CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Problem

Christian religion has spread through the centuries and has been accepted throughout the world, in Africa, and more specifically for the context of this thesis, in South Africa. This religion brought a train of positive indices of civilisation with it, namely: schools, churches, and hospitals. The adoption of Western lifestyle oral values are also associated with Christianity. Yet, in Africa, the embracement of Christian religion has not been wholesale.

Rather, African traditional religion, especially the belief in, and the veneration of the living dead, exists side by side with the "white man's cultural religion". This thesis, therefore, is an attempt to identify the problems that have hindered the acceptance of Christian religion, because the missionaries did not have full knowledge of the Venda culture; and to look specifically into the strongholds of ancestral veneration that have helped to endure the beliefs of the people.

The focus of this research will fall on the Vhavenda of South Africa from 1863 to 1994, with the dawning of the new political dispensation. The cultures and beliefs

of the Vhavenda will therefore be traced to the period prior to the coming of Christian religion, and the ensuing early contact of missionaries with the Vhavenda. An attempt will be made to identify the causes or factors that led to the conflict created by the preaching of the Gospel within a Venda context. The acceptance of Christian religion was hindered among the Vhavenda because the cultural background of the indigenous people was not always taken into consideration.

Had the early missionaries investigated the traditional religion of the Vhavenda in depth, such a problem regarding the life hereafter would not have led to a conflict (see Ndou 1993:10). This in itself is an indication that the missionaries openly maintained and concluded that black people, the Vhavenda included, were destined to be led, and not to lead; to be decided for by others; and not to advance what they believed in. The missionaries should have conducted research on the indigenous religion of the Vhavenda, to find common ground as a prelude to the acceptance of the new Christian religion. The Vhavenda also took pride in the cultural expression of their religion. Regardless of the problems encountered by the missionaries, their contribution should be understood as part of the story concerning the coming of the Christian religion to Venda. The problem to be investigated in this study deals in depth with the failure of the missionaries to identify factors, which hindered or could have facilitated the hearing of the Gospel message amongst the Vhavenda.

1.2. Aim

The primary aim and task of this study is to look into the factors that hindered the wholesale acceptance of the Christian religion by the Vhavenda; focusing primarily on the work conducted by the pioneers who brought the Christian religion to the Vhavenda. This thesis is significant in its potential assistance to future missionaries who will be exploring the area under discussion. The research will also bring factors to light, which assisted in expediating the spread of the Christian religion. The study will not only concentrate on the negative side and failure of the missionaries, but will also look at the brighter side of the missionary effort. For example, some traditional leaders invited missionaries to be in their midst, either as their advisers or for the purpose of boosting their prestige. This happens in many parts of the country. Rakometsi, for instance, indicates that he arrived in Witsieshoek on 6 December 1879, accompanied by Revs. Theron and Maeder. Chief Poulos Mopeli's pleasure to have the services of a missionary in Witsieshoek once more was obviously very great. As a token of appreciation, he sent 24 ploughs with oxen to plough and plant Rev. Schroeder's lands (Rakometsi 1988:21). The action adopted by Chief Mopeli clearly indicates that the traditional leaders, to a certain extent, wanted the missionaries to be near them, so that they had easy access to the missionaries' expertise. The Gospel of Good News was not the paramount concern of the traditional leaders. When some Vhavenda chieftains invited missionaries into the areas of their abode, the primary aims were to enhance the status of the chief

and to meet social needs. The proclamation of the Gospel was of secondary significance. Chief Mphaphuli was not in favour of missionaries, but his son, Makwarela, convinced him that the presence of the missionaries would "enhance the status of a chief" (see Ndou 1993:17).

It is also of importance to point out that the Vhavenda found it difficult to grasp and understand some of the meanings of biblical vocabulary, because the Venda Bible was not concise. Consequently, it brought a misconception of the true meaning of the Word. Van Rooy indicates:

> "Now, the first missionaries in Vendaland, and in their footsteps Dr Schwellnus, thought fit to use a Venda term which was not only full of contamination but, what is more, does not refer to exalted beings who are supposed to have created the world and to have established the world order i.e. Mudzimu, an ancestor Spirit" (Van Rooy 1971:13).

Almost none of God's attributes are present in this concept. This argument by Van Rooy is indicative of the fact that Mudzimu is connected to ancestral worship. To the missionaries, the name Mudzimu referred to the Almighty God, whereas according to the Vhavenda standard, Mudzimu referred to a family god and not to the Christian God. A further aim of this study, then, is to bring such conflicting misunderstandings into a perspective that will be of great assistance to future missionaries and missiological research.

1.3. Hypothesis

This study argues that, although the missionaries made a significant contribution in bringing the Gospel to Venda, neither the main tenants of Vhavenda traditional religion, nor the Venda language, were given proper consideration. The missionaries, for instance, committed a near fatal error, by using the name Mudzimu (Modimo in N. Sotho) for God, instead of Nwali, which had been used by the Vhavenda to refer to their Supreme Being. The missionaries regarded Nwali as a pagan god. This undoubtedly caused confusion at first, as the Vhavenda of Zimbabwe used Nwali for God in their religious works, whilst the South African Vhavenda used Mudzimu for God, as indicated above.

Had the missionaries made a study of Venda culture, and employed their findings in their mission strategy, there would undoubtedly have been less confusion, as cultural customs and practices would have been interpreted correctly, and ultimately the Gospel would have been accepted with greater ease in Venda.

1.4. Method of study

The researcher will employ a phenomenological approach, which implies that the Vhavenda's indigenous culture will be respected as such, and it will be used as a base for the contextualisation of the Gospel.

An objective analysis will assist the researcher to highlight the impediments, which hindered the effective transmission and inculturation of the Gospel amongst the Vhavenda. The researcher will also employ findings from cultural history to indicate that the missionaries should have made use of the cultural background of the indigenous people, of their traditional religion, as this would not have hindered, but facilitated the acceptance of the Christian message.

The researcher will also make use of oral sources and interviews. The results from these shed important light on the subject. The researcher accompanied Professor Ralushai on his interview expedition programme in Venda.

Furthermore, the researcher will also be presenting results from a conducted inspection in loco, of the old mission station buildings, baptismal registers, as well as results from evaluated original documents.

1.5. Chapter Outline

The chapter outline of this study is briefly as follows:

Chapter one deals with the introduction to the thesis. Apart from formulating the problem pertaining to the study, the hypothesis is presented along with the aims and method of study. Background information on the Venda society and culture is also provided to form the setting for the ensuing deliberations.

Chapter two reflects on a brief history of the coming of the Missionaries to Venda.

Chapter three portrays the traditional beliefs, customs and practices of the Vhavenda.

Chapter four deals with the rise of the Independent Churches and their approaches to Venda Culture.

Chapter five deals with the political, colonial and social factors, as to how they either hindered or facilitated the acceptance of Christianity in Venda.

Chapter six presents an evaluation of all the findings in this thesis.

Chapter seven contains the conclusion to this study, which includes the findings in terms of the hypothesis, a number of recommendations and challenges to the church and mission, as well as areas of future research.

1.6. Venda Society

1.6.1. The Venda Region

Venda lies in the northern regions of the Republic of South Africa. It falls in the Zoutpansberg territory, and subsequently forms part of the Northern Province.

Zimbabwe lies to the north of Venda. The Limpopo River (Vhembe) forms the northern border of Venda. However, the Vhavenda have never accepted the Limpopo River as a boundary. Ralushai reinforced this statement when he indicates:

> "The colonial border, the Limpopo (Vhembe) river, affected not only the regular movements of the people living on both sides of the river but also the attitudes of writers, who tended to look on the South African Vhavenda of the Northern Transvaal in terms i.e. as the Vhavenda of the Northern Transvaal and not as people who for many years had been historically and culturally linked with their neighbours across the border" (Ralushai 1980:11).

This historical evidence indicates that the Limpopo river (Vhembe) was never regarded a boundary but was only an artificial colonial border.

To the east, Venda shares borders with Mozambique and the Kruger National Park. A group of the Vhavenda, called the Vhanyai, who settled on the eastern slopes of Mount Lombe in Zimbabwe, first occupied Mount Madzivhanombe in the eastern region of Venda.

In support of this statement Benso purports that "the Vhanyai settled in the eastern Venda beyond Madzivhanombe" (Benso 1979:18). Nemudzivhadi (Personal Interview 4/4/1995) confirms this statement when he indicated that "the Vhanyai settled at Madzivhanombe under Chief Makahane and Chief Neluombe. The ruins of this group can still be easily traced." To the West, Venda goes beyond Muungadi River, and stretches to Hananwa and shares borders with Malebogo. Venda stretches as far as Ga-Sekhukhuni to the South, which is presently occupied by the Pedis. This in itself reveals that there were two senior chiefs in the Transvaal, who were Ramabulana (Venda) and Sekhukhuni (Pedi). This argument is reinforced further by Benso:

> "During the middle of the last century, the prominent chiefs in the area, which was later to become the Transvaal, were Ramabulana in Venda and Sekhukhuni in the area to the South of Venda, which was called Vendana by the Vhavenda" (Benso 1979:35).

Venda has been known by this name for many years. During the colonial era it was referred to as Venda-land, which is incorrect. Until recently, it was called Vendaland, which is linguistically indefensible, as Venda is locative in itself.

Using Vendaland is like saying England-land, which is incorrect of course (see Ndou 1993:1). The linguistic error has also affected other areas, like Basotholand, which, correctly speaking should in fact be Lesotho and the inhabitants should be referred to as Basotho.

Venda had been known by this name, as referring to the area or place. There are many divergent ideas regarding the origin of the name. Mathivha maintains:

> "The leaders of these two communities are the real founders of what we call Venda Culture and Venda Literature. These leaders gave Vendaland its name, its language and they presented a united front in North Eastern Transvaal in the early 14th century" (Mathivha 1958:7).

Mudau confirms Mathivha's argument to a certain extent, although the latter indicates that the name Venda belongs to the Vhangona, who were the first group of the Vhavenda to migrate to this area. Mudau indicates that the name Vhavenda belongs to the Ngona.

Flygare reflects that Venda means "land" and Vhavenda "people of Venda" (Flygare 1899:10). The inhabitants of the area of Venda are called Vhavenda (plural) and Muvenda (singular). This originated from the name of the place Venda. Historically, the Vhavenda came from central Africa, from the Great Lakes of Africa, which the Arabs named Zendzi (Benso 1979:16).

Benso postulates that "available writings by the Vhavenda themselves have cleared the mystery concerning their origin and migration down the dark continent of Africa" (Benso 1979:17). The place of origin is the area around the Great Lakes of Africa, formerly called land of Zendzi by the ancient Arab explorers. Mathivha is quoted by Nemudzivhadi as saying:

> "The leaders of the Vhavenda and the Vhasenzi migrated Southwards about the 12th and 13th centuries and eventually established their homes in the present Vendaland" (Nemudzivhadi 1974:1).

Although Mathivha appears to align himself with Benso, historically the first migratory group was composed mainly of the Vhangona, who are also of the Vhavenda group or sib.

It is historically not correct to assume that the Vhasenzi and Vhalemba were among the first groups to migrate to this area (Venda) during the 12th and 13th centuries. The last group, which consisted of the Vhasenzi and Vhalemba, only made their appearance during the 17th century. Nemudzivhadi argues:

> "The fact as contained in the pages of Möller-Malan that it is the Vhasenzi and not the Vhavenda who made their appearance in about 1700, confused many white writers including some Vhavenda writers" (Nemudzivhadi 1974:2).

The last group, which consisted of the larger and stronger dynasty, conquered the first group (the Vhangona) and the two assimilated with each other, and thus a homogeneous strong fabric was formed. The last and strong group was led by their leader, Chief Dimbanyika. Khuba supports this statement when she indicates: "Historically, however, it has been postulated by Dzivhani (1958:14-16) that the Venda under the first known Venda Chief, Dimbanyika, moved South wards from central Africa and settled in Northern Transvaal" (Khuba 1994:25).

This in itself is an indication that the Vhavenda were led by one strong traditional leader when they came to this part of the world, but as time went on they disintegrated into smaller tribal groups, brought about by the death of their leader. Nemudzivhadi indicates:

> "After Dimbanyika's tragic death in a cave at Lwadali, while hunting rock-rabbits, they descended to Nzhelele valley where they established their second capital called Dzata under the leadership of Dyambeu and his son Phophi who was later known as Thohoyandou" (Nemudzivhadi 1984:25).

Hence we have the town called Thohoyandou (Head of the Elephant) in Venda. The rule of Thohoyandou, their traditional leader (chief), was regarded a golden monarch. After his death, his sons established themselves as independent and

thus the decentralisation of the monarchy caused the Vhavenda to have 27 chiefs, as they have at present.

However, the chiefs ruled specific tribes while sharing one language. Benso confirms this statement when it is indicated that Venda is presently divided into 27 areas, over which 25 chiefs and two independent headmen have jurisdiction. The chiefs do not rule specific areas nor the people who reside there. Moreover, most of these chiefs are cousins, as they stem from a common ancestry (Benso 1979:23). According to Venda culture, it is very difficult for a commoner to be installed as chief. Such a practice is unacceptable in Venda culture.

1.6.2. Language

The language used in Venda is called *Tshivenda*, which is somewhat unique as it is neither related to - nor could it be grouped within the other languages spoken in South Africa. The language spoken is *Luvenda*, which is derived from the name of the area, Venda (See Ndou 1993:1).

The language is quite unique in South Africa, for it cannot be grouped with either Nguni or Sotho. It is entirely on its own, but it is nearer to Shona (Karanga), one of the languages spoken in Zimbabwe: "To the non-speakers, the language Tshivenda appears to be difficult and fast spoken, with the result that it becomes difficult to understand" (Ndou 1993:1).

For the Shona (Karanga) speaking people, however, it does not pose much difficulties. Stayt points out that Tshivenda finds its nearest equivalent in the Karanga group, and is quite sharply distinguished from the Sotho and Tsonga group in this regard, though from the former far more than the latter. The Sotho language is grouped under Tswana and Pedi whereas Xhoza, Zulu and Swati fall under Nguni. Tshivenda is not grouped with any of these South African spoken languages (Stayt 1931:9). Benso reinforced this argument by indicating:

> "Their Language (Luvenda) for example is related to that of the tribe of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia finding its closest equivalent in the Kalanga group, where it is sharply distinguished from the languages of Sotho and the Shangaan-Tsonga" (Benso 1979:24).

This is an indication to point out that Tshivenda is a unique language in this region.

1.6.3. Religion

The Vhavenda, like all African societies south of the Sahara, believe in a Supreme Being. This belief is strongly observed when the Vhavenda offer sacrifices to their departed ones, as a way of veneration.

The Vhavenda belief is anchored in a Supreme Being called Nwali, commonly known by this name. Ranger confirms: "the first Tavhatsindi chief in Venda is said in oral tradition to have spoken with Nwali (Ranger 1974:14). This is an indication that the Vhavenda believed in a Supreme Being known by this name. To the Vhavenda, Nwali was the creator of the universe.

Although Nwali was commonly used as the name for their god, in other areas other names were used, such as Raluvhimba and Khuzwane. Benso indicates: "The Vhavenda believed in a Supreme Being, Khuzwane, who created all things" (Benso 1979:34). Van Rooy, in support of the three different names which referred to God, indicates that "there used to be a cult of the Supreme Venda deity i.e. Raluvhimba, Nwali and Khuzwane" (Van Rooy 1971:40). This argument in itself clearly reflects that the Vhavenda believe in one God who is known by three names, but could not be claimed by one or specific clan as a family God, Mudzimu (Modimo in Sotho). The two names Nwali and Mudzimu reveal to us why the conflict between the Vhavenda and the missionaries was inevitable.

This thesis will enable the reader to have a better understanding of the religious background of the Vhavenda and the importance of a cultural analysis regarding the acceptance of the Gospel. The Vhavenda believe that Raluvhimba (Nwali) is the maker of everything. Junod argues:

> "Creation *ex nihilo* was unknown to the indigenous people. Raluvhimba is the maker and founder of everything. I do not say

creator, as the idea of creation, *ex nihilo,* is not conveyed by the native, nor does it clearly exist in the Bantu mind" (Junod 1920:107).

Junod is in divergence from Daneel, who confirms that the Vhavenda regard Nwali as their God and creator, "They are both identical in style and are regarded as special manifestations of God's creation that is referred to as the works of Nwali" (Daneel 1970:17). These arguments clearly reveal that the Christian Gospel cannot exclude the culture of the indigenous people. More will be discussed about Nwali in the following chapters.

1.6.4. Mission

The word "mission" has become an issue of contention in theological circles. There are a diversity of definitions of "mission", with different meanings, with the result that some want to do away with the word "mission". Kritzinger refers to the fact that "mission" has traditionally been classified in either a narrow or a broader sense (Kritzinger 1989:33).

The narrow view of mission refers to the spiritual saving of the lost soul. The soul is saved through evangelisation and the proclamation of the word. The erection of local churches should not be the means to the end, but an achievement of the missions.

The broader view of mission does not concentrate on the proclamation of the Word or the saving of the soul, for there are those who concentrate on the soul only. In the broader view, the mission goes a step further, by adopting a holistic approach, which makes provision for the body and soul. Both the narrow and the broader views make it clear that the mission is a vehicle for the Gospel, through which the mighty acts of God are executed, in word and deed.

Mission originates from the great command by Jesus, when he ordered his disciples to take the Good News to the end of the world (Matthew 28:16-10). It is the involvement of the whole Trinity and encompasses the extension of the kingdom of God the world over. Kritzinger regards mission as evangelism, that is, the communication of the Good News of salvation to those outside the church (Kritzinger 1989:33). In mission, God wants his kingdom to be established here and now, and thus it will be totally fulfilled when Christ returns.

Although there are many dimensional understandings in mission, it will be appropriate and more suitable to discuss mission in terms of three dimensional elements.

The first element of mission is the preaching (*Kerygma*) and spreading of the Good News also called evangelism. The church should feel committed to calling people to faith in God, to convert from their old existence to a new life in Jesus Christ.

The second dimension of mission has to do with the building of the church, of the establishing of the fellowship of believers (*Koinonia*). This fellowship, however, should also extend to the indigenous people; they are like pilgrims who are still proceeding to a final destination, like the city yonder. "The missionary church must therefore become church-with-others" (Bosch 1991:368-389). The missionaries should not proclaim the word as if they are already on the safe side or are already in heaven but they must be in fellowship with the indigenous people. Neither should they regard themselves as better than the congregants but should realise that God gives them no option but to serve the people in fellowship to the glory of God.

In mission, God wants to save the whole world, irrespective of race or creed, and he wants his plan of salvation to be realised through mission.

The third dimension is the service (*Diakonia*) rendered by the mission that emanated from the Lord Jesus, who ministered to the people both spiritually and bodily. Bosch says, "we should find a way *beyond* every schizophrenic position and minister to people in their *total* need, that we should involve individual as well as society, soul *and* body, present *and* future in our ministry of salvation" (Bosch 1991:399). It should also be taken into consideration that the services rendered by the missionaries were not only those that were charitable, but they also gave

due attention to the personal imbalances and prevalent injustices, which were experienced by the people amongst whom they worked.

The Gospel and the missions are inseparable; it is the task of the Gospel to reveal God, who is missionary by nature. The Gospel of Good News acts as an ignition key to the mission. The mission without the Gospel is like a flat car battery, which can only get life when recharged.

Missionaries should not regard themselves as having completed the work of the kingdom of God when situations are not satisfactory. In the late nineteen fifties, with the coming of the Bantu Authority's legislation, many missionaries left the mission stations under the perception that the stations were taken over by the government of the day. Although there was a feeling that missionaries were considered to be domineering in their proclamation of the Gospel and the execution of their duties, many local and weaker churches could not maintain the standard set by the missionaries.

It is necessary to emphasise that a fourth dimension is needed, as an elaboration on the three-fold definition provided by Kritzinger (1988:34). The liturgical dimension (*Leitourgia*) expresses the most significant work of the church, giving glory to God by way of worship. *Leitourgia* deals mainly with the public service rendered to God, especially through worship. This service, then, could be rendered directly or indirectly to God, as through serving fellow human beings.

Liturgical and diaconal services could be distinguished, but are focussing on the same goal.

The great significance of the liturgical dimension is that it brings the three dimensions, *Kerygma*, *Diakonia* and *Koinonia*, together in a unique relation. God is given glory by the people by way of worship and other expressions of joy, which emanate from the hearts of people, and is expressed through people's actions.

CHAPTER 2

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE COMING OF MISSIONARIES IN VENDA

2.1. Establishment of the white settlement in Venda

It is of great significance to narrate the arrival of the first white people who established themselves in the Zoutpansberg. It should also be noted that the Voortrekkers were seeking land whereon whey could settle. Their primary motive for settling was not to bring the Gospel to the Vhavenda. Depending on perspective, their presence could be said to have had either a positive or a negative influence on the acceptance of the Gospel in Venda.

The inclusion of the white settlement in this study will act as an orientation for the reader in terms of particular missionary events that took place in Venda. The first people of colour who came to Venda, came from the North West. They entered Venda through present day Botswana.

It was a great moment and raised extreme astonishment when the Vhavenda met a strong people with a reddish-brown complexion for the first time. The people referred to here, arrived during 1820, and are known as the Buyses, the offspring of Coenraad de Buys. Möller-Malan indicates:

> "They were coloured people, all of them with a reddish-brown complexion, the sons of Coenraad de Buys, the king of the Bastards. They came from the North-West, from the direction of Bechuanaland, and they had fire-sticks with them. Not knowing what else to do, they bowed down to them and called them 'The sons of the gods' ..." (Möller-Malan 1953:40).

Although they were coloureds, the Vhavenda regarded them as whites, because this was their first contact with the people of lesser colour. According to Tempelhoff, the Buys were a family who came from the Cape colony in three ox wagons and were farmers and hunters who were moving from place to place. Further, he indicated that their father and leader, Coenraad, left them at the foot of the Zoutpansberg to find assistance from the Portuguese in Mozambique, and was never seen again.

Templehoff explains:

> "Sover vasgestel kan word, was De Buys 'n Kaapse avonturier van Hugenote afkoms. Daar word vertel dat De Buys omstreeks 1821 met sy gesin en drie waens op die walle van die Limpoporivier uitgespan het. Hy was 'n veeboer by uitnemendheid en het, volgens sy seun Michael 'baie vee' besit ... Daar word vermoed dat De Buys onderweg na die kus gesterf het want hy het nooit weer teruggekeer nie" (Tempelhof 1989:8).

Although the members of the Buyses' group were regarded as notorious outlaws, they were greatly appreciated in later years, as they were of great assistance to the missionaries in the spreading of the Gospel, since they stayed with the black people on a permanent basis.

