs were deposed and some were absorbed into colonial rule. African family systems were disrupted. African social, political, economic and religious systems were undermined.

After presenting the concepts of the Christian God, I discussed the socio-cultural structure from which the African people, especially the *Sotho*, conceptualize their deities. I discovered that the concept of *MODIMO* within that social structure was all-pervasive and was monistic. This was wrongly interpreted by missionaries as being a sign that the *Sotho* had no concept of a deity, or that they lacked one altogether. In many ways this was one of the reasons for their subjugating the Africans, like brute beasts which had no human faculties or any civilization to speak of.

After looking at the world from which the *Sotho* conceptualized their deities, I presented the natural attributes, local names and the essence of *MODIMO* in STR. I discovered that the notions of deity in STR are different from those of the Christian God. Finally, I showed that there were some areas in which the STR concepts of deities are irreconcilable with the concepts of the Christian God. I also identified areas in which there is potentially common conceptual ground and those areas where there are possibilities for fruitful theological and missiological discussion in future.

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7.3. INTERVIEWS, INDIVIDUALS AND GROUP MEMBERS **Interlocutors in Alphabetical Order of Surnames**

Chiloane, Caroline 5th December 1999
Hine, Diana 1st - 8th September 1996
Hlokoa, Alpheus 20th - 27th July 1998
Kgwale, Barnard 1st April - 30th May 1998
Kupa, Abraham 25th September 1998
Lenkoe, Peter 15th April 1996
Leseamo, John 24th April 1997
Letswalo, Hitler 12th August 1996
Letswara, Agnes 16th Jan - 29th February 1998
Mafokoane, Dean 1st November - 29th December 1996; 1st June - 30th July 1997
Makgai, Kentse 8th - 15th October 1998
Makgale, Eva 16th April 1996
Makola, Lydia 3rd - 10th August 1996; 2nd - 9th April 1998
Maoto, Adam 19th February 1996
Masoga, Alpheus 15th - 30th March 1996
Molele, Gogo Jeckinah 8th - 15th October 1998
Mosotho, Ntsimbi 16th - 20th December 1996
Motala, Johannes 1st March 1998- 30th May 1999
Motala, Elizabeth 1st July - 30th August 1996
Motala, Thabele Jack 20th July - 30 August 1996; 3rd November 1997 - 20th December 1997 1st February - 30th March 1998
Motaung, Edward 21st - 28th April 1997; 1st March - 30 May 1997;
Motimele, Lilly 9th - 16th February 1997
Motoboli, Sharon 7th - 14th March 1999
Mthembu, Emily 18th March 1999
Nchabeleng, Solomon 1st - 7th October 1998

Ngoetjana, David 12th - 19th July 1996; 29th - 31 December 1997; 2nd - 10th December 1998
Ngoetjana, Emily 16th - 20th December 1996
Ngoetjana, Albertinah Mashiye 12th July 1996; 16th - 20th December 1996
Ngoetjana, Michael 20th - 23rd December 1998
Ngoetjana, Phineas 16th - 20th December 1996
Rajuili, Joel 26th - 29th August 1998
Rathethe, Matome 2nd - 12th November 1998
Sefoka, Habakkuk 1st - 30th May 1996; 16th - 20th December 1998
Taumang, Rakgadi 16th - 20th December 1998
Thamaga, David 16th - 20th December 1998
Tlole, Emmanuel 8th - 15th October 1998
Tshipu, Wilfred 8th - 15th October 1998

7.4. Research Teams and Discussion groups

GaPhaahla Teachers Research Team (1996, 18th - 19th June; 1999, 23rd - 25th June).

Madupe Herbalists Traditional Healers Association (1996, 14th - 16th December; 1999, 17th - 20th December).

University of the North and Stoffberg Theological Seminary Research Team (1998, 16th - 30th October; 1998, 13th - 20th November).