

**“INCWALA SACRED CEREMONY” AS A CHALLENGE TO MISSION**

by

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## DEDICATION

To my adorable ‘Ancestor’ and beloved Grandmother, Zakhona Gelty Mabuza (LaNyawo). *Dumakude, Mlaba, Mthandiwabantu wena Bengakuthandi!!* I wish you were around, but of course your spirit lives on, you’re my true ancestor and guiding spirit!! I have made it *Dumakude Nkosazana kaMtshakela-KaMahlathi-KaSambane!!* Your dream is finally fulfilled; I am becoming the light of the Mabuza Clan, and indeed my country. The seeds of the Gospel are beginning to blossom – *Sekuyakhanya*.

To my family and indeed a great team, Happiness, Lindela, Lindokuhle and Lindelani. Yes, it is possible to those who wait. Thank you for allowing me to work even on weekends to achieve this. You are a source of encouragement indeed.

To Dr. V.S. Molobi, my supervisor and counselor who found me in the wilderness and gave me an inspiration to continue on this long journey. You were such a pleasant helper and in *siSwati* we would say, ‘*Ungadzinwa nangemuso*’ (Don’t get tired in doing good).

To God be the glory, who is the giver of life and sustainer of living beings, I thank Him for making me become part of His plans even to a Small Nation like Swaziland.

My earnest prayer is that all humankind would find a sense of inspiration, when reading this work. My humble submission has been to add another voice of reason, let the insights of this work become an instrument of cultivating a quest for a higher level of spirituality. This contribution is to open dialogue so that we all attain a better understanding that there is but one Supreme God whom all are attempting to get to through their different passages.

Apart from the help I have acknowledged above, and for the references mentioned in the text, this is my own work.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>SUMMARY OF CONTENT.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2. A HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OF THE SWAZI PEOPLE.....</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1 Nation within the Ngunis of Southern Africa.....	15
2.2 <i>Emaqhawe AkaNgwane neBalondolozi</i> -The founding fathers of the Swazi Nation.....	18
2.3 The Role of the King ( <i>Ingwenyama</i> - Lion) and the Queen Mother ( <i>Indlovukazi</i> ).....	27
2.3.1 The King and his advisory councils.....	27
2.3.2 The <i>Indlovukazi</i> .....	29
2.4 The Clan lineage and the family structure within the Swazi Nation....	30
<b>CHAPTER 3: THE INCWALA CEREMONY.....</b>	<b>37</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	37
3.2 Preliminary concepts.....	41
3.2.1 Commencement of the <i>Incwala</i> Ceremony.....	43
3.2.2 <i>Bemanti</i> –The <i>Mkhatswa</i> clan (Water-party people).....	44
3.2.3 <i>Benguni Beningizimu- Mngometulus and Myenis</i> .....	46
3.2.4 The Return of the <i>Bemanti</i> .....	50
3.2.5 Administration of the <i>muti</i> by traditional healers.....	51
3.3 <i>Lusekwane</i> Ceremony (Part of a Pre-Incwala event).....	52
3.4 The rituals and the key role players of the <i>Incwala Ceremony</i> .....	54
3.4.1 <i>Sesulamsiti</i> .....	55
3.4.2 <i>Masilela</i> and <i>Mavuso</i> (Some of the muti people).....	56
3.4.3 Symbolism of the Black Bull – <i>Kubulal'inkhunzi</i> .....	56
3.4.4 Throwing of the Gourd (A Melacholy Canticle) – <i>Kujikwa Kweluselwa</i> .....	57
3.4.5 The Rainmaker – Lamotsa.....	58
<b>CHAPTER 4: OUTSTANDING CHARACTERISTICS OF INCWALA - ANCESTRAL VENERATION AS PART OF THE TRADITIONAL RELIGION.....</b>	<b>61</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	61
4.2 <i>Emadloti</i> are part of the Swazis’ life.....	65
4.3 Death does not separate <i>Emadloti</i> from those living.....	67
4.4 Good behaviour makes one becomes a good ancestor.....	68
4.5 Status of ancestors within the Swazi traditional beliefs system.....	70
4.6 Ancestors are venerated and not worshipped.....	72
4.7 Complexities associated with ancestral veneration.....	73
4.7.1 Ancestral veneration is part of the culture.....	73

4.7.2 Ancestral veneration as means of faith.....	74
4.7.3 Communication with ancestors and associated rituals.....	75
4.7.4 Ancestral Veneration as a link with the spiritual world.....	77
4.7.5 Ancestors are not equal to God.....	78
4.7.6 <i>Kubuyiswa</i> ceremony as part of Ancestral veneration.....	79
4.8 Ancestral Veneration and the Power of Traditional Medicine.....	80
4.8.1 Family death is reported to the ancestors.....	81
4.8.2 How do Ancestors manifest themselves?.....	83
4.8.3 <i>Sitfunti</i> and <i>Kubuyisa</i> ceremony.....	84
4.8.4 Ancestors and their involvement with family genealogy.....	85
4.8.5 Ancestors and their appearance in dreams and visions.....	86
4.9 Administration and the role of traditional medicine and ancestral veneration.....	87
4.9.1 How ancestors choose those to administer muti.....	88
4.9.2 <i>Batsakatsi</i> (Witches).....	90
4.10 Ancestral Veneration and their views about Jesus Christ.....	92
4.10.1 Role of Jesus in a traditional setting.....	92
4.10.2 Existence of spiritual forces.....	93
4.10.3 The spirits of the dead as ‘Saints’.....	94

**CHAPTER 5: THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS-THE VISION OF SOMHLOLO –  
Another motivation why Swazis Venerates Ancestors.....** 96