The second group of foreigners (white people) who arrived in the Zoutpansberg, the Voortrekkers, arrived in 1836. They were under the leadership of Louis Trichardt, who led the Albany Party from the Cape Colony. On his arrival, he found that there was a family dispute between Chief Mpofu's sons on the succession to the chieftainship. Ramabulana was the right heir to the throne. This dispute is noted by Benso when he indicates:

> "The arrival of the Voortrekker leader, Louis Trichardt, in 1836 coincided with the struggle for succession of Mpofu's sons, Ramabulana and Ramavhoya. Trichardt's intervention brought some relief to Ramabulana, who could not face his younger brother on the battle field. When Trichardt proceeded to Delagoa Bay he left Ramabulana on the throne, from which he had been ousted by Ramavhoya" (Benso:1979:20).

Although Louis Trichardt's mission was not directly related to the spreading of the Gospel, he helped the Vhavenda to uphold their traditional culture by restoring the rightful chief to his throne. The Vhavenda from around Zoutpansberg nick-

named him "Luvhisi" (Louis).His name will not be forgotten from the history of the chieftains' struggle of the Ramabulanas. This point is explained further by Möller-Malan where she indicates, "Now that Luvhisi was gone, Rasithuu (Ramabulana) decided to hit out at all the smaller chiefs who had begun to fall away from his kingdom" (Möller-Malan 1953:12).

On the 3rd May 1848, a group of Voortrekkers, who were under the leadership of Andries Hendrik Portgieter also arrived in the Zoutpansberg. They were following the trail of Louis Trichardt, who had already left for Mozambique.

Tempelhoff explains that "Op 3 Mei 1848 het die trekgeselskap van Andries Hendrick Potgieter by die suidelike voet van Soutpansberg aangekom" (Tempelhoff 1989:12). Another pioneer to come to the Zoutpansberg was Joan do Santos Albasini. He was born in 1813 at Inhambane in Mozambique and was also a person of mixed blood. He worked for the Portuguese army as a soldier. He moved to the Zoutpansberg during 1856 and settled at Luonde (Piesangkop), where the Vhavenda were led by Chief Matidza of the Vhakwevho clan.

On his arrival, the Shangaan-Tsonga tribe rallied around him as their leader, for he could speak their language and knew a bit of their culture. Maluleke indicates:

> "Apart from his military background, Albasini is said to have possessed many guns and much ammunition. Many Vatsonga refugees who fled to the Transvaal as a result of the war between the

> two brothers and their supporters found refuge with Albasini, although there is little doubt that he exercised authority over the Vatsonga as ' chief', it is unclear who made Albasini chief of the Vatsonga. Was it the Boers? Was it the Vatsonga? Or did Albasini make himself a chief?" (Maluleke 1995:16).

The Shangaan found a man in Albasini with whom they could collude in their struggle for land. He thus contributed to the mistrust between the different tribes in the Zoutpansberg. His chieftainship also contributed to their accepting the Gospel when it was brought by the missionaries. Maluleke indicates:

> "With him they found some space to be themselves and the military security they needed so badly in the unstable situation of the Northern Transvaal as the Boers sought to take land from the Bapedi and the Vhavenda who had lived in these parts for so long time" (Maluleke 1995:17).

2.2. Mission work amongst the Vhavenda

2.2.1. Dutch Reformed Church

The history of the coming of missionaries who brought the Gospel to the Vhavenda is an epoch in the annals of the spreading of the Gospel in Venda.

The first recorded missionary pioneers who came to Venda were from the Dutch Reformed Church. There is another claim that the Berlin Missionaries were the first to have had contact with the Vhavenda. It is generally believed that the Berlin Missionaries were the first missionaries to introduce Christianity into Venda, but written records indicate that the first missionary to pay attention to this area was McKidd of the Dutch Reformed Church (see Ndou 1993:14). The initial exercise of the Dutch Reformed Church, of making an expedition to this part of the world emanated from the decision by the Cape Synod of 1857. During this synod Revs. P.K. Albertyn, J.H Neethling, N.J Hofmeyr and Andrew Murray, were appointed to form a mission committee. This committee was assigned the task of examining the possibility of expanding the Gospel to the North. Du Plessis indicates:

> "At the same time the newly constituted committee entrusted him with the duty of finding missionaries who could proceed to the heathen, and thus inaugurate the foreign mission enterprise of the church. Two men volunteered for this work, Henry Gonin, a Swiss and Alexander, McKidd a Scotsman. They arrived at the Cape in 1861, with their arrival the foreign mission work may be considered fairly launched" (Du Plessis 1911:265).

2.2.1.1. Alexander McKidd[1]

Dr Robertson, who was entrusted with the task of recruiting missionaries for the Dutch Reformed Church in Scotland, approached McKidd to take up the request. McKidd volunteered willingly to take up the challenge. McKidd was born on the 8th March 1821 at Millbank, Thurso, in Scotland. In March 1842, McKidd obtained his M.A. at King's College, Aberdeen. He was well qualified and came from a humble background. In July 1861, McKidd arrived in Cape Town on the boat Roxana. Paul Kruger, the then president of the Transvaal had already agreed in principle to the request by Ds Murray as indicated by Maree:

> "Mr Kruger says that when God gave him a new heart, it was as if he wanted the birds and the trees and everything to help him praise his saviour, and so he could not bear that there should be any poor black people not knowing and loving the saviour whom he loved" (Mare:1962;32).

Although the president of the Transvaal had no objection to the missionaries proclaiming the Gospel amongst the black people, the responsibility rested with the chiefs to invite the missionaries to work in the areas of their jurisdiction.

At the age of 41, McKidd got married to Hess Busman. The solemnisation was conducted by Rev. Murray in Bloemfontein. After their marriage, the young couple returned to Rustenberg, where through the mediation of Cornelius

[1] Alternative spelling: MacKidd.

Lottering they received an invitation to do mission work in the Zoutpansberg, as the people were in great thirst for the Word of God.

Although Rev. Murray got permission to do mission work in the North, he was advised to get an invitation from the traditional leader to proclaim the Gospel in his area. Crafford endorses this statement when he indicates, "Sy aandag is gevestig op die bepaling dat sendelinge deur 'n bepaalde kaptein uitgenooi moes word om in sy gebied te werk" (Crafford 1982:62). It came to happen that a letter, which bore the seal of Michael Buys and others, was given to McKidd.

This was a reply to his prayers. Without any delay and with great joy he accepted the clarion call to the Zoutpansberg, but it was also heart-breaking to part from his friend, Rev. Gonin, who had come with him from overseas. They never met again.

Maree explains:

> "Op 25 April 1863 kon ds. en mev McKidd eindelik na Zoutpansberg vertrek. Daarmee het die McKidds en die Gonins van mekaar geskei. Hoewel hulle nog aan mekaar geskryf het, het hulle mekaar nie weer op aarde gesien nie" (Maree 1962:36).

McKidd proceeded to the Zoutpansberg on 13th May 1863. On arrival, he was accommodated by the family of the Lotterings, who were not far from the white

settlement at Schoemansdal. He immediately got involved in his assignment of bringing the Gospel to the people. It appears that McKidd was given a good reception. This is indicated by the number of black people who attended his first message on the 24th May 1863. In his first address McKidd explained:

> "There it was that, for the first time, we had the privilege of speaking to a real congregation of kaffirs. There were about 300, I think, present, not one of whom I believe had ever before heard of Christ and him crucified. It was a `solemn occasion for them and also for us`. Buys himself was our tolk" (Maree 1962:49).

According to this statement made by McKidd, his first sermon was attended by close to 300 black people and Michael Buys acted as an interpreter. This in itself is a clear indication that the larger part of the group must have consisted of the Vhavenda, as they were in the majority.

McKidd's personal vocation had now really been established. He was to be a Gospel exponent in the land, which had been lying fallow for many years. He was really devoted to his task, and as a Gospel pioneer, he was to bring Good News, which should have been coupled with the culture of the indigenous people.

According to the Vhavenda custom, McKidd should have paid a casual visit to Chief Makhado, who was the leader of the largest local group in the Zoutpansberg. Malunga confirms this statement when he indicates:

> "Apart from the Buys people, there were three black tribes in and around the mission station of Goedgedacht. The large group was the Venda under Chief Makhado. The Venda group was the largest and occupied the Northern portion of the Zoutpansberg (Malunga 1986:2).

It was neither proper nor correct for the chief's subjects to gather around McKidd without his knowledge. Rev. McKidd should have approached Chief Makhado for the land to establish his mission station. This action in itself would then have created a good working relationship between the two. Shaw confirms this when he indicates: "The lands, however, had been granted by the chiefs to the Society (Mission) and confirmed by the Government, and certainly they must in all equity be regarded as fairly its property" (Shaw 1860:394). The missionary should have acknowledged the traditional leader, as a friend and co-worker and this relationship would have made it more convenient, for the assiduous missionary to work without any hindrance.

Rev. McKidd was a hardworking man. On the 20th of October 1863 he established a school, which was accommodated in one of the huts of Buys's children. Mrs McKidd taught the children hymns at the newly established school, and this was the onset of organised education in the area.

In spite of the problems and criticism from some of the indigenous people, Mrs McKidd went ahead with her tuition. At that time, the Vhavenda expected the boys to look after the cattle. There is a Venda expression, "Ni do la Tshikolo naa?" (Will you eat school?) However, as time went on, the new converts became serious and very keen learners.

Cornelius Lottering, a white farmer whose farm was adjacent to the Buys settlement, gave Goedgedacht Mission as a gift to the church. Later, an additional portion of Kranspoort was bought from Lottering by McKidd, who used money from his own funds. Malunga narrates, "In 1864 McKidd wrote to the Synodical Mission Committee: 'The cost of this place which was 450 Ryksdaalders, I willingly paid out of my own pocket and ask not the committee to be at charges therewith' ..." (Malunga 1986:2). The purchase of land by McKidd from Lottering might have reached the ears of Makhado the traditional leader of the Vhavenda. This in itself could not have been palatable to him. Although no mention was made of it, it must have been a thorn in his flesh, especially in terms of Vhavenda customs.

The matter of land to the Vhavenda is a very sensitive issue and a chief takes pride in the possession of land whether it is occupied or not. This is confirmed well by Chief Rasithuu- Ramabulana, the father of Makhado, when he gave land to the white settlement, he gave it to them reluctantly. Möller-Malan indicates:

> "Like Luvhisi (Louis Trichardt) the people of Enderekke also built a water-furrow to irrigate their gardens, it being the dry season. Rasithuu listened with alarm when he was told that these people had brought all kinds of fruit trees, which they were planting now. Were they then going to remain here for ever?" (Möller-Malan:1953:26).

It is not surprising to learn that the chief was taken aback to learn of the development of planting fruit trees. Although this was a good gesture, traditionally and customarily the chief should have been informed of such developments. It is a well established fact that Cornelius Lottering gave Goedgedacht Farm as a gift and McKidd further bought an additional portion, which was later called Kranspoort, from the same owner. This transaction caused ill-feeling with the traditional leader. "Perplexity and regret are more conspicuous by the fact that the farms were bought from strangers and not from the traditional leaders who were the owners of the land" (see Ndou 1993:20).

The relationship between Buys and the Ramabulanas was strengthened by the bond of marriage. Some of the Buys people had married Vhavenda girls, and even from the Ramabulana royal family. These marriages gave them status, and as relatives, they also had free access to the traditional leader's place of abode without much ado. Möller-Malan, in support of this statement, purports, "One of the sister's children of Rasithuu (Ramabulana) came to pay a visit to Tshirululuni. His mother was married to Gabriel Buys.... and they killed an ox for him" (Möller-

Malan 1953:124). Although the grandson of Ramabulana was coloured, he had Vhavenda royal blood in his veins. As a result, an ox was slaughtered for him, because he had visited his grandfather (Ramabulana). Michael Buys and his colleagues were not regarded as strangers any longer, but as sons-in-law (Vhakwasha or Vhaduhulu) and as relatives. The late Chief Patrick Mphephu upheld the family relationship with the Buys people of Mara until his untimely death in 1987. Mphephu was still respected by the Buys people as their brother-in- law.

A common factor that caused a conflict between the missionaries and the indigenous people was that the traditional leaders wanted to uphold their status and were not to be addressed or be preached to by commoners (Vhasiwana). In support of this argument Malunga indicates: "How could a chief allow himself to be lectured to from the pulpit by a commoner (evangelist) who was his subject?" (Malunga 1986:7). According to the Vhavenda culture, the traditional leader is a priest (tshifhe) and is the one to handle religious matters.

2.2.1.2. Stephanus Hofmeyr

Immediately after Rev. Hofmeyr took over from McKidd, trouble started in the white settlement of Schoemansdal. The missionary of Goedgedacht could not read the signs of the ongoing hostility from the chief and his councillors, who were no longer in favour of the increasing number of whites at Schoemansdal.

Chief Makhado himself was not very worried, because he was on good terms with the white settlers, but he could not overrule the decision of his councillors. Möller-Malan indicates the general sentiments when he reports:

> " ... 'It will be better if these white people could just go away' said Katsikatsi (Madzhie), regent to Makhado, the young chief. 'They are for ever troubling us, wanting us to work for them all the time. Also, they are full of pride. They do not know the difference between the Ramabulanas and the common folk. To them we are alike except for the chief' ..." (Möller-Malan:1953:152).

Both the white settlement at Schoemansdal and the missionary did not know the cultural background of the Vhavenda.

According to the Vhavenda tradition, the members of the household of the royal family and the commoners do not have the same status, "Vhakololo" are members of the royal family, whereas the commoners are called "Vhalanda". No wonder Katsikatsi complained that the Vhakololo were not receiving their due respect. As a result, this caused a conflict within the culture and a general misunderstanding resulted. It was against Chief Makhado's wishes to let the whites leave Schoemansdal. He even went to the extent of indicating that the missionary at Goedgedacht should leave first. Möller-Malan further confirms this statement when she indicates that the chief, wishing to spare his friends, said,

"let the missionary go first," for he did not like people who wanted to pray for him (Möller-Malan 1953:149).

It became increasingly difficult for Chief Makhado to disassociate himself from the complaints against the settlement at Schoemansdal that were brought to him by his subjects. This atmosphere hindered the acceptance of the Gospel. Rev. Hofmeyr was not ready to leave the mission as advised by the settlers at Schoemansdal. Eventually he had to yield and he moved to a farm called Noemdraai, where a new mission station was later established, called Bethesda. The farm was a gift from Andries Duvenhage, who rescued them from the impasse they experienced at Goedgedacht.

A delegation of converts who had remained at Goedgedacht, was sent to plead with Hofmeyr to re-establish the old mission station, because divisions had developed amongst the Vhavenda under Chief Makhado, after the missionary had left Goedgedacht. It was established that Katsikatsi, who was Makhado's regent, did not want the missionary to leave. Möller-Malan explains: "If Makhado wanted the missionary to go, Katsikatsi wanted him to stay. So he sent a trusted messenger to beg him not to go 'for where shall we find another one like you' … " (Möller-Malan 1953:150). In January 1871 Hofmeyr went back to Goedgedacht and rebuilt the mission station.

He eventually won the support of the local population. He was a cheerful and courageous man. Du Plessis says, "Hofmeyr was an ideal missionary, patient, courageous, cheerful with a deep insight into the meaning of scripture and an abounding love for his fellow-men, whether black or white" (Du Plessis 1911:385). Through his efforts a significant number, of both Buys and the indigenous people, were converted to Christianity. It is indeed gratifying to point out that in 1878, 114 people were baptised (62 adults and 52 children). By then, the mission station had moved from Goedgedacht to Kranspoort, where there was an abundant supply of water from the mountains.

In June 1889 Hofmeyr visited the Cape Colony. On his return, he was accompanied by a young pastor called Jan Pieter de Villiers. He was assigned to Mara station as a Pastor. Unfortunately, the young minister was not impressed with the standard of living and the cultural background of the people he was going to work with. He decided to resign forthwith, as Maree indicates:

> "Hy het 'n klein salarissie gekry en die werk het nie vir hom bemoedigend gelyk nie. Hy het geskryf dat die naturelle die luiste onbeskaamste en onbeskaafste mense was wat hy nog ontmoet het. Hy was met ander woorde, 'teleurgsteld met die kafferdom' ... " (Maree 1962:117).

This is an extract from the letter by de Villiers to the sending kommissie dated 28 October 1889. De Villiers did not take cognisance of the fact that the cultural

process could either retard or facilitate the acceptance of the Gospel, depending on the approach of the missionary himself. As a result, De Villiers could not make a start at Mara Mission Station, because he did not realise that culture had its own in-built mechanism, which could hinder the acceptance of the Gospel. Unless the new message of the Gospel was culturally compatible, it could not be accepted.

In August 1890, Rev. Hofmeyr made an effort to improve the situation by sending two evangelists to enquire from Chief Makhado whether it was not yet time to have an evangelist at his place of abode. The chief remained adamant in his refusal. Still, Hofmeyr sent Solomon Maseoana (Nemasiwana), a man who was born in the chief's area, but had fled during the conflict with the white settlement at Schoemansdal. Maree says:

> "In Augustus 1890 het eerw. Hofmeyr die soveelste keer twee evangeliste na Magota gestuur om te vra of 'n evangelis nie onder sy mense geplaas kon word nie. Die sendeling het daardie keer hoop op 'n gunstige reaksie gehad, maar weer was die antwoord afwysend. Eindelik het dit Hofmeyr in Maart 1894 geluk om 'n evangelis, Salomon Maseona, naby Magota te plaas. Salomon is daar in die berge gebore maar het sy tuiste weens die oorloë verlaat" (Maree 1962; 150).

This approach, adopted by Hofmeyr, towards Chief Makhado was not correct according to the Vhavenda custom. Hofmeyr should have visited the chief himself as a way of paying homage. It is also unthinkable to imagine that a chief could be approached by evangelists for such a delicate and sensitive matter as the Gospel. It was also difficult for the chief to accept being addressed by a commoner, Solomon Maseona (Nemasiwana), who had previously deserted the chief, and returned had higher status as an evangelist than what he did. Maseona (Nemasiwana) was now no longer a commoner and subject of the chief, and this in itself was in conflict with the Vhavenda culture.

The fact that Rev. Hofmeyr had spent 29 years of his mission work in the Soutpansberg, without converting Chief Makhado and his household was heart-breaking for the missionary. According to Möller-Malan, "It broke his heart that his message of salvation had no impression on Makhado, when he received the message of the chief: 'You and your mission are in my way' ..." (Möller-Malan 1953:77-80).

Hofmeyr was perturbed by the fact that his efforts met with no success, even though he had made several attempts to convert Makhado to the Christian religion. Hofmeyr failed to realise that for a traditional leader to forsake his traditional religion, in which he was the priest and the political head, was not so simple. No wonder the missionaries' attempts to baptise the traditional leaders were met with contempt. It is not surprising to note that the traditional leaders,

Sekwati Mapuru and Masemula Matlala of the Northern Sotho tribes, were baptised only recently. The Gospel was brought to the areas of their abode by Merensky long before the mission work started in Venda. Mminele reinforces this argument when he indicates, " Chief Sekwati Mampuru was baptised in 1974 at the age of about eighty seven years, while Chief Mokgoma Maserulala Matlala was baptised in 1978 at the age of fifty-four years" (Mminele 1983:249).

According to the baptismal register dated 23 September 1951, kept at Tshakhuma by the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the present traditional leader, Andries Mavhungu Madzivhandila, whose area received the Gospel in 1874, was baptised at the age of eighteen years, before he was installed as the traditional leader of the tribe. Mission history records do not record where a traditional leader of Tshakhuma was baptised. This is also the case of Magota (Head man), of whom no baptismal records have been kept. It is gratifying to record that Chief Kama of the Amagqunukhwebe tribe was between the first traditional leaders to have been baptised on the 19 August 1825. Since then he took a strong stand, never swerving nor drawing back (Holden 1877:312).

2.2.1.3. John Daneel

In July 1905, Hofmeyr died, and was laid to rest at Kranspoort Mission, the place where he had laboured hard for so long. The work was taken over by his son-in-law, Rev. John Daneel, who had joined him in 1898. Daneel was already used to

the area and had gained sufficient experience to work independently. Daneel was a hardworking man who cared for both the spirit and the body of his new converts. He contributed greatly to the development of education. Within a short time, he established schools at Kranspoort, Gogobole and Messina, and also acted as superintendent for these schools.

A clinic was also erected at Kranspoort for the whole community as such. A qualified nurse was employed to look after the daily medical needs of the local people. The district surgeon from Louis Trichardt visited the clinic once a week (Malunga 1986:14). This was a great development brought about by Rev. Daneel. This was another way of spreading the Gospel as he helped all the people irrespective of denominational affiliations. Daneel was a hard worker, dedicated to his work, although there were problems, difficulties and dangers, which beset his path. He resolved to demarcate Kranspoort into three zones. Those who were converted to Christianity were to be placed at Kranspoort Mission station and those who had not accepted Christianity were placed in the other zones.

Through the passage of time, the mission work did not move on very smoothly, due to the hostilities between the Christians and non-Christians who shared extended families. The decision to sub-divide created a problem and could have sparked enmity between these two groups. There was ill feeling between the two groups. Malunga indicates:

> "during this period the farm Kranspoort was subdivided into three zones, namely Patmos, Kudetja and the mission station. Initially the first two zones were occupied by the non-Christians while the Mission station was meant only for black Christians. The Christians looked down upon the non-Christians who adhered to their traditions, which were regarded as outdated. On the other hand, the non-Christian scoffed at the Christian for abandoning their tribal traditions and custom in favour of an alien practice" (Malunga 1986:15).

The situation was further aggravated by the fact that the village council constituted of Christians; thus they considered only the cases of Christians, when listening to the trials of both Christians and non-Christian living on the Kranspoort farm. This was an issue that caused much humiliation, which derailed the smooth running of the mission.

The separation of the people at the mission station became a revolutionary factor, which implied the breaking up of the solidarity of the indigenous people and the community at large. The new state of affairs at the mission station enticed the Christians not to have anything to do with their fellow people, but rather to shun them as heathens and uncivilised. Family relations were cut off. Mission stations appeared to be breaking down the power and the authority of the chiefs. In support of this argument, Majeke says, "Allegiance to the missionary undermined allegiance to the chief" (Majeke 1953:25). Christians in

the mission station were missing a point, by forgetting that they belonged to the universal church, whose aim was to share Christian fellowship with all people.

Apart from this tension, Daneel was regarded as a man of wisdom and sympathy. It is also gratifying to indicate that Daneel solemnised the marriage of the author's parents in 1935 at Kranspoort(See attached marriage certificate).

On the 16th July 1949, Daneel died in Cape Town after a long illness and was buried at Stellenbosch. His productive and practical work is still remembered in the records of Kranspoort, as is stated by Maree:

> "Elke bewoner van die stasie moes sorg dat sy erf en die straat voor die erf gereeld skoon gemaak word. Op gesette tye is inspeksie gehou en is oortreders beboet. So moes Mev. Daneel self eenkeer 'n boete betaal omdat haar werf nie skoon genoeg was nie" (Maree;1962:169-170).

This shows that the family of the missionary was not detached from the converts, but that both groups were living as brothers and sisters. Kranspoort developed into an attractive settlement which should have been used to attract the non-Christians.

2.2.1.4. Lucas van der Merwe

Rev. Lucas Cornelius Van der Merwe was inducted as missionary of the Kranspoort Mission on the 27 October 1946. The number of converts at the time of his arrival was 800. Unfortunately, he found that the station was in a state of dilapidation. Van der Merwe, his wife Violet Johanna, and the inhabitants of Kranspoort made a joint attempt to clean up and repair the station. The missionary made a great improvement, reflected in the fruit trees that started to flourish again (Maree 1962:210). Apart from these improvements, Van der Merwe tended to the spiritual needs of the new converts by visiting the outposts regularly. As a result, the outpost mission stations became well organised. The good mission work, which was carried out by Van der Merwe was hindered by the rules and regulations governing the Kranspoort Mission, which were not adhered to as expected. Malunga explains:

> "(i) Only confessing Christians could be buried with the dead missionaries in the consecrated cemetery at Kranspoort.
>
> (ii) Non-Christians were to be buried separately in the unconsecrated cemetery" (Malunga 1986:44).

Rev. Van der Merwe did not understand the indigenous peoples' cultural background regarding the respect accorded to the dead and burial rites. According to the Vhavenda tradition, close relatives are not separated at death, but are to be buried in the same vicinity. The idea of burying the dead in separate

graveyards, as practised by the missionary at Kranspoort, could not be accepted by the indigenous people. It is acknowledged as an African tradition that the deceased should be buried following the full rituals of the specific clan and the dead should be laid to rest next to family relatives who had already passed away (see Ndou 1993:98).

It so happened while Van der Merwe was a missionary at Kranspoort, that Thibego Leshiba, who was a non-resident but a relative of one of the residents of Kranspoort, died during her visit. The problems related to her burial in the consecrated graveyard of the mission station caused a rift between the relatives of the deceased and the missionary. Malunga says:

> "Kranspoortians were now split into two opposing groups - Bapharaoh and Basefasonke. The Bapharaoh supported the missionary and were so called because their leader Van der Merwe was regarded as the biblical oppressor Pharaoh of Egypt" (Malunga 1986:54).

The split continued for about three years. The two opposing groups could not reach any compromise. The church at Kranspoort could not meet one of its objectives, which is the principle of reconciliation.

Since Kranspoort Mission station was considered to be in a white area, the Magistrate of Louis Trichardt made use of the provisions embodied in the Group

Area Act of 1950 to remove the Basefasonke group from Kranspoort. Malunga reinforces this statement when he indicates:

> "Even after the mass expulsion of Kranspoortians in 1956 and the subsequent closing down of the mission station in 1964, Kranspoortians continued to be staunch members of the Dutch Reformed Church wherever they settled (Malunga 1986:88).

2.2.1.5. Nico Smith

Rev. Nico Smith established the Dutch Reformed Church at Tshisaulu, in the Tshivhase area. Rev. Nico Smith was challenged by the outcome of the Tomlinson report which indicated that only 10% of the black people in the homelands had accepted Christianity. Rev. Smith and his wife, dr Ellen Faul, a medical practitioner, took it upon themselves to do mission work in Venda.

Church members and relatives had mixed feelings about Nico Smith's plans to leave his white congregation to move to Venda. De-Saintonge, confirms this statement when she indicates:

> "Beyers Naude gave them his heartfelt approval, the congregation was stunned, not just at losing him, but at the thought of him wasting his talents on the black people and Ellen's mother went into an instant depression" (De Saintonge 1989:71).

Nico Smith stuck to his motto, "The Lord will provide", and eventually they arrived in Venda during August 1956, and were accommodated in two brick rondavels without windows. News of the family's arrival spread quickly, and the couple and their baby were well received. Johannes Netshikulwe became Nico's right hand. He acted as an interpreter and an adviser regarding Venda culture. Nico Smith started with his mission church service whilst his wife opened a clinic in a rondavel, where minor ailments were treated. News soon spread that a doctor had arrived. People came in numbers to get help. Although Ellen Faul was not trained as a veterinary surgeon, to the Vhavenda she was a doctor. As a result, people came to get help, even for their sick animals. De Saintonge confirms this statement when she indicates:

> "On their first morning they woke to find an old man sitting on their doorstep. He said he'd come because he'd heard there was a doctor in the house and could she come and help his cow. The cow had swallowed a mango that had got stuck in its gullet" (De Saintonge 1989:76).

Florence Tshimangadzo Netshikulwe (Personal Interview 16/4/1997) reveals that Ellen Faul's approach to the Vhavenda was outstanding, because she could act as both veterinary and medical practitioner in order to assist the people who were seeking help.

During her clinic visits, she went to the extent of inviting the local traditional healers, in order to hear their opinion regarding the treatment of diseases. She

would explain her western ways of treatment. The traditional healers realised that Ellen Faul was no threat to them. The patients who could not get satisfactory cure from the traditional healers flocked to the hospital for further treatment. Patients started queuing for treatment of all types of ailments from infectious diseases to infertility. The medical assistance offered by Ellen Faul acted as a bait for new converts, who were ready to accept the Gospel without much ado. People came to be healed both spiritually and physically.

Nico Smith was confronted with a financial problem as his funds could not cope with the developments related to his mission work. He made requests for funds from potential sponsors, and money came in from different sources. The department of Health approved the construction of a T.B. Hospital with the Departmental subsidy of R14.00 on every R2.00 raised from own sources. Donations were received from organisations and individuals for the new mission work. The medical services were highly appreciated by the indigenous people. Nico Smith conducted his church services in a temporary building and went round from hut to hut doing house visits (huisbesoek). Nico Smith's greatest concern was that very little was achieved, due to his inability to understand the indigenous people's culture.

After some time, Nico Smith realised and admitted that he did not know, nor had any respect for the Vhavenda culture. He discovered that he was preaching about God whom the Vhavenda knew from time immemorial, although from their

own cultural background. De Saintonge quotes the remarks made by Johannes Netshikulwe, who was his interpreter:

> " ... 'You are telling them what they have already know,' said Johannes, 'They already believe in God who created the earth, and they still believe that he is ruling this world ... Why should they come to hear you telling them what they already know' ..." (de- Saintonge 1989:79).

The remark made by Nico's interpreter was of great significance and this made him change his approach, and adopt a different strategy which suited his audience better.

Nico Smith started to present Jesus Christ in terms of his mighty acts of healing the sick and casting out evil spirits. The Vhavenda listened attentively because they wanted to know of this great man, Jesus, who could cure their ailing bodies. The new approach bore good fruits. The first person to be baptised was an old man called Muthego from Muledane, who confessed as follows: "If what you say is true, he said, and Jesus is the king of this world, and I belong to him, then I must come to him" (de- Saintonge 1989:81). When the new convert realised that Jesus was the king of the world he felt secured from all other evil forces.

According to the Vhavenda culture, kingship is regarded of great significance. The Vhavenda Christians regard God as a mighty king over all ancestors" (see Ndou 1993:143). Nico Smith was in line with the Vhavenda culture when he

proclaimed Jesus as king. It is gratifying to indicate that on the dedication of the then newly completed church at Tshilidzini on the 12.11.1960, Nico Smith had the pleasure of requesting his first baptised convert, Muthego, to have the privilege of unveiling the cornerstone (hoeksteen) with this inscription, "Khangulu 12-11-60. Jesu Kristo Murena". To Muthego and members of the church, this was a great honour, extended to the first baptised convert of the mission station.

According to the Vhavenda culture, women may not look men directly in the eyes. They were expected to look down whilst a man was speaking or addressing them. Sitting on chairs or in church pews with men, was unthinkable. They could rather kneel on the floor or on a mat (Vhogwadama). It was an embarrassment to Nico Smith to see women sitting with their backs to the pulpit. De Saintonge quotes Nico:

> "...'I can still remember that first morning,' he said, 'About sixty women turned up, most of whom had never been to a church in their lives. Some were sitting on the benches with their backs to the pulpit' ..." (De Saintonge 1989:81).

During a funeral service at one of Nico's outpost mission stations, of Nkabi, who came from Khumbe location, Nico Smith was dismayed to find the corpse wrapped in a blanket. Nico hurriedly went home and made a coffin. Ultimately the deceased was buried in a coffin. The bereaved appreciated the efforts of their minister.

Nico Smith had good working relations with the local traditional leaders. A big church was established at Chief Netshimbupfe's (Shiel farm) area. He managed to gain the trust of Kingi Davhana Nesengani, who was the chief of the area. This was a break through for Nico Smith, as the chief also encouraged his household to become members of the church. Dutch Reformed Churches were also built in the areas of Chief Nelwamondo and Chief Ramovha of Mulenzhe.

The Hospital, under the management of Ellen Faul, progressed very well. It had 120 beds and obtained a considerable reputation, for it had already started training the local girls. Matodzi Mashudu Murovhi (Personal Interview 22/3/1996), who is a Nurse at Tshilidzini Hospital, recalled an incident when she accompanied Dr Gauche from Tshilidzini hospital on his routine visit to Shigalo clinic, which was under the services of Tshilidzini Hospital. Dr Gauche assisted an infertile woman, Mamaila Rasenga, to give birth. The husband, Mkhachane Resenga, a traditional healer, was so excited that he brought a cow to the hospital as a token of gratitude for the doctor who had assisted his wife. The latter refused the gift, but Mkhachane persuaded the doctor to accept it, and it was ultimately slaughtered for the patients at the hospital. According to the indigenous people's belief, when the traditional healer has cured a patient of his/her ailment, a gift called tshidzimu (which is a present to a traditional healer, or fee given after consultation) must be given as a token of appreciation. According to African culture the Traditional healer was not paying for the services

rendered by the medical practitioner, but it was a way of expressing joy and gratitude.

The hospital services had made a breakthrough, in that a traditional healer had sent his wife to a clinic. This was also a milestone in the field of primary health-care. Nico Smith accepted a post of secretary of missions for the Northern Transvaal.

During Nico Smith's seven years of ministry in Venda, he established about 23 outpost mission stations. The clinic which was started by his wife, Ellen, grew into a big training hospital. Tshimangadzo Netshikulwe (Personal Interview 16/11/1998), who accompanied Ellen Faul to the clinics, indicated that Ellen Faul took it upon herself to educate the indigenous people in primary health care. People suffering from major diseases, such as tuberculosis, were sent to hospital by their relatives without delay, as some of the traditional leaders confessed to Ellen Faul, such diseases took a long time to heal. The establishment of the hospital was a blessing for the indigenous people. Young girls were trained as nurses, and those with a lower educational background were trained to serve as assistant nurses.

Nico Smith and Ellen, his wife, succeeded in their clarion call, although they did not leave their names on the Hospital building as founders. The hospital was named by the Vhavenda themselves: "Tshilidzini" (the place of mercy).

2.2.1.6. Louis Swanepoel

Rev. Louis Swanepoel started working at Tshilidzini congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1967. He was well conversant in the Sesotho language, and this served as a base for him to learn Tshivenda. Within a short time he could preach in Tshivenda without difficulty.

He was assisted by Evangelists Neluheni and Foroma, who were in charge of the wards Lwamondo and Manamani, Tsianda and Lwenzhe respectively. The evangelists helped in conducting catechism lessons for new converts.

He worked in close co-operation with the Department of Education, and with financial aid from the church he helped upgrade Lwenzhe High School. The church donated the domestic science block, the library and the school hall. These facilities, provided by the church through his influence, were a great relief to the community.

He took it upon himself and his helpers to build church buildings in Manavhela, Nngwekhulu and Mulenzhe. He went to the extent of building a church close to Chief Davhana's place of abode. Chief Davhana, who was commonly called "Kingi" (King), was an associate of President Paul Kruger. In building the church next to the chief's place of abode, the missionary was under the impression that

members of the royal family (Thondo) would attend the church service with ease. He did not realise that it is more difficult to convert the royals than it is to convert the commoners. The former are more attached to traditional customs and the veneration of the ancestors than the latter. According to the interview conducted on the with Rev. Nyathela of the Dutch Reformed Church at Tshilidzini (Personal Interview 12/8/1999), the church built by Rev. Swanepoel for Chief Davhana has been deserted and closed down; its members have joined the new charismatic churches.

Although Rev. Swanepoel was a confirmed member of the Afrikaner Broederbond, his affiliation to this secret organisation, which supported the policy of apartheid, did not affect his mission work much. According to Simon Mudindivhathu Murovhi (Personal Interview 12/81999), he was nurtured by Rev. Swanepoel and is presently the acting principal at Tshilidzini Special School for the Handicapped. Rev. Swanepoel was also instrumental in the establishment of the school. "The synodical commission for the Northern Transvaal also initiated negotiations with the Department of Bantu Education, over and above the negotiations which were at the same time being conducted by the Rev. Swanepoel" (Tempelhoff 1991:2-3). The school has succeeded in uplifting the conditions of the disabled people in this area.

Although Rev. Swanepoel tried with all his efforts to proclaim the Gospel, there were setbacks that were the result of a lack of knowledge about the local people's customs and practices. He left the Tshilidzini mission station in 1973.

2.2.1.7. Faure Louw

Rev. Faure Louw arrived in Venda in 1974. On his arrival he embarked on the task of learning the local language, Tshivenda. He was assisted by Rev. Mudau, and they both followed in the footsteps of their predecessors by doing house-visits (huisbesoek). Margaret Magidi (Personal Interview 15/4/1996) said, "Rev. Louw used to travel on foot from house to house at Khumbe, conducting prayer to both Christians and non-converts."

Revs. Louw and Mudau extended the mission work by establishing additional out-stations. During Rev. Louw's mission work in Venda, South Africa was in a state of political unrest, and the Dutch Reformed Church at Tshilidzini was gutted by fire round about 26 June 1976. Rev. Louw, through God's mercy, had a premonition which led him to advise the Church Board to take out insurance on the church building. It was insured on the Wednesday and on the Friday of the same week it was completely burnt down. Mbeu bookshop, which was run by the Reformed Church (Gereformeerde Kerk), was also set ablaze during the same period of unrest. There is a general feeling that the church was set on fire because it was associated with the Government of the day.

The burning of the church was condemned by church members, for they regarded the edifice as their own property, which was established to the glory of God. Members of the various denominations in Venda took a stand of solidarity in condemning the burning of the church. During the construction of a new church, Sunday services were conducted under a canvas tent, where both black and white people sat next to each other. This was not the custom in the past. The church exterior walls were newly painted in the Vhavenda ornaments (Makolo a tshivenda), which was decided upon by the church members themselves. According to Esther Masindi Ramulongo (Personal Interview 25/5/1997), the painting on the exterior walls was highly appreciated as it depicted the Tshivenda way of decoration.

2.2.1.8. Wilhelm van Deventer

Rev. A.F. Louw left Venda on the 5th January 1982, after being expelled for political reasons, and was succeeded by Rev. Wilhelm van Deventer, who became the first minister of the Dutch Reformed Church to live amongst the Vhavenda as part of the community, under headman (gota) Makumbane, and not in a missionary house, Rev. Wilhelm van Deventer (Personal Interview 13/2/1996) indicated that the congregation had 30 outpost wards with a membership of 5,500. Wilhelm van Deventer appeared to be well placed amongst the Vhavenda. He attended meetings called by the local Headman

Makumbane as he was part of the community. He was further exposed to the day to day contact with the Vhavenda and their cultural practices.

2.2.2. The Berlin Missionary Society

The Berlin Missionaries were the second group to bring the Gospel to Venda. They concentrated on the eastern part of Venda. It has been accepted that the Dutch Reformed Church missionaries were the first to come into contact with the Vhavenda, in the western parts of Venda. The Dutch reformed missionaries could not penetrate the central portion of Venda. They were confined to neighbouring settlements and to the area under the domain of Chief Makhado.

2.2.2.1. Alexander Merensky

Rev. Merensky, who was appointed superintendent of the Berlin Missionary Society in the Transvaal, had a dream of expanding the Gospel message as far North as the Zoutpansberg. Rev. Merensky led a delegation to explore the area of the Zoutpansberg in 1862, with the aim of establishing a mission station under the banner of the Berlin Missionary Society. During his visit to the Zoutpansberg, he came across Albasini who appeared to be a chief of the local tribes in the area.

He observed with great regret that the area was infested with Malaria and was not suitable for the establishment of a mission station, and he went back. Chief Tshivhase from Venda approached Rev. Grutzner, who was stationed at Matlala, and requested him to send missionaries to his area. Van der Merwe supports this statement when he indicates: "Onderdane van een van die Bavenda opperhoofde, Tshivhase, het Grutzner op Xa-Matlala by twee geleenthede versoek om 'n sendeling na sy volk te stuur" (Van der Merwe 1975:104-105). Chief Tshivhase did everything in his power to invite a missionary to come and work amongst his people. The bold step was taken with the co-operation and consent of his subjects. At first, it was disappointing to Chief Tshivhase, who had expected the missionaries to arrive without delay, but they only responded when they received the second invitation.

Chief Tshivhase had an unshakeable belief in the traditional religion, but he invited the missionary to preach and teach his subjects. He did this, not particularly because he was interested in the new Christian religion, but because the presence of a missionary in a chief's area of jurisdiction was regarded a honour. Pride, with the establishment of schools, was a further consideration, as was the prospective supply of weapons. A last factor that encouraged the chiefs to invite missionaries to their areas, was the missionaries' ability to act as negotiators between themselves and the encroaching Afrikaner farmers.

2.2.2.2 Carl Beuster

The Berlin Missionaries were reluctant to start with mission work without the approval of Chief Makhado, who was regarded as the paramount chief of the Vhavenda. As a result they went to him for direction, as Chief Tshivhase was his younger brother (Khotsimunene). Van der Merwe supports this statement when he explains:

> "Aan die einde van 1871 het eerw. Carl Beuster, afkomstig uit Liebenwalde in Brandenburg, Duitsland, vergesel van eerw Grutzner en Beyer, die opperhoof Makhado wat homself as opperhoof van al die Bavendas beskou het, besoek met die versoek om 'n sendingstasie by Tshivhase te mag aanlê. Op voorwaarde dat die grond waarop die B.S.G 'n stasie by Tshivhase sou oprig nooit hulle eiendom mag word nie het Makhado, wat self geen sendeling wou hê nie, aan die B.S.G toestemming gegee om na Tshivhase te gaan" (Van Der Merwe 1975:105).

Rev. Beuster, the first missionary to go to the Tshivhase area, accompanied by his colleagues, used a successful method of symbolic interaction by acknowledging Chief Makhado's rightful status as the senior chief. Chief Makhado even went so far as to instruct them not to take land from Chief Tshivhase, but to establish a mission station. On the 8th November 1872

missionaries arrived at the place called Maungani in the Tshivhase area. Rev. Grutner and Beyer went back to Matlala, where they were stationed.

Rev. Beuster received a warm welcome from Chief Tshivhase, who was very keen for the missionaries to work amongst his people. Mathivha confirms this statement when she indicates: "It was through his influence that Chief Ligegise Tshivhase, as early as 1870, started to seek for missionaries to preach and teach amongst his people" (Mathivha 1985; 41-42).

Rev. Beuster, without wasting any time, started constructing a mission station from scratch. Buildings for accommodation were erected within a short space of time. The main problem was communication. As he had a basic speaking knowledge of Sotho, he was able to learn Luvenda without too many difficulties. Revs. McKidd and Hofmeyr were using Setswana books. This approach, unfortunately, did not make a good impression on Chief Makhado, because he wanted to be addressed in his own language.

Within a short time, missionaries Beuster and Stech were informed that there was a man who was proclaiming the same Gospel as they were. The man was residing in a Cave at Tshiheni (in Venda) and they sent for him. When the news reached him, he took it upon himself to visit them.

He arrived at Maungani on Christmas day in 1872. He introduced himself as Johannes Mutshaeni, who was baptised in the same faith by the Wesley Mission. It was a momentous occasion to meet another Christian in that part of the world and a Muvenda who would help them with communications. Van der Merwe says, "met die hulp van Johannes Mutshaeni van die stasie Blauberg kon daar mettertyd in liturgie in Venda opgestel word" (Van der Merwe 1975:104-105). According to Mathivha, Mutshaeni was a Muvenda Christian pioneer, whose name stands in the records as the first Muvenda Christian:

> "Johannes Mutshaeni (Malindi Neluheni) was born at Tshiheni, an area due west of lake Fundudzi, and was brought up there. Like many of the Vendas, Johannes heard of Kimberley and wandered south to the diamond fields ... He wandered south-east into Natal where he was baptised by James Alison of the Wesley Mission" (Mathivha 1985:41-42).

Mutshaeni attended church services every Sunday, although he had to travel from his home village in Tshiheni. With the help of Mutshaeni, Beuster started to translate extracts from the Bible with a view to compiling a Venda reader.

Beuster is still regarded as the first person to make an attempt at writing down the Tshivenda language. He never spared himself, but made use of all the resources at his disposal to extend the Gospel to the Vhavenda. In the field of education, he established a school, which was started by his step-daughter,

Marrician. The approach of Beuster to the traditional leaders (chiefs) was an epoch in the history of mission work amongst the Vhavenda, for he was inclined to use the method of symbolic interactionism, with the result that he could reach the indigenous people without too many problems.

Nemudzivhadi confirms this statement:

> "Rev. Beuster used to visit the chief's kraal on horseback. If he found the Tshikona dance in progress he would, whilst on horse back, join in the dance. After the Tshikona dance had abated he would then start preaching the Word of God" (Nemudzivhadi 1991:105).

Tshikona is a way of playing music by blowing reed flutes accompanied by the beating of drums. It is played on solemn occasions and on days of celebration. Its performance is at the command of the traditional leader. The Tshikona dance is the pride of the Vhavenda as a whole.

It was quite appropriate for Beuster to have waited until the Tshikona had abated. That was a clear indication that he had respect for the Vhavenda culture. Through joining them in the Tshikona dance, the chief's subjects gave him a hearing and thus the Gospel was proclaimed. When Beuster realised the great qualities in Mutshaeni, he decided to send this Muvenda pioneer for further training in the field of pastoral and mission work. Arrangements were made for

him to be admitted to Umgungundlovu Bible Continuation Class in Pietermaritzburg. After completion, Mutshaeni was ordained as an Evangelist.

With all the authority and knowledge received from the Bible School, Mutshaeni started to proclaim the Gospel of God. He started by establishing mission outposts, such as Tshamanyatsha, Khalavha and Mandala. He also made great impact at Tshakhuma, on members of his clan such as the Madimas and Neluhenis, who were close to Chief Madzivhandila. He thus played a role in influencing the chief.

Chief Madzivhandila reacted immediately when he heard that Rev. Beuster and Mutshaeni were doing good work in Chief Tshivhase's area. He concluded that the first blow won the battle. He had full knowledge that his subjects were highly stimulated and impressed by Mutshaeni's work. He set off with his delegation to visit Rev. Beuster at Maungani to try and persuade him to establish a mission station at his own place, Tshakhuma.

Mission work was not imposed on the indigenous people. The chiefs, as the traditional leaders, invited the missionaries. Whilst the chief advocated this positive step, their subjects appreciated the move taken by their leaders. The request made by Chief Madzivhandila gave Beuster a mandate to negotiate with the Berlin Missionary Society for a missionary to be sent to Tshakhuma.

2.2.2.3. Erdman Schwellnus

The Superintendent of the Berlin Mission society in the Transvaal, Merensky, made all the necessary arrangements to send a missionary to Tshakhuma. Rev. Erdman Schwellnus was sent to Tshakhuma, and he arrived there on 14 May 1874.

Rev. Schwellnus was well received at Tshakhuma, and the chief encouraged his subjects to help the missionary build both his house and the church. Further, he went on to establish a school in 1875. He made friends with Chief Maphuphe from Lwamondo, who sent four of his sons to attend the school. Schwellnus also started with catechism classes for baptism. In the year 1877 the ceremony of baptism was conducted for the first converts. These were: Johannes Madima, aged 24; and Simon Madilonge, aged 17. Both were baptised on the 6th of January 1877. In the same year, Rev. Beuster baptised Mutshaeni's wife, Johanah. Unfortunately Johannes Mutshaeni did not witness the baptism of his wife, since he died in 1876 during an outbreak of a smallpox epidemic at Maungani mission station. The untimely death of Johannes Mutshaeni was a great blow to Rev. Beuster, and to the new outpost stations he had started.

At first the relationship between traditional leaders and the missionaries augured well, but as time went on traditional leaders ceased to have full trust in the

missionaries because there was a feeling that the missionaries' paramount aim was to take land from the locals, and not to proclaim the Gospel.

This argument is reinforced by Van der Merwe when he indicates:

> "Tshivhase en Madzivhandila het die sendelinge as "Lekoa" (Boere) beskou en hulle het gevrees dat die sendelinge hulle land aan die Boere wou uitlewer. Aangesien die Boere nie in 1867 daarin kon slaag om die Bavenda met wapens tot onderdanigheid aan die Suid Afrikaanse Republiek te dwing nie (Van der Merwe 1975:106).

Beuster did not make any attempt to buy land for missionary purposes, whereas with his counter-part at Tshakhuma, the opposite was the case. Schwellnus bought land from a Land Trader called Watt, though in fact the land belonged to Chief Madzivhandila, who invited him to do mission work in his area of jurisdiction. This incidence is confirmed by Mathivha when she indicates that, "Schwellnus bought the farm Tshakhuma in the name of the Berlin Mission from a trader called Watt" (Mathivha 1985:258). It is indeed regrettable that the purchase of land by missionaries led to the racial friction amongst the traditional leaders and the missionaries, who were assigned to proclaim the Gospel. Even at present, traditional leaders are still not free to surrender their land for private land-ownership.

Merensky, who was the Superintendent of the Berlin Mission in the Transvaal, lost his credibility because of land purchase. Moila explains:

> "The second episode began with the settlement of Merensky and his followers at a farm which they bought near Middelburg ... Merensky had the highest authority at the mission station. He was thus a 'Paramount chief of Botshabelo'. All serious cases and cases involving the Boers in the neighbourhood were to be referred to him. The chiefs were allowed only to deal with minor cases" (Moila 1987:136).

Rev. Schwellnus, had to bring erring Christians to trial at Tshakhuma Mission Station. All cases were tried by him, and that brought another conflict between the missionary and the traditional leader, an action which reduced Christianity's credibility. The traditional leader's political power was undermined, and from a cultural point of view, the action taken by the missionary was very sensitive, as there were now two political leaders within the same area.

The third missionary from the Berlin Missionary Society, went to the land of Chief Ranwedzi Mphaphuli through a recommendation of his son, Makwarela. Makwarela was highly impressed by the activities performed by the London Missionary Society amongst the Ndebeles, under Chief Lobengula.

During Makwarela's visit to Mashonaland, he decided that missionaries should be invited to come to his father's area. When Makwarela approached his father, Chief Mphaphuli, to invite a missionary to his land, both the chief and Makwarela's mother were against the move, in fear of their land being turned into a mission farm. Makwarela mentioned that the presence of the missionary in their midst would enhance the status of the chief as well as that of his subjects. After careful consideration of the reasons provided by Makwarela, the chief acceded to the request. Ultimately, the missionaries were invited to work in Chief Mphaphuli's area. The Berlin Missionary Society approved the establishment of a mission station in Mphaphuli's area in principle, but unfortunately there was a lack of funds. However, a Pomeranian landowner, named George, and his daughter, Holtz, donated the money for the spreading of the Gospel in Chief Mphaphuli 's area.

2.2.2.4. Klaas Koen

On 26 July 1877, a mission station was established at Tshifudi (Mavhola), next to where Makwarela stayed (Gaba). The mission station was named Georgenholtz. The first missionary to man the newly established station was Rev. Klaas Koen, who was first stationed at Anhalt Schmidt, Berlin Mission Station in the Cape Colony. Koen was the first South African born missionary from the Berlin Mission to spread the Gospel amongst the Vhavenda.

Johannes Madima, the first convert at Tshakhuma mission, was sent to the newly established mission station at Mavhola to assist Rev. Koen. By 1879 five people were baptised, amongst them were: Joseph Radema, the brother of Makwarela; and Tshishonga Lalumbe, who was given the new name of Nathaniël Lalumbe. According to the Vhavenda culture, the name given at birth or in infancy has a meaning, One could be named after a great grandparent, or it may remind parents of any mishap which happened prior to birth. For example, the author's name "Muthuphei" means "Sufferer"; the author was born when there were problems in the family.

Makwarela's greatest disappointment was to be refused baptism, because he had many wives. Mathivha explains this when she indicates, "He was very disappointed when the missionary refused to baptise him because he was not prepared to abandon his many wives" (Mathivha 1986:55-56). In this case, the cultural background of Makwarela, who as one of the chief's sons, and heir to the throne of the Mphaphuli dynasty, hindered him from accepting the Gospel, while Makwarela persuaded his father to accept missionaries. Ironically, he could not be baptised unless he abandoned his many wives.

The newly converted Nathaniël Lalumbe and the seasoned pioneer, Johannes Madima, worked hard to assist Rev. Koen in the field of education and in spreading the Gospel. In 1895 Nathaniël Lalumbe established a mission outpost

at Mutale, which was quite far away to the east, in what was then Chief Makahane's area, next to the Luvuvhu river (Levubu river).

Although Rev. Koen made use of these two Vhavenda pioneers to spread the Gospel, he was not wholly accepted because he did not have a wife. According to the Vhavenda culture any single young person is not taken seriously, and is still regarded a child, because he cannot discuss family needs and problems. Van der Merwe confirms this statement when he indicates, "Hoewel die sendingwerk hier stadige vordering getoon het en Koen as ongetroude persoon dit moelik gevind het om die vertroue van die Bavenda wat alle ongetroude persone as kinders beskou het te wen" (Van der Merwe 1975:108).

Rev. Koen became a victim of malaria and his health deteriorated. The Berlin Missionary Society sent Dietrich Baumhofner to assist him. Koen died in February 1883. Within six weeks after his death, Baumhofner was also attacked by malaria and died. A convert, Franz Maluleke, took charge of the mission station under the guidance of Rev. Beuster, who was stationed at Maungani.

2.2.2.5. Ludwig Giesekke, Ernst Friedrich Gottshling, Otto Klatt

Ludwig Giesekke

On the 18th of May 1906 the newly appointed missionary to Georgenholtz (Mavhola), Ludwig Giesekke, transferred the station far away from Mavhola to

Ha-Luvhimbi, the present Georgeholtz, in order to avoid the threat of malaria. Rev. Giesekke was assisted by his brother-in-law, Rev. E. Schwellnus.

Mrs Giesekke was instrumental to the success of her husband, since she was born in Venda (Tshakhuma Mission), and was regarded as Vho-Makhadzi (Aunt to the Nation). She performed the duties of midwife in a small clinic, and also helped the people greatly during the outbreak of measles. Both the school and the church work progressed well at Goergenholtz during the Giesekkes' stay, until Ludwig Giesekke was transferred to Tshakhuma on the 4th August 1919, and Mrs Giesekke went back to her place of birth.

Ernst Friedrich Gottschling

On the 25th July 1899, Rev. Gottsling established a new mission station, Gertrudsburg. The station was situated in the area of Sub-Chief Gota Ramakhadwana, in the jurisdiction of Chief Makhado. This area was close to the newly established town of Louis Trichardt. The mission station was also close to Kranspoort, which was founded by the Dutch Reformed Church. Little was achieved, due to the conflict between Chief Makhado and the white settlement at Schoemansdal. However, Rev. Gottlsling encouraged the new converts to attend both church and school. Modern houses were built, as the station was situated near to Louis Trichardt and building materials were easily transported.

The first person to pay much attention to the Christian religion was a sick man, who was suffering from leprosy. His name was Elias Mashau. The leprosy in itself caused a threat to the local population accepting the Gospel, as such patients were usually regarded as outcasts and were neglected by the community. However, with the wisdom displayed by Rev. Gottsling, who came down to the level of the people by way of improving their living standards, many better houses were built, and people were encouraged to build streets. Gertrudsburg compared favourably to Louis Trichardt in this regard, and this pleased the new converts.

The year 1901 was regarded as a commemorative year in the life of the new mission station as thirteen new converts were baptised. School attendance was improving, and even the son of Chief Makhado, Simeon Mubva Ramabulana, was amongst the pupils attending this school.

Otto Klatt

In 1904, Rev. Gottschling was transferred to Botshabelo Seminary School. He was succeeded by Rev. O Klatt who also worked very hard to improve the mission station. People were to erect well-elevated houses, with big steel frame windows, and this was a great development in the eyes of new converts.

2.2.2.6. Stephanus Makhado Masiagwala

In 1914 when Rev. O. Klatt was recalled, a Muvenda pioneer replaced him. This was history in the making, for a Muvenda to replace a white missionary and to carry the same status, not as an Evangelist but as an ordained pastor. Who could this be, if it were not Rev. Stephanus Makhado Masiagwala, who had been nurtured by Rev. Beuster at Maungani? His father was Sub-Chief Gota at Maungani. Rev. Masiagwala was first trained as a teacher, and in June 1907, he was ordained at Tshakhuma as pastor, and became the first Muvenda teacher to become a minister of religion. He worked for only two years at Gertrusburg, and was then requested to start new mission outposts. He established Shondoni, Lukau, Dzimauli, and lastly Dzamba.

It is indeed a blessing to have had a person from the royal house proclaiming the Gospel, because he knew all the cultural practices pertaining to the indigenous people. Further, he spoke with authority and the listeners gave him a hearing without doubt. This argument is supported by Mminele when he purports, "One can just imagine what a strong effect the return of the Muvenda chief. Chief Makhado (Masiagwala) had on his tribe" (Mminele 1983:248). Notice should be given to the consideration that Masiagwala was not a chief, but one of the sons of a royal family. The German missionaries made use of Masiagwala, who had royal blood, to permeate the Vhavenda in spreading the Gospel. Ultimately, many were converted to the new religion.

In 1948, Rev. Masiagwala died at Georgenholtz mission station, during his retirement, which he started in 1935. The ordination of Masiagwala opened doors for the inflow of the local people, who felt called to be preachers of the Gospel.

It was through him that the Berlin Missionary Society brought the Gospel to traditional leaders such as Chief Rambuda at Dzimauli and Chief Nethengwe, whose son was trained as a teacher at Botshabelo. This Muvenda pioneer was a great asset to mission work. Mathivha indicates that Rev. Stephanus Masiagwala deserves special honour among the Venda People. It was through Masiagwala, especially as he was of royal blood, that it was possible for the Berlin Missionaries to erect the many outposts throughout Venda even where they would otherwise have been prohibited. As a pioneer and teacher his name will remain indelible in the hearts and minds of many as a Venda who knew everything about Education (Mathivha 1985:65).

2.2.2.7. Samson Rabothata

Samson Rabothata was principal of Tshakhuma School, and later, in June 1930, ordained as a minister of the Lutheran Church. In June 1929, a circumcision "Murundu" school, an initiation school for boys, was established at Tshavhavha near Tshakhuma Mission Station. Munzhedzi Fungisani, Makungo Sithomola and other boys from the mission station fled to the circumcision school. The

missionary, Rev. Giesekke, instructed Rabothata, the then principal, to recapture the boys. Rabothata was involuntarily circumcised, ultimately. Giesekke sought the assistance of the police and the circumcision school was closed unceremoniously; which was against the cultural norms governing circumcision schools.

David Fungisani (Personal Interview) indicates that Razwimisani Madzunya, Muthadzwi and others were forced to leave the Mission station, as the missionary concluded that they were accomplices to Rabothata's untimely circumcision. Rabothata's circumcision was a blessing in disguise as he could mix freely with both the circumcised and the uncircumcised. He was also inclined to boast to the uncircumcised, calling them "Mushaa" (a scornful term for addressing males who were not circumcised).

2.2.2.8. Nicodimus Masekela

In 1947, Nicodimus, who was a teacher at Tshakhuma, and the son of Paul Masekela, the founder of the Berlin Mission Station at Tshiozwi in the Sinthumule area, was ordained as minister. Masekela was transferred to Maungani in 1952 to serve as both a teacher and a minister. Several teachers, who felt called, were ordained under the Missionary Rule (tent makers). As a result, many mission outposts and stations were established. Pastor Theodor Dau (Personal Interview 16/05/97), indicated that as African ministers, they did not encounter problems

regarding children attending circumcision and initiation schools for girls, as that was part of the people's cultural heritage. As a result, he had never suspended or excommunicated any child who attended such schools.

Rev. Zwoitwaho Calvin Nevhutalu, who is presently the Dean of Devhula/Lebowa Circuit (Personal Interview 26/01/1996), indicated that the Circuit had 96 congregations and 10 000 plus members. At the time of the interview, all the congregations were being ministered by indigenous people.

There is no doubt that the presence of the significant number of indigenous ministers reflects on the importance of the local voice, even though they were under the tutelage of missionaries.

2.2.3 Swiss Missionaries

2.2.3.1. Paul Berthoud, Ernest Creux (Tsonga mission)

The Paris Evangelical Mission Society in Lesotho decided, during a conference on 12 May, to expand the Gospel as far as the Northern Transvaal. Adolph Mabila was in charge of the expedition, and was accompanied by Paul Berthoud and a few others. On the 23 May 1973, they left Morija, in Lesotho, for their fact-finding mission.

The expedition ultimately arrived at the foot of the Zoutpansberg, where they found a Dutch Reformed Mission station under the care of Rev. Hofmeyr who was stationed at Goedgedacht. Hofmeyr gave them a warm reception.

When they enquired about mission work in that part of the country, Hofmeyr advised them to go east to a place called Spelonken, where there were people who had not received the Gospel. Junod indicates:

> "He told them of a people living in the east in a part known as the Spelonken, called 'Knobneusen' by the Boers. Because their faces and noses were tattooed ... but elders of Mr Hofmeyr's church added that they were thieves and liars and were deceitful, that their language was very difficult and almost impossible to learn. They advised the missionaries not to have anything to do with them. To this Mabilo answered, 'These are just the men we are looking for, did not Jesus come to look for and save the lost' ..." (Junod 1933:67).

The enmity created by Albasini amongst the black people caused a gulf between the Shangaans and the other tribes, because they were regarded as the soldiers of Albasini. No wonder the church elders of the Dutch Reformed Church discouraged the Swiss Missionaries from taking the Gospel to them.

At last, they arrived at Spelonken, where they were received by Albasini and the Shangaans. The missionaries were cordially welcomed and the Shangaans

urged them not to abandon the mission work amongst them. They eventually returned to Lesotho with zeal and encouragement.

On the 16th April 1875, both Rev. Paul Berthoud and Ernest Creux, their families and a few Basotho left Morija for the Zoutpansberg, with much joy and gratitude for the new venture. They ultimately arrived on 9 July 1875 at Spelonken where they found themselves in great solitude, because of the lack of contact with colleagues and relatives. They were well comforted by Eliakim, whom they had left behind on their first expedition. Eliakim welcomed them warmly. Arrangements were quickly made with Watt for the purchase of his farm, Klipfontein. The trade of land also complicated relations with traditional leaders, because farms were being sold by strangers (Watt) to the missionaries for the purpose of establishing mission stations.

It is surprising, where, and from whom, Watt acquired land, as has already been mentioned. The same Watt sold land to Rev. Schwellnus at Tshakhuma. Native lands were expropriated under the pretence that they were not possessed. Customarily and traditionally, the land belonged to the local people. This in itself is a clear indication that the lands were seized by race-orientated laws. The missionaries were a party to these fraudulent procedures by participating in the land acquisition transactions.

The first problem the missionaries encountered with the Shangaans was poor communication, because they were under the impression that all black people in the Northern Transvaal spoke the same language. They learnt Sesotho during their short stay at Morija. Du Plessis reinforces this statement when he indicates:

> "The missionaries had been led to understand that all the native tribes in the Northern Transvaal made use of the Sesotho language, which, during their three years stay in Basotholand, they had mastered. But here was a tribe that understood no Sesotho" (Du Plessis 1911:331).

Eliakim, the first Evangelist who accompanied the missionaries from Morija, was one of the founder members of Valdezia mission station (Klipfontein) and came to the assistance of missionaries by being their interpreter.

The Swiss-missionaries also had the opportunity to take the Gospel to the neighbouring white settlement. The missionaries also offered medical services to the sick. Junod indicates:

> "Either my colleague or I went every fortnight to our little flock of whites ... The Swiss Missionaries were thus becoming popular with the whites, the medical services rendered by Paul Berthoud could but add to their esteem and gratitude" (Junod 1881:11).

The services rendered by the Swiss Missionaries helped to break down prejudices between the Boers and the Swiss Missionaries. The latter felt that they were accepted by both the black people and the white settlement in Zoutpansberg area.

During the conflict between Chief Makhado and the Pretoria Government, General Joubert was assigned on a military expedition against Chief Makhado. The Government made use of a Shangaan army. The black Christians also formed a contingent against Makhado. The strategy adopted by Joubert against Makhado was not conducive to encouraging Makhado to accept Christianity. Rather, it deterred his desire for the Gospel, and strengthened his dislike for the missionaries.

General Joubert and Makhado were ready to enter a peace treaty. In March 1883, General Joubert requested Rev. Creux of the Swiss Mission to negotiate a peace treaty between Makhado and the Boers. In reality, the work of reconciliation should have been assigned to the Berlin Missionaries, as they had arrived earlier in this region. Unfortunately, the Berlin Missionaries were not on good terms with Chief Makhado.

When Rev. Creux arrived at Makhado's stronghold, Hangklip, the chief was in a pensive mood, his whole body was trembling, and his eyes were aggressive, ready for war. When he recognised Rev. Creux, his friend, he calmed down.

Junod confirms this statement when he indicates:. "Ah! why do they not appoint you as magistrate! If they had sent a Boer in your place war would have broken out long ago" (Junod 1933:38). The diplomatic approach of Rev. Creux can be attributed to his parishioner, Hakamele, who was well-vested in Venda culture, and assisted Rev. Creux in negotiating a peace treaty with the chief.

The two Swiss Missionaries were in a better position to propagate the Gospel, as they were assisted by the Basotho evangelists who accompanied them from Morija. The evangelists could master the Tsonga language faster than the missionaries could, due to their knowledge of the similarities in African linguistics. The efforts by the missionaries led to the first baptismal ceremony held at Valdezia, on the 4th October 1876, on which occasion Lydia Xihlomulo was baptised.

It is gratifying to note that within the short period of three years of the Swiss Mission's inception in Valdezia, eighty converts were baptised. Neither Rev. Beuster nor Schwellnus of the Berlin Mission had reached that number of converts who had been baptised. Cuendet indicates: "Rev. Beuster of the Berlin Mission, during his visit to Valdezia, did mention that he had spent six years at Maungani (Sibasa) mission station but had not baptised one convert" (Cuendet 1950). Traditionally the Vhavenda are more conservative than the Shangaans. As a result, the Vhavenda are not as susceptible to new ideas or religions.

In 1878, Rev. Creux moved away from Valdezia to a place called Shehe, which fell under the jurisdiction of Headman Ramaru, of the family of Ramabulana. He established a Swiss Mission Station called Elim. The present site of the church is where the old residence of the Senoamadi family was. The Senoamadi family was moved further west from the mission station.

Rev. Creux conducted his work in various areas, irrespective of ethnicity. He established a good working relationship with both the Tsonga (Shangaan) and the Vhavenda traditional leaders. This statement is reinforced by Halala when he indicates:

> "After the establishment of Elim Mission station Reverend Creux went as far as Mlamula, Ntshabalala (Nthabalala) and Mashamba in the Zoutpansberg district to teach the Shangaan-Tsonga people the Word of God"(Halala 1986:47).

The Swiss Missionaries were greatly encouraged when Chief Ndjakandjaka, who stayed near the waterfall in the vicinity of the Elim Mission, converted to the Christian religion.

The conversion of the chief enabled the Swiss Mission to produce good fruits between both the Vatsonga and the Vhavenda. Junod confirms the steps taken by Chief Ndjakandjaka when he indicates:

> "The conversion of this chief caused tremendous joy to Creux, and for all the churches of all missionaries who preceded the Swiss missionaries. There is no instance where a Muvenda chief confessed and was baptised as it was the case with Chief Ndjakandjaka (Junod 1933:41).

It was never a simple task for the Vhavenda to embrace a new religion, because traditionally they adopted an attitude of wait and see. It was even more difficult for a Vhavenda traditional leader to become a Christian, because traditional leaders were also the religious leaders of the tribe. Stayt endorses this statement when he indicates:

> "The chief, Vhamusanda is the head of his tribe, the father of his people and the sacred living representative of their far off ancestors. He is the hub of their universe, all the life of the community, religious social and economic, revolving around him" (Stayt 1931).

The conversion of a Muvenda traditional leader, is thus a tremendous blessing on untiring labour and persuasive efforts.

The Mission station, which started at Efrate under Headman Munzhedzi, was founded by a Venda Pioneer, Maphangwa Moshe Mphelo, who had established himself at Ga-Ramokgopa. He was expelled because he had built himself a house similar to the one of Joao Albasini. It is clear that Albasini had caused an

irreparable enmity amongst the black people in the Zoutpansberg district. The expulsion of Evangelist Mphelo hindered the progress of the Gospel.

From a traditional point of view, the presence of Albasini in the Zoutpansberg district caused much embarrassment under the local population. Albasini had declared himself chief of the black people around him. The action taken by Albasini regarding the chieftainship was not settled easily. Nemudzivhadi confirms this statement when he indicates:

> "At this meeting the President announced that Schoeman had been appointed diplomatic agent in the district and that Albasini was no longer in the service of the Government. This announcement was cordially received by black people who promised to be obedient to Schoeman" (Nemudzivhadi 1997:23).

The black people around the Zoutpansberg preferred Schoeman to Albasini, because the latter had created enmity between the Shangaan and the other black groups.

After the death of Albasini, his son wanted to inherit his chieftainship. He was not accepted due to the uncompassionate acts committed by his father. The acceptance of the Gospel was hindered as Albasini was associated with missionaries, even though the missions and Albasini were very different regarding their actions, goals and attitudes towards the local inhabitants.

2.2.3.2. Numa Jaques (Vhavenda Mission)

The Swiss Missionaries did not only bring the Gospel to the Tsonga speaking people, but also laboured amongst the Vhavenda. Cuendent indicates that Efrata made a branch of Elim in 1880. The congregation was entirely composed of Vhalemba and Vhavenda members (Cuendet 1950:26).

Rev. Numa Jaques was well known for training and assigning black people to work as pioneers to spread the Gospel amongst their own brethren. Evangelist J. Mavikani established a Swiss Mission Station in collaboration with Vhavenda chiefs, such as Mashau, Mashamba, Nthabalala, Davhana (Nesengani) Ramaru, and Masia, although the language used in these areas was Tshivenda. The language of instruction at all the schools, under the control of the Swiss Mission, was Tsonga. Chief Sinthumule, who attended church services frequently at Elim Mission Station, advised his brother Manavhela to invite missionaries to his place of abode (Cuendent 1950:26). This is a clear indication that the Swiss Missionaries worked amongst the Vhavenda, which is contrary to Halala's statement when he argues, "The first missionaries who were sent by the Swiss Mission to work among the Shangaan Tsonga people in the Transvaal were Reverends Ernest Creux and Paul Berthoud (Halala 1986:45).

It should also be known that the Swiss Missionaries were no exceptions; their mission work was also hindered by cultural and traditional differences. The missionaries had difficulty relating to the practices of the Vhavenda who were converts to the Christian religion. During the interview conducted with Maanda Ramaru (Personal Interview 15.03.1996), who stayed at Elim mission station, explained the misunderstanding between the missionary and the members of its congregations:

> "The incident occurred when the boys, who were converted to Christianity, went to the circumcision school in 1955, during winter vacations, which was established at Ha-Mbangambanga (sweetwaters). When the boys came from the school after the duration of the circumcision, their parents were debarred from ploughing their fields for two years as a way of punishment for leaving the children (boys) to participate in heathen practices."

The boys were at a dilemma, for if they did not go to circumcision schools their circumcised friends would ridicule and call them Mashuvhuru (uncircumcised). Stayt supports this statement when he indicates that at one time it was a taboo for any circumcised man to eat with one who had not undergone the Rite of Circumcision (Stayt 1931:125-126).

The good work done by the Swiss Missionaries in Venda and the Zoutpansberg as a whole, will not vanish unrecognised. The establishment of Elim Hospital,

which renders medical services to the sick, and the training of girls as matrons and nurse educators, is highly appreciated by the indigenous people.

The establishment of Lemana High and Training School at Elim Swiss Mission Station was received favourably and contributed greatly to the success of the mission station. The school demonstrated the strength of the Swiss Missionaries. The Vhavenda students, who studied at Lemana School, and who became inspectors of schools, are: I Phaswana, Mphelo; A Mulaudzi; E. Netshilema; E Mudau; T. Maumela; PL.B. Mashige; M.H. Nesengani (Nee Ngalane); E.E. Maimela; D. Nemauluma; A. Ravele; and E.R.B. Nesengani. The latter started teaching at Lemana Training College for Teachers in 1953. In 1956 he wrote an Anthology called *Mitlhokovetselo ya Xitsonga ya Tinthanga A -II*. The book was a great asset to the student teachers at the college.

2.2.3. The Reformed Presbyterian Church.

The Presbyterian Church has its origin in the British Isles. It is a Calvinist church that lays emphasis on the office of the elder. As time went on, it was designated as the "Reformed and Presbyterian Church".

The Presbyterian Church was commonly called "the Bantu Presbyterian Church", though it was not an Indigenous Church neither in form nor in context. Ravhudzulo indicates:

> "According to Nissen, there were two reasons why the Bantu Presbyterian was formed. Firstly, the missionaries of the United Free Church of Scotland wanted to allow a native church to develop on its own under the auspices of the European missionaries until such time that the Native church was mature enough to be wholly on its own. Secondly, this would make the 'Natives' (Black people) feel at home" (Ravhudzulo 1992:11).

All the Reformed Presbyterian Churches anchored their roots in the United Free Church of Scotland. The Bantu Presbyterian Church finally seceded from the Presbyterian Church under the leadership of Mzimba.

2.2.3.1. D A Mc Donald

On the 20th August 1905, D.A. Mc Donald was ordained minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Burnhill, at the then Kafraria. He was appointed to establish a mission station in Venda. Like Abraham of old, he left Burnhill church without knowing the land he was going to. He managed to arrive at the Presbyterian Mission Station called Donhill, near Pietersburg in the Mamabolo area.

Mc Donald was accompanied by Rev. W. Mphamba from Donhill Mission Station to Venda. They arrived at a place called Ha-Makhuvha on the 16th September

1905. The entourage of Mc Donald was welcomed by Julius Mulamula (Mlamla) who was busy preaching the Gospel in the area. Mr Mulamula (Mlamla) had very little success. The Vhavenda were not impressed by the way he preached to them. He was using the Xhosa language, an influence he received from his Xhosa wife, whom he married in Kimberly during his stay at the diamond mines. Failing to convert the Vhavenda, he invited the Shangaans to settle in the vicinity.

Mc Donald reinforces this statement when he indicates:

> "The preacher whom I found at Bufuli moved first to the Spelonken, where he associated with the Swiss Mission. He then kicked against its discipline and went on up to Sibasa where he began holding services in Xhosa tongue. Failing to gain converts among the Venda he brought heathen Shangaan relatives from the distance to settle beside him, teaching their children to read Xhosa, and getting them all to attend his services" (Ravhudzulo 1992:11).

The Shangaan families referred to by Mc Donald were those of Maringa, Maswanganyi (Mashao) Hlaise, Shivalo, Maphangisane and Shiluvane.

Rev. Mphamba, a black missionary, knew a bit of the local people's culture. Therefore, he accompanied Mc Donald, without any waste of time, to pay a courtesy call to the chief of the area. The chief was Chief Ramaremisa Tshivhase, who stayed at Mukumbani. Chief Tshivhase gave them a warm

reception and encouraged them to carry on with mission work. After Rev. Mphamba had completed his work in orientating Mc Donald, he went back to his mission station at Donhill.

Mc Donald was not impressed nor pleased with the way the Gospel was brought to the Vhavenda. He was not satisfied with the small group of Shangaans, gathered by Mulamula (Mlamla), for he wanted to preach to the whole community. Thus Mc Donald explains: "I was not immensely interested in the little group around me but I saw no Venda and heard no Venda spoken" (Mc Donald s.a.:94-95). The language problem was a great hindrance for the Vhavenda to accept the Gospel, as the Xhosa language was quite strange to them. When Mc Donald detected this handicap he found himself an interpreter and the Vhavenda became interested in the Gospel.

Mc Donald moved the mission station from Ha-Makhuvha to Mathithi, next to Munzere Tree where the mission is today, in the area of Headman (Gota) Mphigalale Tshikovhokovho. The mission station was named Gooldville. The reason why Mc Donald moved the mission station far away from Mlamla, was because Xhosa, as a language of instruction, was a stumbling-block for the local people to understand the Gospel. Secondly, Mlamla and Mc Donald were not on good terms. Mc Donald explains:

> "I saw he was a stumbling block to the conversion of the Vendas, not only by the life he lived but by holding services in an unknown tongue

> ... like a chief he imposed forced labour on the said families" (Mc Donald s.a.:94).

The Shangaan families also moved away and followed Mc Donald, and Mlamla remained with only his family.

Evangelist Lucas Makoale was sent to Venda by Rev. Mpamba from Donhill Mission Station in order to assist Mc Donald in his mission work. Makoale was well trained in the discipline of the Presbyterian Church, and was an asset to Mc Donald. Mc Donald started a school at the new site with the children who moved away from Mlamla at Ha-Makhuvha. Most of them were Shangaans. Mc Donald indicates::

> "My first pupils were all Shangaan boys and girls: Venda boys came later but not girls and though girls of converts from the Vhavenda came, we never had many Venda girls. The heathen Vendas were totally against their girls either becoming converts or attending school" (Mc Donald s.a.:95).

It is a fact the Vhavenda girls were not encouraged to attend school. Beatrice Francisca Molete (Nee Da Gama) (Personal Interview 21/03/1996) indicated that she had persuaded her friend Nyadzani Kharivhe to attend school. All Nyadzani could say was "The school makes a girl run mad." Jacob Mabidzha was amongst the first Venda pioneers to work as an evangelist in the field of spreading the

Gospel under the name of the Presbyterian Church. He was assigned to establish a missionary out-post at Muhuyu. With the assistance of his wife Ester, they involved themselves in the school work and the church services. The community was helped greatly.

The Evangelist, Lucas Makoale, who came from Donhill, assisted Mc Donald by establishing several outpost stations such as Mukumbani, Mulenzhe, Makonde and Ngwenani.

There were new developments when John da Gama encouraged the new converts to bury their dead in coffins, instead of wrapping them in blankets, as was the Venda cultural practice. Da Gama's effort of making coffins was highly appreciated by Mc Donald and the indigenous people.

When Mc Donald approached a woman sub-chief, Nyatshitahela (Mutshalingana) of the community Vondwe, to establish a mission station in her area, she welcomed the idea. She had already heard of the good work done by the Presbyterian Church. Mc Donald indicates:

> "When I went to the Great Place, I would be greeted in this way. The chief comes up with a happy look clapping his hands and exclaims: 'Madonora (Mc Donald) is a good a right missionary, he hasn't my land my people, he is not like the other missionaries who asked only

> to teach my people, not have my land my people' ..." (Mc Donald s.a.:194).

The Vhavenda and the traditional leaders had a good working relation with Mc Donald who was nick named "Madonora". Because he did not turn his mission station into a farm, he was regarded as a good missionary.

2.2.3.2. Mc Donald's assistants and successors: Mrs Mc Donald, Lamont, Nkhabide, Aitken, and Charity Majiza

Mc Donald was also assisted by his wife, who was a professional nurse. She was competent in the medical field, and the indigenous people were helped greatly, as she started a clinic. Mc Donald also encouraged Chief Tshivhase to make use of the medical facilities provided at the clinic. Mc Donald indicates:

> "Sometimes the work brought her unnecessary hardships, as when the late Chief Sibasa sent his cart out and six mules for her to go to one of his wives in great need and she and I spent hours at his place" (McDonald s.a.:126).

Although the work was strenuous for Mrs Mc Donald, the work gave her unspeakable joy, even when it involved hardship to the utmost.

The small clinic started at Gooldville Mission Station developed into a hospital, called Donald Fraser. In 1930, Dr Lamont arrived from Scotland. Unfortunately, he did not stay for a long time, on account of his wife's ill-health.

On 14 June 1931, Mc Donald left Gooldville for Scotland after 26 years of mission service amongst the Vhavenda. The indigenous people extended their grateful appreciation for the faithful service he had given to his missionary call in Venda. Mc Donald was succeeded by Rev. Nkhabide, who maintained the good relations entered by his predecessor, in working with traditional leaders.

Hlaise, a retired teacher, (Personal Interview: 19/7/1998) indicated that Chief Rasimphi (Mphaya) Tshivhase gave Nkhabinde the responsibility of nurturing his two sons, Teddy and Prince. The latter was installed as the traditional leader of the Tshivhase tribe. They were both baptised in the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

In 1933, Dr Robert D. Aitken, a South African, replaced Dr Lamont. He had the skills of a physician and a missionary. Dr Aitken indicates:

> "I had come to Gooldville not only as a doctor, but as a missionary, and on my first Sunday there I preached to the native congregation from words in the book of Nehemia, 'Come and let us build up the walls of Jerusalem'..." (Aitken 1944:10).

The mission doctors served both the spiritual and bodily needs and cared for the welfare of all the people, irrespective of their Christian affiliation. The doctor was a hard-working man; he travelled extensively for mission work and to provide a hospital service.

Dr Aitken was once faced with the problem of amputating sick limbs, as a way of saving and relieving the pain endured by patients. The Vhavenda could not give consent to the surgeon to conduct amputations on their affected limbs. Aitken confirms this statement when he indicates: "the native people dread amputation and will often die before they consent to it" (Aitken:1944:7). The Vhavenda would rather endure the miserable, dreadful pain, than to surrender their suffering limbs for amputation. In Venda circles, there is also a belief that if one is an amputee during one's life on earth, one would be maimed in the future world. During 1979-1980, the Gooldville mission was ministered by a woman pastor, Charity N. Majiza. According to H. Makoale (Personal Interview: 19/05/1998), the woman pastor encountered some difficulties in leading the congregation, because men were not accustomed to being led by a lady, but as time went on they learnt to accept her as their spiritual leader.

The present Pastor, assigned to the Gooldville Mission as from 1988, Rev. Edward Mukondeleli Ramulondi (Telephone Interview 03/05/1996), indicated that there are 15 outpost stations, and the membership count stands at 1001. The

medical service, started by Mc Donald, had been transformed into a big medical hospital, which is of great service to the indigenous people.

2.2.4. Reformed Church (Gerformeerde Kerk in Venda)

2.2.4.1. The First Pioneers: Dirk Postma, Pieter Bos

The task of mission work of the Reformed church, known as the Gerformeerde Kerk, was pioneered by Rev. Postma, who arrived in South Africa in 1858. Whilst in Durban on his way to the Transvaal, Van Rooy cited him as saying: "I feel a burning love for expansion of your kingdom, when I see the land of Ham's sons and of our related people, 'O make me into a blessing for them' ..." (Van Rooy 1975:2). Although Rev. Postma had a great desire to spread the Word of God amongst the black people, he met with some obstacles along the road of mission work in the Transvaal. At Nylstroom, he was refused permission to minister to black people and he accused the church in the town of racism, and he challenged the church members for practising racism in church circles.

The Reformed Church in Venda was founded by Rev. Pieter Bos, who was not trained as a minister but answered the clarion call. He was a book-keeper by profession, but he was ordained in accordance to a provision made in the church order. It is indicated: "A person of outstanding gifts can be ordained without the full seminary training as is indicated in Article eight" (Van Rooy 1975:2). In 1910,

after his ordination, Rev. Bos arrived at the foot of the Soutpansberg. He settled on a farm called Uniondale and was assisted by Moutlwatse, an evangelist. He was welcomed heartily by the families of Manus Moshapo and Ephraim Chuma. According to Machaba (Personal Interview 03/04/96), Eliakim Moorosi Matlakala, who came from Moletji, became the foreman on the farm.

Rev. Bos started preaching the Gospel and Matlakala was his interpreter, as he was well conversant in Afrikaans. The Gospel fell on fertile soil , and Headman Matshisevhe (Phukha) was also baptised.

Machaba (Personal Interview 03/04/96), indicated that Headman Matshisevhe encouraged his subjects to convert, and he joined forces with Rev. Bos to discourage new converts from working on Sundays. The neighbouring farmers encouraged their employees to attend services at Uniondale.

Mrs Bos was blessed with a set of baby twins. This was a good lesson to the Vhavenda around that area, to see a mother nursing twins. According to the Vhavenda culture, this was taboo, as only one infant could have survived. Rev. Bos died in 1923, and was laid to rest on the farm Uniondale, where he had started his mission work. The mission work was left in the hands of Moutlwatse and Mrs Bos.

2.2.4.2. Hugo Du Plessis

In 1928 Rev. Hugo du Plessis arrived at Uniondale, but proceeded to start a new mission station at Siloam in the Nzhelele Valley. Matlakala assisted him as an evangelist and two interpreters, Johannes Mabona and Jakobus Lutengwe, also accompanied him. In the same year, 1928, Rev. De Klerk was sent to the town of Louis Trichardt to work in the white community. Machaba J.T. (Personal Interview 03/06/1996), indicated:

> "I accompanied Rev. Du Plessis as cart driver to visit the congregation of Louis Trichardt. Some of the whites refused to receive Holy communion served by Du Plessis, who was assigned to work amongst the black people (Vhavenda) at Siloam. Their attitude disturbed Rev. Du Plessis who was always nicknamed 'Rooi hare'."

This action was a deterrent factor for the acceptance of the Gospel under the Vhavenda, as apartheid was also practised in the church. Du Plessis made use of the Vhavenda evangelist to spread the Gospel. Andries Mabona was sent to Joubertstroom (Ha-Maelula). In 1929, Jim Thalifhi Machaba was baptised, and in 1936, he was sent to Shanzha as an evangelist. His father could not be baptised as he was a traditional healer with more than one wife. In 1939, the young Machaba established new mission outposts at Vhurivhuri, Lambani and Makuya. Evangelist Madzhabada was sent to Tshamulungwi. These evangelists did tremendous work amongst their people. The Vhavenda culture and practices

could not hinder the acceptance of the Gospel as the evangelists understood the cultural background of the indigenous people.

After the death of Moutlwatse, and the departure of Matlakala to Siloam, Manus Moshapo, who was well known as Jojakim, remained as both Evangelist and foreman on the farm Uniondale, until his ultimately move to Siloam to join Du Plessis there.

Matlakala, who worked faithfully as both interpreter and evangelist, was ultimately ordained as minister. Van Rooy confirms this statement when he indicates: "Matlakala was finally ordained as the first black minister of the Reformed Churches on 8 October 1947" (Van Rooy 1975:7).

During the early forties, a mission station was established at De-Hoop by Rev. Erasmus, who did not stay long as he was accidentally shot and killed during a hunting expedition. He was replaced by Rev. Louw, who, after a short period of time, moved to Siloam to replace Rev. Du Plessis, who had moved to Dube, and later on to Hammanskraal to start a seminary school. Rev. Du Plessis worked hard amongst the Vhavenda and he had made a significant contribution for the Vhavenda, for he wrote a M.A. thesis about the Vhavenda, with the title "Die Politieke Organisasies van die Venda". His thesis became an eye opener for the missionaries who followed after him.

2.2.4.3. Koos van Rooy

When Rev. Jacobus Albertus (Koos) Van Rooy was assigned to Siloam in 1957 great, strides were made in the field of mission work. Without any waste of time, he took it upon himself to learn the local language (Tshivenda). He established new mission outposts at Tshidzini, Mahunguwi, Tswera, Vhurivhuri and Lamvi. He had no communication problems as he could speak Tshivenda fluently and this assisted him in understanding the Vhavenda culture better. He went to the extent of translating the second edition of the New Testament and the Psalms. This was a great work indeed.

The mission work of the Reformed church was further expanded with the arrival of the Christelike Gereformeerde Kerk in 1961. Missionaries were sent on special assignments, apart from propagating the Word of God. Projects were funded, such as Iyani Bible School, where evangelists received proper training, as Floor, M Rebel, and Carl Ofourtit were amongst the missionaries who spear-headed these developmental projects.

The first Muvenda to be ordained was Rev. S.M Mugeri, who was assigned to De-Hoop in 1959-1969. As an indigenous minister, he had neither problem with communication, nor with cultural practices such as circumcision.

According Rev. S.P Moshapo of the Reformed Church (Telephone Interview 28/05/1996), who is at present stationed at Mahwelereng, he had no problems with the boys attending the circumcision school (Murundu), as the rites did not come into conflict with the Christian principle, except for the heavy words used, which could be regarded as vulgar, but in reality was the language understood by those attending the circumcision rites. According to Moshapo's point of view, it is uncalled for to inflict punishment on boys who attended these circumcision rites.

Prof J.A. van Rooy (Telephone Interview 22/05/1996) made mention of the fact that the converts were under the care of the indigenous ministers, who had no problem with the Venda culture. He mentioned that there were 135 outposts. The membership numbered at 7,800 in 1992, and was estimated to be 10,000 in 1996. The Reformed Church (Gereformeerde Kerk) had established mission outposts in almost all the areas in Venda.

2.3. Factors which hindered or facilitated the acceptance of the Gospel in Venda

The unfamiliarity of the missionaries with Venda Culture contributed to the hindrance of the Gospel finding appeal in Venda.

Missionary Hofmeyr of the Dutch Reformed Church, left the Zoutpansberg district with a sorrowful heart, because the Gospel message had not made any impact

on the traditional leader, Chief Makhado. Hofmeyr was not familiar with the Vhavenda. He did not know, for instance, that according to the Vhavenda custom, the traditional leader should be recognised as a political leader. Any person who wanted to pay homage could visit the chief's abode personally after proper channels of protocol had been observed.

The missionary Hofmeyr was accustomed to sending either Michael Buys or Nemasiwana, the evangelist, to deliver whatever messages there were to Chief Makhado. The method of approach adopted by Hofmeyr was totally unacceptable. It is not surprising that the Gospel could not be readily accepted by the traditional leader, Chief Makhado, who preferred personal contact. In support of this argument, Munnik, the one-time landrost (magistrate) of the Zoutpansberg indicates: "as Landrost of the Zoutpansberg, I often came into contact with him (Chief Makhado) and always found him dignified but extremely courteous" (Munnik 1934:101-102). To the missionary Hofmeyr, Chief Makhado seemed to be an intolerable person.

Converts were dissuaded from having family ties with their unconverted relatives at the mission stations. Mulaudzi of Tshakhuma Lutheran Mission Station (Personal Interview: 17/09/1994), indicated that they had to get permission from the missionary in order to visit their unconverted relatives, who were still residing in tribal areas. The manner of confining the converts to the mission stations resulted in an inherent conflict and scorn between the converted and the

unconverted, even though they were family. Thus, the petition of honouring parents was not adhered to, as Christians had to separate themselves from unconverted relatives, which in reality, is unnatural.

The missionaries were not aware that the Circumcision School (Murundu) was not originally part of the Venda culture. By acculturation, it was assimilated into the Venda culture. It is completely foreign. In support of this statement Rabothata claims that, "Songs for initiation for boys are those of the N. Sotho" (Rabothata 1991:49). This argument is further reinforced by Van Warmelo when he confirms that "Murundu", the general term for the circumcision rites for men was adopted from the Sotho and Tsonga neighbours and was never originally a true Venda custom, nor could it be so considered today (Van Warmelo 1937:175). Although circumcision was not originally a Venda practice, according to the Vhavenda accepted standards, a boy who had not been circumcised could not mix freely with his peers. A conversation with the uncircumcised was regarded as invidious and spiteful.

The missionaries dismissed the practices of circumcision schools without hearing from parents whether permission was granted by them or not. Monnig confirms this statement when he indicates: "As the missions are all opposed to the institution of initiation, most Christians do not allow their children to attend, but many Christians boys nevertheless do attend against the wishes of the parents" (Monnig 1978:112).

The missionaries resorted to punishing or excommunicating children who had taken part in circumcision rites. At the outside-post (where a missionary had no residence), both circumcision (Murundu) and initiation schools for girls (Vhusha) were practised without the missionary's awareness. This argument was confirmed by Neria Mushaathama Modiba from Maungani (Personal Interview 26/05/1997). According to the research conducted in this district, hardly any black ministers who excommunicated people for attending circumcision schools were encountered. Missionaries would have done well in the eyes of the indigenous people if they had followed a policy of transformation and not disparagement of culture.

Many missionaries made use of their own cultures as a vehicle to proclaim the Gospel. In support of this argument Katoke purports, "If a Lutheran missionary came from Germany the converted was expected to accept the German type of Lutheranism" (Katoke 1984:7). Presently, the desire for youth to go to the circumcision schools is diminishing, because traditional knowledgeable people on circumcision are difficult to find, and as a result, boys are admitted, in large numbers, into local hospitals for circumcision.

Patrick Makatu, a Professional Nurse from Makhado Health Centre (Telephone Interview 28/05/1998), indicated that doctors Munyadziwa and Ayob circumcised 200 boys in June 1997. Dr Maiwashe (Personal Interview 15/10/1997) indicated

that he had circumcised 70 boys in his surgery at Madombidzha during the winter school holidays of 1997. It does happen though, that after circumcision by medical doctors, the youths proceed to the traditional circumcision schools to learn moral codes and songs relevant to the schools, so that they should not be despised by their peers. Pitje purports that "the songs are sung which are intended to make the boys despise boyish and childish things and look forward to become men" (Pitje 1950:13).

The problem of boys contracting pneumonia and sepsis of the wounds is solved, as circumcision has been modernised and greatly transformed into something acceptable in all circles.

Traditionally, the Vhavenda regarded land matters as an issue of great significance, if not sacred. It is generally believed that the traditional leader is the guardian of tribal land on behalf of his subjects and the ancestors. Land cannot be surrendered easily to foreigners or be sold for commercial purposes. In support of this statement Nemudzivhadi purports: "According to Venda tradition, land does not belong to an ordinary person or nation but to the chief. It is a property inherited from his forefathers" (Nemudzivhadi 1997:15).

There are cases where the missionaries bought farms in order to establish mission stations, while they were invited by the traditional leaders to spread the Gospel in their areas. Portions of land were given to them for the purpose of their

work. As time went on, the same lands were bought from land traders. It is on record that a Scotsman, John Watt, sold lands to missionaries. Tshakhuma was sold to the Berlin Mission when Schwellnus was a missionary at Tshakhuma. Lwaleni was sold to the Swiss Mission and was named Valdezia under missionaries Creux and Berthoud (see Ndou 1993:19). The habit of turning mission stations into farms became a problematic issue for the traditional leaders.

When missionary Schwellnus was transferred from Tshakhuma to Maungani (Beuster Mission), some of the residents left the mission, including the royal family of Headman Masiagwala. The acceptance of the Gospel was delayed and greatly hindered by mission farms that were bought. The indigenous people decided not to have anything to do with the missionaries.

Some of the hymns of the church became an embarrassment to the traditional leaders, like a verse in "Difela tsa kereke" of Hymn number 251 of the Evangelical Lutheran Church which says: "Ba ba botileng Marena. Ba botile ba ba hwang" (Those who trust traditional leaders, rely on those who die) "Tlang re boke Jesu, ye a phalang me a busang" (Come let us trust Jesus who is living and should be trusted). In this hymn, the comparison between Jesus and the traditional leaders should not be made, as Jesus is God and is thus far above traditional leaders. In fact, the traditional leaders are his creation. This hymn, if

sung in the presence of traditional leaders, would make them feel uncomfortable, degraded and demoralised instead of being uplifted spiritually.

It should not be generally concluded that everything the missionaries brought to the indigenous people was bad. It is without doubt that the missionaries did do commendable work in this part of Africa. For instance, back in 1876, missionary Beuster started the first Bible translation with the aid of a man named Johannes Mutshaeni. They translated the Gospel according to St. John, "Evangeli nga Johannes na dzipistola dza Johannes na dzipsalme na dzi moedzo khethwaho nga Tsewenda." Beuster went further to construct Venda literature. The translating of the whole Bible into Luvenda was a task undertaken by the Schwellnus brothers, Theodor and Paul, and was published in 1936. The Vhavenda expressed great appreciation for this gigantic contribution made by the missionaries. Smit in support of this statement indicates that the Bavenda expressed great appreciation to the Bible Society for providing them with the Bible in their own language (Smit 1970:225).

A thorough revision of the Venda Bible by Van Rooy and his support team received well deserved applause from the indigenous people, as the Bible was now made accessible to ordinary people because it had been simplified.

According to the Venda Culture, human twins were ominous. There is a Venda expression that says: "Muthu ha bebi mafhata sa mbudzi" (A person should not

bear twins like a goat). Should such an unfortunate birth occur, one infant would be put to death, so that one would survive. The correct Venda name for twins, "mafhata", is Malwela-Vanda. Mafhata (twins) always referred to animal twins and not to human twins. Fritz and Dorah Tshatsinde were the first Vhavenda twins to be allowed to survive in 1908, as a result of the Lutheran missionaries' intervention, who rescued one of the twins before it was killed. It is gratifying to indicate that twins are now welcomed by both the converted and the unconverted Vhavenda. The Church has enlightened the indigenous people to the fact that twins are a gift and a blessing from God and not a curse, as was originally erroneously thought.

According to the Vhavenda culture, the disabled were not given any special treatment to improve or develop their skills. They were not commonly seen in public. Much has been accomplished by the Dutch Reformed Church in improving unbearable conditions of the disabled to help them to fend for themselves. The establishment of the School for the Handicapped contributed to the acceptance of the Gospel. Even the impaired felt inspired to praise the Lord in their own way. Job opportunities for the handicapped were created by that special school. Mission work has brought joy where there could have been perpetual misery.

CHAPTER THREE

TRADITIONAL BELIEFS, CUSTOMS AND PRACTICES OF THE VHAVENDA.

3.1. Introduction

In order to understand the context within which the missionaries worked, and to evaluate the role they played, it is necessary to study the traditional customs and beliefs of the Vhavenda. The way the missionaries understood (and sometimes misunderstood) these customs and beliefs made a large impact on the success of their work.

3.2. Nwali

The indigenous people south of the Sahara led a religious life long before the dawn of Christian religion. Traditional religion imbued their faith in such a way that their daily lives were controlled by religious practices and customs. It is therefore maintained that the Vhavenda, like the rest of the South African tribes, believed in the existence of a Supreme Being. The Vhavenda name for God is Nwali. The characteristic of Nwali is that he was not associated with a specific tribe, or regarded as a family god. The manifestation of Nwali in the minds of the Vhavenda, made an indelible mark in their hearts. They genuinely believed that

Nwali was the only universal God. This strong belief can be reinforced by the fact that they believed in him even before their migration to the Northern Transvaal.

Information can also be drawn from comparing the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the Mashona, who are domicile in Zimbabwe, and the Vhavenda. They share the same name for their Supreme Being. In Shona, the name for God is called Mwari, whereas in Venda it is called Nwali. Although the two nations are separated by the Limpopo river (Vhembe), which forms a boundary between the Northern Province in South Africa and Zimbabwe, it was regarded as an artificial colonial boundary which failed to stop their regular movements to and fro. Their historical and cultural links were not deterred, and consequently they still shared the same Supreme Being, Nwali/Mwari.

Historically the name Mwari for god, as referred to by the Mashona, dates back to time immemorial. It is also associated with religious observances in Western Zimbabwe. Ranger indicates that historical linguistics have suggested two origins for the word Mwari. Gutrie shows that the word, or its variants, has proto-Bantu usage, and dates back some 4000 years (Ranger 1974:6).

Mwari was ultimately recognised in the state religious system in Zimbabwe, as Ranger confirms when he states that the "Rozwi confederacy regarded the Mwari cult as a sort of state religious system, which was closely related to the Mambo rulers" (Ranger 1974:6).

The point of departure, therefore, is that the name Nwali/Mwari dates back to time immemorial. This historical fact implies that the Vhavenda did not regard Nwali or his cult as merely a relic of some far-fetched religion; to them, he was a Supreme Being. The Vhavenda also had another name for Nwali or the Supreme Being. He was also called Raluvhimba. To them the two names referred to the same God, whose attributes were one and the same. Van Rooy strongly supports this statement when he asserts:

> "The Venda refer to God as either Raluvhimba or Mwari ... But at present all Vendas when asked about it, state that Raluvhimba and Nwali is one and the same" (Van Rooy 1971:22).

The two names pose neither confusion nor conflict among the Vhavenda's firm belief in Nwali.

The Vhavenda had such a strong belief in Nwali that they believed that he was the only creator of mankind and the earth. This is the reason why, whenever they had to worship or give glory to Nwali as the Supreme Being, they were often inclined to refer to him as "Musika Vhathu" (Creator of mankind), which is ample proof that the universe was created out of nothing, or to bring to being something which did not exist before. This general belief of the Vhavenda: that the earth was created out of nothing, does not coincide with Junod's view point, for he

concludes that the natives did not understand the term "creation" out of nothing. He asserts:

> "Because according to the Africans they do not understand creation, as the idea of creation *ex nihilo* is not conveyed by the Native term, nor does it clearly exist in the Bantu mind ... Natives do not bother much about creation" (Junod 1927:209).

The general statement made by Junod, that the Africans do not understand creation out of nothing or *ex nihilo* is in direct conflict with the arguments advanced by Van Rooy, who argues that the Vhavenda did understand the word creator or creation out of nothing for it occurs frequently in the Venda Linguistic vocabulary. "There is however a more suitable term, Musiki, from the verb u sika ... The word Musiki (Creator) is used in that form in the accepted version of the Apostle Creed" (Van Rooy 1971:157). The argument proposed by Van Rooy reflects on the fact that the Africans did have a knowledge of creation out of nothing. There is no tribe in any part of Africa that is devoid of religion. People may not give adoration to God, but when they are in danger or face possible execution, they often express their fear and anxiety in the following terms: "Help me God"; or, "Save my soul". This concept of man's knowledge of God as the creator, distinguishes man from all other creatures. It is that which makes man a unique creature. It is unthinkable to consider the conclusion reached by Casalis, who worked amongst the Basotho for many years. His assertion is that the indigenous people never knew anything about God, "All the natives whom we

have questioned on the subject have assured us that it never entered their heads that the word earth and sky might be the work of an Invisible Being (Casalis 1896:228- 340). It is difficult to give credence to such arguments as advanced by Casalis for he drew conclusions on the basis of the Basothos` belief, without making a thorough research of the indigenous people as a whole.

The Vhavenda traditional religion has posited the Supreme Being as Nwali, the creator who presides over the collective community, who loves and cares for his creation. The Vhavenda believed in the universal Supreme Being who controls the whole cosmos. This assertion coincides with the assertion advanced by Idowu when he states:

> "Africa recognised only one God, the Supreme, Universal God. Even though she has a picture of him which is of various shades, calls him by various names and approaches him in various ways, he nevertheless remains one and the same God, the creator of all" (Idowu 1967:12).

The observation advanced by Idowu indicates that the Africans have a supreme God who is universally accepted. This idea is in line with the Vhavenda's cultural standards, for they regarded Nwali as superlatively great, unchanging and lastly, unsurpassable in his cosmic power.

The Vhavenda used to depend entirely on rain for their livelihood. Everyone survived by tilling their fields. The presence of rain also meant that there would be sufficient water for their livestock. Thus, rain was of great significance to the indigenous people, as there were no other means of making ends meet.

It was customary in times of drought for the Vhavenda to turn to Nwali in their search for rain. This would be done in accordance with the normal procedures. The Vhavenda were positively emphatic that, if they paid homage to Nwali for rain, their request would be acceded to. During the late nineteen twenties, Khosi (chief) Mphephu, once sent messengers to ask for rain from Modjadji, the queen rain maker, but without success. He had to revert back to Nwali, and had to send his son, Mbulaheni, to Mubvumela at Matombo hills in Zimbabwe. Nwali took vengeance on the Vhavenda and punished them with further severe droughts for consulting foreign powers (Modjadji) in their quest for rain, but eventually rain fell (Stayt 1931:233).

In support of Stayt's argument, Daneel says, "Mwari is primarily a God of fertility" (Daneel 1973:449). The Vhavenda, like their counterparts the Mashona, believed strongly that Nwali was the provider of rain, and was glorified to see to the fertility of the land. Nwali's attribute of rain making was a symbol of religious authority and power. This threatened other deities and also led to the destruction of political order of the Ndebele dynasty, which led Chief Mzilikazi to detract his faith from his Amandlozi and yield to the power of Nwali in his search for rain. To

support this argument, Bhebe says that "When faced by a drought, he first prayed for rain the Zulu way, it was only after these had failed that he would call upon Nwari priests to perform mitoro (rain-ceremonies) (Schoeffeleers & Nwanza 1978:289). Nwali's power pervaded deeply into the Ndebele faith, with the result that their reliance on their ancestors was obscured by Nwali's powerful intervention. According to Vhavenda accepted standard it would not be proper for an individual to dare approach Nwali in order to request for rain. That would have been regarded as an insult to the entire nation. The request for rain is made at national level, where both the community and the traditional leaders make a joint request. On making a request it is always the duty of the traditional leader to approach the priest (Tshifhe) which is well vested with skills of approaching Nwali (Schapera & Eiselen 1959:265). This in itself is clear indication that both family or clan ancestors have no power to control or cause the clouds to be saturated with rain. The Vhavenda believed that rain came from Nwali who is the begetter of everything. Nwali was vested with the power of security, for protecting his children from the enemies and cosmic disasters, such as storms and the outbreak of an epidemic. When the Mashona were at war with the Ndebele, the former resorted to consult Nwali for assistance, and this coincided with the arrival of the whites in Zimbabwe. It was ultimately concluded that Nwali was a great liberator for he rescued the Mashona from the oppression being inflicted by the Ndebeles over them (Ranger 1974:144).

According to the Vhavenda cultural understanding, Nwali is referred to as god of the sky, (Mudzimu wa makoleni or tadulu) unlike the family ancestors who are believed to be underground (Vhafhasi). Nwali's arrival was preceded by the sudden cracking of thunder up to the sky. The people would look up in the sky while the Vhavenda women would be ululating with joy, welcoming the arrival of Nwali. In 1917, a meteor, which burst during daytime, made such a thunderous noise along the Zoutpansberg mountain range, that this incident prompted the Vhavenda to associate it with the arrival of Nwali. Junod reinforces this statement when he observes:

> "This story of a spontaneous and collective act of adoration of a Bantu tribe towards its God is most curious, and I wonder if such a demonstration has ever taken place amongst Tsonga or Sotho" (Junod 1921:209 - 210).

Rev. Westphal of the Evangelical Lutheran Church who at that time was stationed at Khalavha, was an eyewitness of this incident (Stayt, 1931:231).

Westphal could have seized this golden opportunity to explain to the Vhavenda the mighty acts of the Supreme Being, who could reveal himself through natural phenomena. Schapera made use of this occurrence when he indicated that Raluvhimba (Nwali) was associated and connected with the astronomical and physical phenomena (Schapera & Eiselen 1959:265). Although the Vhavenda regarded Nwali as residing some what far away and was remote from his people,

in another version he was regarded in terms of a human grandfather, who was obliged to visit his grandchildren. This analogy of Nwali as grandfather is further endorsed by Van Rooy, when he made use of the Vhavenda proverb, which goes as follows: "Makhulu ndi tshiulu ri tamba ri tshi gonya" (Grandfather is an ant hill, we climb on it in play) (Van Rooy 1970). This proverb reveals one of the attributes of Nwali, which means that Nwali expressed his endless patience like a grandfather.

3.3. Nwali shrines

Nwali was accustomed to manifest himself in a unique way and in selected shrines, which could be either in groves, caves or under huge rocks in the different places around Venda. The best known shrine is at mount Makonde, which is situated in Eastern Thohoyandou. The actual location of Nwali Shrine has become a controversial issue amongst researchers.

Stayt indicates: "There is a cave at Luvhimbi where Raluvhimba went to manifest himself" (Stayt 1931:231). Bhebe, as quoted by Schoffleers and Mwanza, in support of Stayt, purports: "Luvhimbi is located in Vendaland, it has now ceased to exist." Schoffeleers and Mwanza (1972) argue that Nwali used to visit Ha-Luvhimba. These assertions might have emanated from the other name for Nwali, Raluvhimba. It must be contended that Nwali never visited Ha-Luvhimba,

but rather Mount Makonde, which is 7 km west of Ha-Luvhimba (Ralushai 1980:11).

The Nwali cult at Makonde is not situated far from the Evangelical Lutheran Mission station. There are no records in the annals of Mount Makonde history of an attempt made by Lutheran missionaries to search for the truth in this matter. Had such an attempt been made, it would have contributed to a better understanding of the Vhavenda belief in Musiki (creator).

The Nwali cult at Makonde was established by the Mbedzi group, which is correctly believed to have migrated, with its services of priesthood, from Matopo hills in Zimbabwe. This argument is asserted by Rennie, as quoted by Ranger, when he writes: "This early group was responsible for the Venda cult Raluvhimba the local equivalent of Nwali cult" (Ranger 1974:13).

Research has revealed that some of the Nwali sacrificial cults in Zimbabwe were administered by the Vhavenda, who were assisted by their cultural background, to render services as expected from a priest (Tshifhe). According to the Vhavenda traditional standards, a priest is a person officiating in sacrificial rites, either for Nwali or for ancestors. Cobbing goes on to say, "The first Njelele priests, Jenie and Pinga, were of the Mbedzi Venda ... There is significant evidence connecting the Matopo cult with Vendaland" (Cobbing 1977:72-73). It is worth noting that the Vhavenda, since time immemorial, had an original name

and not a borrowed or coined name for priest. The original name is "Tshifhe" whereas the other African tribes in South Africa refer to priest as ke Moprista from Sotho, and Umprista from Nguni.

At Mount Makonde, a man by the name of Magwabeni was the last priest (Tshifhe) to transmit the messages from Nwali to Chief Ravhura and ultimately to the Vhavenda as such. The official who approaches Nwali (God) was accorded great respect, and was referred to as priest, as he was not connected to family gods but to Nwali, who was in charge of the whole cosmos.

There were other sites or cults of Nwali, which he used to visit, such as Mudzivhadi, Madindini a Nwali and Donwa. All these were half-way stations, since the ultimate destination was Makonde. By cultural observance, the traditional leaders, in whose areas these cults were situated, and who where of the Singo clan, were not allowed to enter. Messages destined for their cults were transmitted through the priest of the Ngona clan, as they were the first immigrants to settle in Venda. Ralushai, in support of this, agrees that "this is not surprising for Donwa being historically a Ngona area, it was like other known Ngona sites where senior Singo chiefs could not dare enter" (Ralushai 1980:1). It was a taboo for a Singo chief to enter a shrine situated in a Ngona area, this practice was upheld for many years until the inception of the Gospel. There is now freedom of movement. The traditional leaders were not satisfied when their respected cult was not treated with the respect it deserved.

3.4. Ancestor veneration

It is necessary and important to give a brief explanation of the meaning of the word "ancestor". The Oxford Advanced Dictionary defines the word ancestor as, "any one of those people from whom one is descended especially one more remote than a grandparent." By implication, ancestors are people who form part of the genealogy of the family, or the family predecessors.

According to the Vhavenda cultural standards, the ancestors are those people who died at a mature age or as parents. The unmarried and the infants who died, could not be accorded the status of ancestry after death, as they had no offspring to minister to.

The ancestors are not on the same level as Nwali, or the Supreme Being, because the ancestors were people who lived, and after death, they were promoted, as assumed by the living, to a position of ancestry. The name used by the missionaries, Mudzimu for God, caused such a confusion and misunderstanding, with the result that the acceptance of the Gospel by the Vhavenda was deterred.

In support of this argument, Ralushai gives an illustration as he indicates:

> "the early missionaries working on Venda religious translation caused confusion by calling God Mudzimu while those working

> across the border of Zimbabwe used the tern Mwari (Shona for Mwari or Nwali) for God. Mudzimu means an ancestral spirit or person possessed by a spirit of his ancestor. Nwali is a Venda and Shona Supreme Being" (Ralushai 1980:11).

According to the Venda culture, the name Mudzimu is related to the ancestor. When the missionaries used the name Mudzimu for God, they took an uncalculated risk, as Jehovah is God and not an ancestor. According to the Vhavenda standards, the name Mudzimu refers to the living dead, who after death acquired the status of a family God. As a matter of fact, it is enhanced status that is acquired. The name Mudzimu is incompatible with Nwali (God), as the latter is universally accepted by the Vhavenda as their only god, not a family god (Mudzimu). The first missionaries who translated the Bible resorted to Mudzimu for the eternal God. As a result, we have "Yehovah ndi Mudzimu" (1 Kings 18:39) "Jehovah is God."

In support of this statement, Van Rooy purports that even Mudzimu (ancestor spirit for "god") must have been chosen under the influence of the Pedi term Modimo. Missionaries in Venda, Carl Beuster and Erdmann Schwellnus, used the Pedi Bible to do their mission work (Van Rooy 1971:31). The Venda Revision Committee of the Bible translation could not change the word Mudzimu for Nwali, for it would have caused further confusion and criticism by the present generation, as the word Mudzimu had been in use for a long time. The first

Biblical commandment says, "Thou shall have no other gods before me" (Ndi songo u vhona u na midzimi I sili"). According to the Vhavenda cultural standard, if this commandment was interpreted literally, it gave them credence not to bow down to foreign gods, but to their own god (Nwali). This is exactly what the Vhavenda were doing, for they were paying allegiance to their only God, Nwali. Although the Vhavenda venerated their own family gods "Midzimu", Nwali was the universal Supreme Being, accepted by all traditional leaders in Venda and their subjects.

In Venda Bibles "Mudzimu" (God) is written with an initial capital letter, referring to Yehovah, and "midzimu" (gods) is written with a small letter "m", which refers to the other gods or ancestors. The problem or short comings of such a distinction is that capital letters could be noticed when reading but is indistinguishable in spoken terms. Rev. Giessekke, who was born in Venda and became a renowned figure in the Tshivenda language, confirms that mudzimu is not an appropriate word referring to God. "Originally Mudzimu means 'ancestor'. An old person can be referred to as a Mudzimu. Nwali or Raluvhimba could be considered as the most appropriate names referring to God" (Giessekke 1970:84). Had the first missionaries resorted to the use of Nwali for God, the acceptance of the Gospel could have been facilitated, as the misunderstanding that arose from the use of an ambiguous word, Mudzimu, could have been cleared. In Venda religious circles, however, Mudzimu was designed to ancestors and Nwali to the Supreme Being. The Vhavenda would have been

more comfortable, had the word Mudzimu been used to refer to the ancestors but not to Jehovah. Van Rooy is more accurate when he says that Dr Schwellnus, the Venda translator, was influenced by Sotho when the Sotho Bible was translated into Venda. Even Mudzimu ("ancestor spirits" for God) must have been chosen under the influence of the Pedi term Modimo" (Van Rooy 1970:31).

3.5. Intermediatory agents.

The Vhavenda believed that their dead continued to play an important role in parenthood, though in another world and in a different fashion, and therefore they were to be consulted by their offspring, who were still in the world of the living, by way of veneration.

The ancestors, as members of the departed living, were not worshipped in the strict sense of the word, but were venerated; or, due respect was accorded to them through living members of their family. In the Oxford English Dictionary, worship is defined as, "Reverence and respect paid to God. Veneration regards much respect, they venerate the old man's memory." The word veneration implies that respect is accorded to the elders by the young ones. This point of view is further reinforced by Idowu, who firmly believes:

> "our conclusion is that while technically Africans do not put their ancestors on the same footing with the deity or divinities, there is no doubt that the ancestors received veneration that may become so

intense as to approach worship or even become worship" (Idowu 1973:186).

By way of implication, worship is conducted with the strictest reverence, which is accorded to God, but the ancestors are given their due respect. This argument is compatible with the assertion advanced by Theron who asserts that "the ancestors are dependent on God for performing their functions, but they also possess enough power to have a direct influence on the lives of human beings" (Theron 1996:32). The argument advanced by Theron, clearly indicates that the ancestors are lower than God, thus they are not worshipped but venerated. The process between the living and the ancestors is somewhat reciprocally related and creates a recycling function. The living please the ancestors by offering sacrifices in order to give a thanksgiving or to make a request for needs. The ancestors in turn send blessings to the living.

According to the Vhavenda culture, an individual has no right to approach the family ancestors without the knowledge and assistance of members of the family. The ancestors could be approached when there is need in the family, or a crisis, or when it had been firmly established that a married woman in the family is barren. In most cases the head of the family or aunt, (Makhadzi) who had been trained to take charge of such matters, is endowed to take sacrificial responsibility of approaching the ancestors.

Although there are different ceremonial sacrificial offerings, the procedure remains the same. There is the sacrificial ceremony called "the biting (uluma) ceremony", which, in most cases, is conducted before the first fruits and green vegetables are eaten. In Venda circles, a ceremonial sacrifice should be offered to the ancestors, who usher in the celebration of the first fruits. On this occasion, the priest/priestess takes charge of the necessary procedure. The ceremony is treated in a well dignified manner.

The priestess addresses the living dead as if she were speaking to living human beings. She would say: "I offer you all of you, and I deprive none amongst you. What remains on the ground belongs to me and the young ones." Lastly, she offers to the unknown one (Stayt 1931:255). St Paul also uses, the expression "the unknown God'. Perverted as the religion of Athens might have been, beyond all reasonable doubt, he observed that they were very religious and that the one who they did not know was the Supreme Being. In all fairness, the name of Nwali is never mentioned in family circles during these offerings.

The sacrificial ceremonies are regarded as of great significance in Venda circles, more specially the shedding of blood from sacrificial animals, either goats or bullocks. The shedding of blood in terms of sacrificial offering has a long standing history in African religion, as it has in Judaism.

The main work of the blood was accomplished by Jesus, when his blood was shed on the cross, and the whole cosmos was reconciled with God. In both Judaism, and Christianity, as in African religions, blood is of great importance during sacrificial offerings. Billy Graham endorses this arguments when he says, "Judaism and Christianity have been called bloody religions" (Graham 1969:20).

The missionaries should have made use of the traditional sacrificial rites of the shedding of blood, as reinterpreted either as a peace offering, or in terms of reconciliation, in preparation for transformation. The missionaries could have portrayed Jesus as the last, and complete sacrificial lamb, who died for the whole world. The new converts were debarred from venerating their ancestors and as a result, they lived in two worlds, for they continued to venerate their ancestors in secret. Van Rooy supports this argument when he concludes that "Christianity is the fulfilment of all religions" (Van Rooy 1985:7). This implies that Christianity should not destroy or supplant, but rather complete what is lacking in other religions, like providing a roof for a building that has existed for a long time without one.

Missionaries should not have concluded that all that which was practised by the indigenous people was superstition and to be rejected without first being evaluated objectively.

During the process of sacrificial offering, the objects and the articles which belonged to the departed ones are also brought out as part of the process, as these are believed to represent the living dead. Men were represented by spears, (Mapfumo) while women were represented by copper rings (Malembe). These were then called by the relevant individual names of the living dead. The copper rings (Malembe) were usually worn around the necks by women, as a token of remembrance of the parent ancestors. This practice is in agreement with the assertion made by Stayt:

> " All old objects belonging to the ancestors are regarded by the descendants with a certain feeling of reverence and awe, particularly the old Venda artefacts which, since the European occupation, are no longer made" (Stayt 1931:248).

The objects are regarded as having the personality of the original owners who possessed them.

When the Portuguese navigators arrived in West Africa, they were alarmed to see the indigenous people wearing shells and small horns around their necks. In a comparative light, the Portuguese themselves were donned in medallions, crucifixes and images of saints, duly blessed by their priest (Willoughby 1928:313 - 314). A Muvenda found no difference between the Portuguese who wore crucifixes and medallions, and Vhavenda (women) who wore malembe. The

Vhavenda would logically conclude that both were inherited from their departed ones.

The sweet beer (Mpambo) was poured on the ground as an act of giving to the ancestors. It was believed that the ancestors continued to exist underground, and not up in the sky (Tadulu or Heaven). Whereas, according to the Gospel, God is believed to be in heaven (Tadulu in the sky). Moila asserts that, from beneath the ground, the dead go to live in heaven (Legodimong) and thus they attain supernatural power (Moila 1987:76) The controversial issue regarding the exact location of heaven should have been defined in much more detail. According to Venda context, it is only Nwali who is supposed to be up in the sky, not the ancestors. The concept of the living-dead being underground is clearly visible during the sacrificial offering, for instance if an individual had participated in foreign customs, such as circumcision (Murundu). It is quite common to hear old people say: Vhafhasi vha dori mini vha tshi vhona muthu o raloho zwitunguloni (what will those below ground say when they see such a person participating in a religious ceremony).

The term "Vhafhasi" (those under the ground) helps to reinforce the idea that after a burial, ancestors are said to remain under ground, while communicating from time to time with their living descendants. After the priestess has sipped some beer (Mpambo), she passes the thungu (chalice) to the next person. After all those present had drunk, there would be shouts of joy accompanied by

traditional dancing. If the sacrificial ceremony was conducted at community level by the traditional leader, this could open a way for the commoners to participate in their family offerings. Van Warmelo observes: "whosoever is a commoner, let him now do what is meet in his own kraal" (i.e. You commoners may now sacrifice to your own ancestors) (Van Warmelo 1940:162). This is a clear demonstration that the traditional leader always took a leading role in all matters that affected his area of abode. Schapera points out that the chief was the head of the tribe as well as the priest and the living representative of his tribe (Schapera & Eiselen 1959). The Vhavenda regarded the traditional leader as vested with religious awe. He was the point of contact between his tribe and the ancestors. As a result, he commanded high respect from a cultural point of view. According to the Venda culture, the traditional leader is a priest of his tribe, but often delegated his sister (Makhadzi) to act as priestess in religious matters.

The Vhavenda regarded the sacrificial ceremony as a great and special occasion for it was a day of rejoicing. It also became an occasion during which a reunion was made with the relatives, who come from far and near. The sacrificial day created an excellent opportunity, as there was an atmosphere of reverence, which could have opened the way for the Gospel to be propagated, in an orderly way as people would be well assembled. When father Carmichael, who was stationed in Lesotho, found the Basotho celebrating their thanksgiving offering called "Pitiki", he joined them in their dancing without hesitating. When everything was over, he said "I have been informed about why you are feasting here this

morning ... let us now kneel down and pray to God for his mercies" (Maboee 1982:31). Maboee also indicates: "By that simple act of understanding the Basotho ways of doing things, he was able to convert the entire village to Christian faith" (Maboee 1982:31). Father Michael transformed the Basotho's sacrificial offering, from its emphasis on ancestors to God the Almighty without a word of condemnation for what they were doing. As Jesus said "Think not that I came to destroy the law, or the prophets: I have not come to destroy, but to fulfil (Matthew 5:17).

The sacrificial celebrations of the Vhavenda could become part of the communal significance, which takes place during the festival meal, and develop the meal into a religious and culinary event. It could then become an ideal setting for the Gospel to be interwoven into the local culture of the indigenous people.

3.6. Christ as Brother Ancestor

The Adamic ancestry of Jesus could have been portrayed to the indigenous people in such a manner that He could be accepted as one of their ancestors. Descendants of Jesus should have been portrayed to the indigenous people's consanguineous bond, which existed between the living dead and the living. From the human historical background he accomplished the plenitude of his brotherhood through incarnation, and born by the Blessed Virgin Mary. His human trace reached its zenith during his death and exaltation.

The Adamic ancestry strengthens the human bond between him and the indigenous people. Jesus Christ is the base of our supernatural life; the Holy Scripture further regards him as the second Adam. "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (I Cor 15:22).

Jesus is regarded as a humanly brother, who once lived in Israel and expressed compassion towards all people. He also had the amazing capacity to heal bodily ailments. The healing power has an important ancestral quality in African traditional beliefs (Nyamiti 1984:55).

The Vhavenda cultural belief is that healing emanates from supernatural powers received from the Supreme Being.

According to the Vhavenda tradition, it is a fact that through death a person acquires supernatural status, which brings one closer to God. On his death, Jesus joined the company of the dead. St Paul makes an appropriate explanation, when he remarks that Jesus descended to the lower regions of the earth. By implication, he was in the midst of the dead ancestors. On the same note, Paul mentioned his ascending and exaltation. This in itself demonstrates His superiority over the ancestors (Eph 9-10).

Had the missionaries introduced Jesus as a brother and a hero ancestor, or portrayed him as the pro-Ancestor (i.e. ancestor who is ready to assist whenever help is needed), the indigenous people would have received Him with joy and adoration. Jesus would further have been the centre of Christology, for he is himself God incarnate. His loving care and healing ministry could be well illustrated through his resurrection from the dead.

According to the Vhavenda notion, the ancestors, as the living dead, are considered to be mediators. A significant consideration is that it is believed that they love and still know the living. Daneel reinforces this argument when he explains: "in the Motonjeni context Christ is regarded as a great European Mhondoro ... who like Chaminuka, stands as Mediator at the apex of the ancestral hierarchy" (Daneel 1970:37). Although Christ is compared to the ancestry at the Chaminuka (Shona), he is still regarded as being elevated above all the ancestors. Van Rooy holds a different opinion in terms of considering Christ in relation to the ancestors. His assertion is that Africans cannot accept Christ alongside the ancestors' spirits for it becomes a question of either him or them (Van Rooy 1970:87). It should be noted that if Christ were accepted as a Prime Brother ancestor, ultimately he would be rated above, and supersede the ancestors, and demonstrate his power of mediation between God and the people. Moila, in disagreement with Van Rooy, argues: "Thus the Pedi perceive Christ as the prime ancestor, he is not God" (Moila 1981:85). Therefore, generally, the indigenous people could not have had a problem in accepting

Christ as one of their brother ancestors. Nürnberger, as quoted by Moila, demonstrates, by implication, that Christ is above all ancestors as depicted in the Bible: "But the prime ancestor overshadowing and enabling all others was Jesus, who was revealed in the Bible narratives" (Moila 1987:85). Jesus Christ's ancestorship is mediatory and consequently priestly and redemptive" (Nyamiti 1984:39). Jesus' mediation and his brotherhood to mankind enables him to be instrumental to his ancestral powers. Nyamiti is in total agreement with Maboee, who says that the Basotho accept Christ as a mediator who supersedes the Bodimo "ancestors" (Maboee 1982:26-27).

Jesus, by his resurrection from the dead, is regarded as an active Brother Ancestor. He is active in the sense that he intercedes for the descendants because of his relationship, and accessibility to God. Through the Logos, we are incorporated in his divine descendancy. Christ was without sin. He was unblemished, a perfect man who gave his life for mankind. With all these qualities, the local people would have liked the idea of being associated with such an ancestor, who bridged the enmity between God and humanity.

Although Gelfand asserts that, "some Mashona would classify Jesus Christ, the spirit of the white man, as another Mhondoro like Chaminuka" (Gelfand 1977:2), in presenting Christ, an attempt should have been made to avoid a term which the indigenous people could have understood in a particular context, and thus regarded Him as a prophet of the whites. On the contrary, he went to Egypt for

security reasons during his early childhood. This reinforces the notion that he is for all nations (Milingo 1984:76). The indigenous people do believe that Jesus fulfils the role of the Supreme Ancestor for all humanity.

After the resurrection, Jesus acquired eldership over all the ancestors. He attained an eternal victory over his enemies. Milingo maintains: "the ancestors are cultured and well mannered and thus they will give way for Jesus to take over the living members of the tribes" (Milingo 1984:87). With this argument, the indigenous people would accept Christ as their powerful hero ancestor, who is not restricted by the laws of mortality.

It is most unfortunate that the missionaries introduced the Gospel as a new, authentic religion. Christianity should have been the crown of all religions, including the African traditional religions. Jesus should have been presented as the ultimate ancestor. Willoughby indicates that Europeans were not obliged to become Asiatic in order that they might become Christians (Willoughby 1928:414). Similarly, the indigenous people could have accepted Christ as Lord of their lives without recasting themselves in an European mould. In support of this argument, Burden quotes Mosala as saying, "Black Theology is not an attempt to localise Christ in a black situation but … the Venda and American may say: 'This man Jesus is bone of my bone: He speaks in my own accent of this that are true to me' …" (Burden 1991:26). The missionaries, who brought the Gospel, concluded that the western cultural approach was the ideal vehicle to

take Christianity to the indigenous people, thus missing the point that God could interact with the indigenous people in their given culture. This wise and tactful move would have saved Christianity the stigma of foreignness.

The Vhavenda Christians would have interpreted the Bible in the manner of their own experience as their cultures and customs were transformed by the Gospel, without lowering Christian principles. The Vhavenda Christians could then deny those cultures that caused a conflict in the acceptance of the Gospel. As argued in this thesis, the contextualisation of the indigenous people's culture is an inevitable factor for the facilitation of the acceptance of the Christian religion.

3.7. Belief in spirits and supernatural power.

The Vhavenda, like any other indigenous people South of the Sahara, have a strong belief in spiritual beings. As a result, the spiritual world remains a focal point of their religious beliefs. The spirits are regarded as those celestial beings that remain between the living and the living dead.

It is not assumed to be an automatic exaltation for every person who dies to become a spiritual being. It is firmly believed that arrangements had to be made, through the ancestral practices or rites, before one could become a spiritual being, who was accepted in the spiritual realm. The consecratory ceremony is

conducted, whereby the deceased is represented, in the case of a man by a spear, and in the case of a woman by "malembe" (miniature hoe).

A problem usually occurs when a departed one does not receive appropriate funeral rites. The Vhavenda usually do all in their power to bring home a corpse of a family member who might have died away from home, in order to ensure that the deceased are buried among their own people.

Ravele reinforces this view when he asserts, "in most cases a Muvenda who dies in an urban area has his remains brought home, and if such attempts fail a sheep is slaughtered and its head is buried to designate the grave as his or hers" (Ravele1980:30). The unreal grave is usually meant to appease the spirit of the dead not to be troublesome to the next of kin. The author's great grandfather, Masakona Netshirondoni (Ndou), who was buried at Songozwi (Hangklip, near Louis Trichardt) on the 14th July 1944, had his remains reburied at the family grave (yard) of Tshirondoni, at Tshakhuma in 1966.

The burial of the deceased next to relatives, is not only practised by the Vhavenda tribe; it is an accepted African practice, that the dead should be accorded an appropriate funeral, otherwise things may not go well.

Don Jacobs reinforces this view when he indicates: "the U.S.A. government is now expected to pay the R10.000-00 costs for the exhumation of the Zambian's

body and fly it back to Livingstone in Zambia, where relatives will be able to claim it for a tribal burial" (Jacobs 1989:14). Bones of the dead are to be transferred to a place which may be considered to be an appropriate place for family graves; the most important factor being the communication between the living dead and the living offspring.

The burial custom of the Vhavenda is somewhat similar to that of the Israelites, as both nations are of the opinion that family graves are of great significance. Jacob commanded his sons to bury him with his fathers in the field of Ephron (Genesis 49:29-30), and also Joseph, whose bones were carried from Egypt to the promised land (Genesis 50:23-25). Mphophi (Personal Interview: 04/07/1989) stated: "the most significant part of the deceased was not the corpse in flesh form, but the bones, which must be well looked after, because in them it is believed there is everlasting life." It is a very strong Venda belief that an ancestral spirit comes forth from the bones.

3.8. Form of manifestation.

The living dead adopt various means by which they communicate with the living.

3.8.1 Dreams

The Vhavenda regard dreams as a particular means for the living dead to communicate with their offspring, who are in the land of the living. It would be fruitless and in vain to discourage the indigenous people from dreams. Dreams are some times so complicated that the traditional healer had to be approached to unravel the secrets of the meaning of such dreams. Richard Kgopolong, a Staunch Member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, was instructed in a dream by his late father to build a church (Edifice). He built it according to the layout in his dream (Personal interview: 9/2/1976). Sundkler reinforced this statement when he asserted that "the importance attached to dreams, both amongst the Zulu Christians and Haya Christians, is great (Sundkler 1961:267). By implication, it is quite clear that African Christians cannot totally rule out the impact that dreams make on their daily lives, because the dreams have made indelible impressions on their minds.

3.8.2. Disasters

The Vhavenda believe that the ancestors can cause ruinous effects on the health of an individual, and can bring an extreme widespread calamity to a clan or a tribal area. The restoration of the normal state of affairs is believed only to be made possible by the propitiation to the angry ancestral spirits.

It is the belief of the indigenous people that homage must be paid to the ancestors, as the indigenous people are convinced that death does not effect any change in the character of the departed parent. This view is reinforced by Willoughby when he indicates: "Their characters have not been changed by death, they are as prone to jealousy as they ever were" (Willoughby 1928:89). By implication, the ancestral spirits feel offended when their integrity is undermined, or if ancestral spirits of junior status receive preference over their seniors. As a result, they become jealous.

The Vhavenda had great fear of serving the God (Mudzimu), who was introduced to them by the missionaries. The indigenous people did not want to adhere, or worship the God of the Gospel, because they had their own family ancestral spirits who would bring disaster or calamities to their families, either through ill health or through some similar misfortune. The Vhavenda were of the opinion that if the ancestors were well treated they would take their stand as vigilant protectors against the ill omens.

In Exodus 20:3 God speaks of being "a jealous God". This does not indicate that he is envious. He insists on being recognised above the ancestors. Had the missionaries made it clear that the Supreme Being was more jealous when the ancestral spirits were given more affection and honour than he, this would have helped the Vhavenda to accept the authority of God as inevitable.

3.8.3. Possession

It does happen that the living dead may reveal themselves through a dead spirit, who could manifest itself in a person, through whom messages or instructions are imparted to the specific family or clan. A person who is possessed by such a spirit is always feared, regarded as conciliatory in his or her action, and becomes honoured by the family for he/she has acquired power from the ancestors.

When a person is possessed by the ancestral spirits in the case of a woman, the husband has to address her as a mother-in-law, (Vho Makhulu). According to the Vhavenda culture, the possessed wife's status rises above that of the husband. Consequently, she must be accorded due respect by the husband, who cannot treat her harshly for whoever adopts unbecoming behaviour towards her may receive punitive punishment from the ancestors.

According to the Vhavenda concept of the life hereafter, the spirits of the living dead become both spiritual and personal. The two are bound together by family ties. The living dead are believed to be well acquainted with the activities of the living offspring. Berglund asserts that the Zulu accept the spirits more intimately together with the living, sharing the good and the bad (Berglund 1976:198). By implication, the spirits are regarded as parents who look after the welfare of their children. This bondage makes a mutual understanding of interdependence, the two rely on each other. This interdependence would have made it very difficult for

the missionaries to cause a rift between the family ancestors and their surviving children.

The possessed person is a human oracle, through whom the ancestral spirits communicate with the living members of the family. It is firmly believed by the Vhavenda, that when a person is possessed, it is because of the indwelling of a foreign person, the spirit who is beyond the control of the person possessed. The possessed, who is the normal spirit, is submerged under the instruction of the new spirit, who takes control of the whole person, and is then a medium for communication. Van Rheenen, in support of this argument, asserts that, "in the ancient time both Greek and Roman gods spoke to the people through Mediums" (Van Rheenen 1991:158).

When one is possessed by a ancestral spirit, the indigenous people have the tendency of consulting a traditional healer, who must make it clear to the family whose ancestor may be causing such a concern. The aim is to identify the ancestor, so that the ancestor may be appeased. The outcome of the findings may indicate that the ancestors are offended by being neglected or because of the deviation from the accepted Vhavenda cultural norms.

In Venda circles, a person possessed may be regarded as having "Malombo", which is an ancestral peripheral cult, where music plays a substantial part. Blacking supports this statement when he indicates:

> "By common consent, the two most powerful affecting musical experiences in traditional Venda society were provided by the institutions of Ngoma dza Midzimu and Tshikona. Both were inconceivable without music and dance (Blacking 1985:67).

Although music plays a significant role in the Malombo dance, it does not precipitate the state of possession, but encourages the possessed to dance faster.

It is of great concern to the author to indicate that in most cases, if not all, the Vhavenda possessed medium, speaks in the Kalanga (Shona) language which is spoken in Zimbabwe. The conversation is not very smooth nor clear, because most of the present Vhavenda do not have sufficient knowledge of the Kalanga language. Ralushai asserts that "all my informants are convinced that possessed people do not speak Venda but Kalanga, one of the dialects of the Shona language of Zimbabwe" (Ralushai 1980:5). Since the Vhavenda, who are possessed speak a different language, indicates that the Malombo spirit possession has its origin in a foreign cult, which the Vhavenda adopted from other non-Venda tribes. Had the missionaries researched this cult, the Vhavenda could have forsaken this "Venda adopted Shona version of Malombo", and also the Manzhosi cult from Zimbabwe and Ndau from Mozambique respectively (Ralushai 1986:2). The Malombo cult in central areas of Mozambique's borders adopted the Malombo cult from their neighbours. This argument is supported by

Stayt when he indicates that "the phenomenon of possession was rare among the Vhavenda until about 1914" (Stayt 1931:302).

The area of Mutele is situated in Venda, and shares borders with Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Children in Venda were forbidden to visit Mutele by their parents for the fear of being possessed, as the Malombo cult was commonly practised in the area. The Vhavenda proverb is still expressed today, which says, "Ha-Mutele a ku-endi nwana" (a child should not visit Mutele). The main fear was that a child would pick up doctored objects (Zwigwasha) and be possessed with the alien spirits (non-kin). The spiritual possession (the Malombo) was, in most cases, not a cult that was traditional to Vhavenda religious practices. In some instances, the people who were spirit possessed spoke in Zulu, a language that is quite uncommon in Venda circles. Van Warmelo supports this view when he indicates: "There are others (possessed by different spirits) who say 'give me a Zulu cloth and they speak in Zulu' ..." (Van Warmelo 1940:144). It could thus be clearly indicated that most of the spirits of the Malombo cult are dissociated from the Vhavenda, as they are foreign and vague in appearance, and because they are inherited from neighbouring tribes. Stayt further made mention of Zwidadzhane, the spirits that were adopted from the Basotho, which resemble creatures, though credited with human reasoning, but they do not appear in a complete human form (Stayt 1931:238). From a historical point of view, Zwidadzhane spirits are not part of Venda culture. The Shangaans regard such spirits as Zombies, people who have been killed and then made alive to serve the witches.

The early missionaries were active during a period in which foreign spiritual cults were practised, and they were convinced that these cults were the religious beliefs of the Vhavenda. Missionaries could have concluded that the indigenous cultures were identical to each other, and inherently different and in conflict with the principles of the Gospel. It should be noted that it was difficult to propitiate the needs of these foreign spirits, as the Vhavenda could not trace their lineage.

3.9. Traditional healer

The Vhavenda regarded a traditional healer, or medicine man or woman, as a religious person whose main purpose was to find out the needs of the spiritual ancestors were and what was expected of the living towards the departed parents. Traditional healers could be regarded as technicians, for their findings and interpretations became part of their profession. Their findings and conclusions revealed the beliefs in the Vhavenda traditional culture. They could also find out what had angered the ancestors. Some were regarded as diagnosticians and could prescribe the medicines which could cure diseases.

Parrinder regards the diviner as a specialist who seeks to diagnose diseases or to discover the solutions to problems, by means of inspiration or manipulation of objects through various techniques (Parrinder 1962:103). Sithuga (Personal Interview), who is a traditional healer, indicated that, before starting medical

activities, one had to be possessed by the power entrusted by the ancestors in order to have knowledge of the diseases. The Vhavenda are convinced that the traditional healers are close to the ancestors, from whom they get wisdom and guidance.

Any sickness, which is caused by neglect of the ancestors, is healed or cured through means of rituals of reconciliation and reparation. Sickness caused by the evil ones could be smelled out. Culprits could be identified in this manner. Stayt, in support of this view, asserts that "the Ba-Venda attribute nearly all diseases either to the evil influence of the ancestral spirits or to witchcraft" (Stayt 1931:267). By implication, Vhavenda social welfare, religion and health are intertwined, and are inseparable, unlike in western civilisation. The ancestors are regarded as protecting the family welfare, including health, as perceived by the indigenous people.

According to Vhavenda culture, the traditional healer (nanga or maine), is not a seer (mungome). The seers are regarded as having no social status unlike the traditional healers. The seers are regarded as diviners in Venda circles and there are very few in Venda. They are more common amongst the Shangaans. In most cases, their art of smelling out evil ones or the guilty party is influenced by the group that requires information. It was common practice of the Vhavenda to consult the seers (mingome) immediately after the dead had been buried, in order to establish the cause of death, and who the responsible people were. That

in itself was contrary to the Batsonga belief, for the latter consult the seer before the sick died, in order to identify the culprit, and to receive instructions on how to save or cure the sick person. The practice of seers (Mingome) was rarely found amongst the Vhavenda. The latter visited the Batsonga seer for consultation. This practice could easily have been eradicated by the missionaries in Venda, as the practice was not inherent to Vhavenda culture, being an influence from the Batsonga.

According to the Vhavenda belief and understanding, the traditional healer's main function was to cure diseases. Unfortunately Stayt confuses the traditional healers (nanga or maine) with the seers (mingome) as one and the same, although the latter specialised in reconciliation and disclosure of the person who was responsible for either murder or other evil actions committed in a family (Stayt 1931:263). Traditional healers dealt with cases of delirium and insanity, dentistry, leprosy and also with the fertilising of seeds for better harvests, if requested by the traditional leader of the community. The Vhavenda have a proverb that says, "Vhukololo avhu ambuwi hu ambuwa vhunanga" (Royalty does not cross the river but the traditional healer can). That means that the traditional healer can practice his medical skills anywhere, but the person from the royal family, cannot be expected to be accorded royal status in a foreign community. That in itself is a clear indication that traditional healers were highly respected, irrespective of where they were, and not particularly at their place of abode.

Rev. Nyathela (Personal Interview 12/8/1999) of the Uniting Reformed Church, indicated that during his house visits he came into contact with a female traditional healer, Tshamaano Madzivhandila of Balanganani on 12 January 1963. At first she was reluctant to welcome him, as she made it clear to him that her homestead was the throne of Satan, as named the by preachers. After some counselling and persuasion, the preacher was allowed to say prayers. Her daughter and son-in-law, Thomas Makhuvhela (Personal Interview 16/02/1997), from Lukau, confirmed that the traditional healer was consulted by Christians and non-Christians, and that her home was regarded as a clinic by people who came from far and near who sought help.

Tshamaano Madzivhandila, the traditional healer, was ultimately baptised by the Rev. Theodore Dau on her sick bed at Donald Frazer Hospital. Her funeral service was conducted by three Ministers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. J.A.M. Silimela, the then inspector of schools, spoke on behalf of the patients. In his consolation address, he unreservedly mentioned that Tshaamano was mourned for by many of her patients, particularly the barren women whom she assisted. In consulting (u tungula) her patients, the traditional healer, Tshaamano never used bones (Dice) for divine divination to interpret illnesses, but only sprinkled snuff for the divination of illnesses and treatments.

The term "witch-doctor", as was commonly used by the missionaries for traditional healers, caused repugnance for the acceptance of the Gospel. Van

Warmelo, a renowned ethnologist in the Vhavenda culture, asserts that "u zwifha sa nanga" (He tells lies like a witch-doctor) (Van Warmelo 1937:207). This was a derogatory remark made by Van Warmelo, when he asserted that witch-doctors could not be depended upon. In Swazi conservative society there are leading specialist witch doctors in black-white milieu who are considered criminals (witches) (Kuper 1947:9). Missionaries should have resorted to the imposition of hands on the sick and inviting the Holy Spirit to do the healing. All these actions and efforts made by ministers of religion were fulfilling the work of acculturation in the Vhavenda belief of healing. Milingo maintains, "Healing means the taking away from a person a disturbance in life, which acts as a deprivation of self-fulfilment and which is considered an unwanted parasite" (Milingo:1984:24). This argument, advanced by Milingo, could be aligned to the faith healer, who could also be regarded as a professional specialist.

There is no doubt that traditional healers play a very significant role in Vhaveda circles, and are part of their religious beliefs, practices and social welfare. No wonder respect for traditional healers, surpasses the respect for a person from a royal family. The traditional leader of the community accords the traditional healer due respect, while the status of the healer is not above that of a traditional leader, because the latter's position is both political and religious.

3.10. Witchcraft

The word witch/wizard (muloi), represents anti-social beings who practice witchcraft. Their behaviour is not acknowledged by the Vhavenda accepted living standards. It is considered to be disruptive to the normal life of humans and of the family as a whole. There are instances where illness could emanate from broken relationships with family ancestors, with whom reconciliation could still be sought. Illness which could be caused by the evil one, is fatal because its main purpose is to kill a person. There are epidemic diseases such as measles, which are attributed to nature and not associated with the evil one, but are a natural phenomena of the cosmos. Afflictions caused by the witches were detected by the traditional healers, who could prescribe preventive measures.

The belief in witches in the Vhavenda circles cannot be ignored. Stayt, in support of this statement, says, "The implicit belief of the average Muvenda in the reality and power of the muloi (witch) is amazing" (Stayt 1931:275). The indigenous people believe that witches have impulsive forces to bring sickness to other people through their secret knowledge of poisonous medicine, or this could be attributed to the help they receive from witchcraft or an evil spirit.

Witchcraft, could be regarded as involuntary and the person practising it may be doing so involuntarily, or have been compelled thereto by the evil spirits of one's ancestors., It is quite common in the Vhavenda practice that if such a person

were accused of witchcraft, the person might say innocently, "Ndi mimuya or ndi vhadzimu" (It is the spirits, or ancestors). Stayt reinforces this statement when he asserts that the witches could consciously or subconsciously practice magic over lives of people (Stayt 1931:273). Boardillion regards witchcraft as a hereditary phenomenon, which could be inherited from parents, and witches enjoy satisfaction in practising witchcraft as the normal person enjoys doing the good things (Boardillion 1991:178).

The belief in witchcraft is so engraved in the minds of the indigenous people with the result that it creates fear in their daily lives. Mahamba supported this opinion when he reports:

> "as the drums were beaten to celebrate victory over apartheid, it was important to note that drums were used and not a western symphony orchestra. The belief in witchcraft also sets itself free thus resulting in the burning of many people" (Mahamba:1994:2).

In support of Mahamba's statement, the practice and belief in witchcraft precipitated violence in most areas, with Venda as no exception. Venda was also greatly affected. Neluvhalani confirms that, "in Venda, in the month of January to March 1990 alone no fewer than 50 people accused of witchcraft were burned to death in a gruesome manner" (Neluvhalani:1992:8).

Although churches tried all they could to take a stand against this horrifying situation, it is regrettable to know that some of the so-called ministers of religion were singing the same song as witch-sniffers. In confirmation to this fact, the commission of inquiry into witchcraft reflects:

> "the young man instead procured a so-called prophet or minister of religion ... the prophet named three future victims of the dark forces which according to him were working in the village" (Commission 1996:223).

It is indeed a great disappointment for a minister of religion to have steeped so low as to align himself with those who are still probing in the darkness. The commission, in its findings, further indicated that an African minister of religion at Ben Farm in the Lulekani district of Phalaborwa alleged to have ordered medicine from Durban so that his church membership could increase. This was probably done after the minister started suspecting certain witches of causing his church to have a decline in its membership (Commission 1996:24). By Christian principles, the church could have been seen as propagating the Gospel, which would have been regarded as the Christian doctrine, with an effective antidote for belief in witchcraft.

Devout congregants are embarrassed when ministers of religion are seen collaborating or supporting witchcraft ideas and practices. The government of the Northern Province was kept on its toes as far as that matter was concerned. At

the Evangelical Lutheran Church Rally, held at Botlokwa, the Minister of the Executive Council (M.E.C.) for safety and security, indicated: "We believe that the church has a special role in combating these senseless witchcraft killings and violence (Nthai 1996:4).

The community seems to shun those who are suspected of practising witchcraft, and in most cases people decide to distance themselves from suspects and are even afraid to touch their possessions. Maibelo affirms this argument: "The practitioners of the craft are feared and held at arms length as enemies of the society, who should be dead and not alive" (Maibelo 1989:86). Ha-Ravele (Personal Interview: 24/07/1989) indicated that Khosi Sinthumule the 1st had resolved, with the support of his tribe, to send any one suspected of practising witchcraft to a secluded area called Muraleni. Even today, the community in that area still bears the stigma of practising witchcraft.

In most cases, the witch-sniffers do not do witch-hunting on a general basis, or at random. There are certain characteristics which they associate with witchcraft. A person is associated with witchcraft when it is emanated from prosperity or family conflicts. Omoyanyowo confirms this assumption when he indicates potential witch identification through "co-wives whose hatred develops because of jealousy on other, old women or men because they look ugly and also their age "(Omoyanjowo 1971:25). In most cases, when a person is accused of practising witchcraft, the accused admits to the charges laid against him, whereas under

normal conditions he would not admit. The person admits to the accusations, because he is afraid of the mob, he becomes delirious and unconsciously accepts whatever is said against him. *The Sowetan* (Friday 20/3/1992:12) reported that Magano of Molepo admitted that, before he became a Christian, he was taught by his mother to bewitch people, and used a broom to fly to Tanzania at night.

Although the matter of witchcraft cannot meet scientific validity, the fact is that it cannot be totally ignored as a phenomenon. The issue of witchcraft seems to be problematic. Both occultism and spiritualism are practised in the first world countries. Van Rheenen reports that in 1484 Pope Innocent VIII issued a decree against witchcraft (Van Rheenen 1991:165). Although decrees could be passed, the fear and belief of this practice stretches back to the stone age, and it is still rooted deeply in the minds of the indigenous people.

3.11. Factors which hindered and facilitated the acceptance of the Gospel

The Vhavenda may appear to be polytheistic, as was concluded by many theologians and by the first missionaries. In contrast, the indigenous people were monotheistically orientated. Their religious belief was anchored on Nwali / Mwari. Although they had family gods, who from a Biblical point of view would be regarded as "idols", in Vhavenda traditional understanding they are considered to be "the living dead". The Vhavenda accept Nwali as the creator of humankind

(Musika Vhathu). The name Nwali was never mentioned in propitiation of the family god. His name was always held sacred.

The missionaries should have used this sacred name Nwali for the God of the Gospel. The word Nwali was above criticism or contamination. Instead, they took a risk, thus making a blunder, by using the name Mudzimu for the Supreme Being instead of Nwali. According to the Vhavenda religious belief, the word Mudzimu refers to family gods, if not divinities. In support of this view, Van Rooy asserts that "Mudzimu, an ancestor spirit, almost none of the attributes of God are present" (Van Rooy 1972:439). The family ancestor's functions are none other than those of creating stability in the family, but can in no way act as creator of the cosmos.

When the Gospel was introduced to the Vhavenda traditional leaders, with Mudzimu as the name for God, the leaders of the tribe were dismayed, if not alarmed by this decision. According to the Vhavenda belief, traditional leaders were closer to God than their subjects. The discussion between Michael Buys and a messenger from the Dutch Reformed Mission Station Goedgedacht confirms this argument.

> " ... 'Wat wil hy hê?' het hy aan Michael gevra ... 'Hy wil vir jou bid,' was Buys se antwoord. 'Vir my bid? Weet hy dan nie dat ek self as godheid intree vir my volk by Nwari (God) nie' ..." (Möller-Malan 1957:171).

The coming of the Gospel could have been based on the indigenous people's traditional belief, for Khosi Makhado made it plain that he believed in Nwali/Mwari.

It is worth noting that the Vhavenda have no image or emblem that represents Nwali, who by all religious standards is regarded as the Supreme over all the other ancestors. The indigenous people have various images of their family divinities. They bow down to these images in a way of veneration, but should the images become the end in themselves, that could be regarded as idolatry. The missionaries should have taken cognisance of the fact that the divinities were not the Supreme Beings, but were venerated as ancestors who were acting as intermediates.

Dickson's point of argument gives clear evidence to the fact that the indigenous people do not venerate the Supreme Being directly but through their family ancestors, with a full understanding that their pleas, and requests will ultimately reach the Supreme Being. The Vhavenda portray God as unique and as above all the ancestors, the loyalty accorded to the Supreme Being supersedes that of the ancestors.

The Vhavenda regard the Supreme Being as having the status of a king, being on the highest rung of the ladder. His position, according to the Vhavenda

standards, creates a problem for an individual who approaches him without involving the mediators, the ancestors. The king administers his functions through his subordinates and down to the grassroots. That point at issue was further supported by Mudau in his Ngomalungundu legend, when he indicates that Nwali was the ancestor god of the Vhavenda and was their first great king who subjected the local peoples along the Zoutpansberg range, where the Vhavenda are settled today (Mudau 1940:13). The personal character of God, as concluded by the indigenous people, is that of the King of kings. From a human point of view, he could be the father of the Vhaveda in their land of abode, as he was the father of Israel, and the cosmos as such. Had the missionaries presented God as the father of all creation, irrespective of culture and tradition, the indigenous people would have received the Gospel with less difficulties. The Kingship of God is further supported by Indowu when he asserts that the Supreme Being of the Yoruba Pantheon is pictured as a king who operates through subordinate gods (Idowu 1973:136). God, is not regarded as king of the Yorubas, or Israel but his kingship is of the whole universe.

Jesus Christ is the God who revealed himself, not in dogmas or ideas, but in a living person. This person should have been presented to the indigenous people as a Brother-Ancestor. Jesus as a Brother Ancestor would have become a family relative, who had common parenthood and God, being the father of the Vhavenda. The brotherhood of Jesus would have given God a common

progenitor, which would have strengthened his acceptance with all indigenous people.

To present Jesus as an ancestor would not have implied that only his human nature was emphasised. The fact that he had risen from the dead and is alive, reinforces the indigenous peoples' hope and faith that Jesus is their Prime-Ancestor, who is performing the function of mediation. The argument is endorsed by Maboee when he purports that "the tactless condemnation of the Badimo has placed the Basotho Christians at cross- roads today. They lean on Christ as the Mediator, and then towards the Badimo for the same purpose (Maboee 1982:27). Jesus is the great mediator, who supersedes "Vhadzimu" (ancestors). The missionaries would have had no problem in communicating Jesus as the Son of God, and the only God and one Mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5-6). The problem of the indigenous people being at cross-roads would have been solved, as Jesus is greater than any of the ancestors.

When Jesus is viewed from a human perspective, as a descendant of Adam, as a great grand ancestor, he thus becomes a natural brother to all human beings, irrespective of race or creed. His brotherhood would reach its zenith after his death, and after his resurrection, Jesus was endowed with the supernatural powers of mediation, between God and his creatures, and he became the source of Christian tradition.

His resurrection could have been welcomed by all indigenous people as victory over death, and more so because he had risen from the company of the dead ancestors. He emerged as a victor and came into contact with the living. He came out of the grave, not as ghost or a spirit but as a living human being. Thomas, the disciple, touched him, for he was physically resurrected. The community in Jerusalem saw him. There was no reason why he could not have made an impact on the indigenous people's belief. His actions reflect his portrayal as Proto-Ancestor, the mediator who has the capability of sustaining humanity. The point of argument is further reinforced by Pauw who contends that, "Many African Christians combine a lively awareness of god and the ancestors", thus indicating that God and the ancestors work together (Pauw 1975:102).

It is transparently clear that the concept, Jesus as Brother-Ancestor, would have enhanced the acceptance by the Vhavenda; primarily for the fact that he is one of the members of God's holy people, who do the work of interceding between the living and God the creator. This devotional service would promote him, ultimately to be received as a Senior Ancestor.

The traditional healer was derogatorily referred to by missionaries and the colonists as a witchdoctor. As a result, this despairing word caused such a negative impact on the indigenous people towards the acceptance of the Gospel. In the Vhavenda circles, a traditional healer is given a high and respectable

status. The traditional leaders are mostly inclined to make use of the traditional healers' expertise in times of crisis.

Although Van Warmelo, a renowned ethnologist in Venda culture, scornfully says, "u zwifha sa nanga" (he tells lies like a witch-doctor) (Van Warmelo 1937:207), the Vhavenda regarded the traditional healers as specialists, who may advise the sick, whether the illness could be cured by pacification of the ancestors or by any other form. Andries Maiwashe (Personal Interview 15/10/1997) of Thohoyandou, indicated that certain diseases such as piles, haemorrhoids (Nowakhulu) are easily cured by using the herb known as Mukuvhazwilu (*Cassine Transvalensis*). He further indicated that sores are easily cured by using another herb, Murungwane (*Xanthoxylum Capensis*). The diagnosis and the prescription indicated by the interviewee is further supported by Mabogo when he says, "The plants which give a reddish decoction are commonly used for blood diseases *Cassine Transvalensis* as a remedy for piles (*haemorrhoids*)" (Mabogo 1990:166). Some of the Vhavenda traditional healers are regarded as experts in treating various seemingly incurable diseases, as confirmed by both traditional healer Maiwashe and Mabogo, who is a senior lecturer in Botany at the University of Venda. The two prove Van Warmelo wrong, for he had concluded mistakenly that traditional healers were liars. As a result, some of the indigenous people rejected the Gospel, and everything that goes with it. In some instances, the traditional healer's homestead was regarded

as the throne of "Satan". Yet, they were visited for assistance by both the unconverted and the converted, while the latter lived in two worlds.

The discredit made by the missionaries towards traditional healers, dispelled the desire of the indigenous people to be converted whilst they still consulted their family traditional healers (maine). Namadzavho Ntsandeni (Personal Interview 02/05/1997), a community Matron for the Primary Health Care at Tshilidzini Hospital, indicated that patients are not debarred from consulting their family traditional healers, but are encouraged to continue with the prescriptions they receive from the hospital. The approach adopted by the hospital is a middle course, which encourages patients to have good rapport with the hospital treatment.

The missionaries should have given medical science its rightful place and not disregarded the traditional healers' expertise, for it too is of God. Both approaches to life should have been accepted as such. Thus, indigenous people would have realised, that some medical and emotional illnesses could easily have been treated by the authority of the Christian counsellor, as well as by both a medical practitioner and a traditional healer.

The Vhavenda traditional religion was transmitted from generation to generation. As a result, the propagation of their religion did not hinge on the theological

trained specialist, but all members of the community were a copy book for their children.

The missionaries should have used the ten commandments as a vessel to bring forth the acceptance of the Gospel. The commandments were known to the Vhavenda society, although not as orderly laid out as in the holy writ. Deviation from these norms was regarded as an offence to the society.

From time immemorial, the Vhavenda have always believed in one Supreme Being, the only unique bearer of the cosmos. It has never occurred that any Muvenda follow his own religion, except perhaps in the case of the family ancestors who acted as mediators to the only Supreme Being. The belief of the Vhavenda in one Supreme Being could have been a golden opportunity for the missionaries to promulgate the Gospel.

According to the Vhavenda accepted standards, religion could not be separated from society. The creation or establishment of mission stations for the converted Vhavenda, separating them from their families and relatives who were not converted, brought in a gulf of mistrust. The Vhavenda regarded church ministers as shepherds for the entire society, irrespective of religious affiliation. This was an appreciable attitude.

The Vhavenda Christians also regard their traditional religion as revelatory, for both God and the ancestors reveal themselves in nature. To them, God does not reveal himself only through the Gospel, but also through dreams and natural spirits. The religious rituals practised by the Vhavenda could have facilitated the acceptance of the Gospel, for their religion is communal, as it strengthens the social order of their daily lives. It further creates a two way traffic between the living and the dead, and thus reconciliation remains the order of the day.

In conclusion, we may say the approach of the missionaries towards the Vhavenda was more scholarly and had little to do with everyday realities. It appears to have been more western ethnocentric than being the propagation of the Gospel. As a result, it could not fulfil the purpose for which it was intended.

The path travelled by the missionaries in Venda was not a smooth one, but relentless endurance earned them fruits. The fact that missionaries never despaired, bore commendable applause by the Vhavenda as a whole. The indigenous people ultimately have access to Jesus as their own and prime - ancestor, who is always performing the work of mediation.