5.1 Introduction.....	96
5.2 Preliminary Concepts.....	98
5.3 The Vision as Historically narrated.....	102
5.4 The Symbols – ‘Umculu’ and ‘Indilinga’ .....	105
5.4.1 Can this vision be seen as means and reason for Ancestral Veneration.....	107
5.4.2 Was it a myth – Based on the cultural norm orientation?...110	
5.4.3 Could this Vision be viewed as merely a philosophy?.....112	
5.4.4 Perhaps it is a ‘Special’ revelation.....114	
5.5 The fulfillment of the Vision in the midst of Swazi cultural heritage..118	
5.6 The implications of the Vision.....	122
5.6.1 <i>Mvelinchanti</i> approves Swazi customs and culture.....124	
5.6.2 The ‘Book’s contents should be read and understood.....125	
5.6.3 The vision is not a blanket approval that God approves Swazi culture and custom.....	126

**CHAPTER 6: MISSIONARIAL INTERPRETATION OF INCWALA.....** 129

6.1 Introduction.....	129
6.2 The mysterious Characteristics of <i>Incwala</i> Ceremony.....	134
6.3 The Gospel should shine its light to the Incwala Ceremony.....	135
6.3.1 The Lessons from the Holy Communion as compared to <i>Incwala</i> Ceremony.....	138
6.3.2 Holy Communion is Holy and Sacred.....	139

6.3.3 The Partakers and administrators of <i>Incwala</i> as Compared to those administering Holy Communion.....	140
6.3.4 Results of celebrating <i>Incwala</i> Ceremony.....	141
6.4 The Black ceremonial Bull – A sacrifice during the <i>Incwala</i> Ceremony.....	142
6.4.1 Symbolism of the sacrificial bull.....	143
6.4.2 The killing of the bull to replace the life of the King.....	143
6.5 Christian mission should not underestimate people's cultural beliefs.....	144
6.5.1 <i>Incwala</i> Ceremony as a gateway to doing mission within The Swazis.....	146
6.5.1.1 Christianity confronts culture.....	147
6.5.1.2 Culture is creation of God.....	148
6.5.1.3 Embody the Gospel to a given culture.....	149
6.5.1.4 Possessing the culture for Christ and His Gospel.....	150
6.6 <i>Incwala</i> Ceremony giving a sense of belonging to the Swazis.....	151
6.6.1 The King as the main player of <i>Incwala</i> Ceremony.....	152
6.6.2 <i>Incwala</i> Ceremony adds value to the traditional beliefs of the Swazis.....	153
6.7 <i>Incwala</i> Ceremony and ancestral veneration as part of religious life of the Swazi.....	154
6.8 <i>Incwala</i> Ceremony - A mystery of interlink communication between the living and the 'living dead'.....	155
6.9 <i>Incwala</i> Ceremony rituals - Faith healing versus traditional healing.....	156
6.10 <i>Incwala</i> Ceremony is an attempt to relate to the Supreme.....	156
6.11 <i>Incwala</i> Ceremony a highly spiritual religious rite acknowledging the existence of the Supreme .....	157
6.12 Swazis are connected to the spiritual world.....	158
<b>CHAPTER 7.....</b>	160
Conclusion.....	160
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	162



## **SUMMARY OF CONTENT:**

This dissertation aims to critically evaluate the *Incwala* Sacred Ceremony and its relevancy to Ancestral Veneration in the life of the Swazi Nation. Swazis to a greater extent are believed to be quite obsessed about their cultural heritage. They view this cultural event as sacred and very important in their national unity and pride of being a sovereign entity. They religiously observe this rite as an integral part of their cultural heritage and see it as a vital glue that holds together the national unity and cements the eternity of the Swazis' existence. Celebrating and commemorating this sacred festival can be equated to what Christians do when celebrating and observing Good Friday or Holy Easter. It could also be related to the Islamic Pilgrimage to Mecca.

Swazis are strongly connected to their Ancestral Veneration. It is inculcated in their core system of beliefs and is part of their lives because it tends to shape their religious view, as well as moulding it. The Supreme God (**Mvelinchanti**) is believed to have spoken to the founding fathers of the nation about how the nation ought to conduct its affairs (in different forms through visions and dreams). Hence there is a deeply held view that the departed kings and the forefathers are believed to be alive and closer to that very Supreme God. According to this long held view the dead are asleep and are continually involved in directing the affairs of the nation. Indeed they decide on blessings, health and life of the living. It is

embedded in the subconscious mind of Swazis that the living dead (***emadloti, labaphasi or labalele***) continually influence the affairs of the nation and any given family; hence they need to be consulted from time to time.

***Emadloti*** are the mediators between human beings and God and they can be contacted through the spiritual mediums. The national elders and advisors to the Monarchy,<sup>1</sup> as well as traditional medicine persons (***muti***) people (***Tinyanga and Tangoma***), are there as custodians of the *Incwala* Ceremony. In any given family, *emadloti* (ancestors) are consulted in times of marriages, new births and any other eventualities that may befall that family. In the life and worldview of Swazis, nothing just happens without any involvement and sanction of the ancestors. In fact, for anything to happen in the life of a Swazi, there must be a supernatural cause or reason, hence in the very core of foundational beliefs there are involvements of the supernatural powers and the forces believed to be operational.

## 1. Methodology

The writer has used an ‘Active observatory participatory methodology’ in this research. It should be stated that he has participated in the ceremony itself and observed the behaviour of those involved as well as some of the related sacred activities that are conducted during the sacred ceremony. The *Incwala* sacred Ceremony is an old Swazi

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to the Swazi King and his kingdom.

traditional rite or custom. It is a national spiritual event that is celebrated annually around December and January. It is an important national sacred and spiritual festival that sees the culmination of the Swazi system of beliefs regarding the Veneration of the Ancestors (the living dead) as part of Swazi life. A King's life, health and prosperity, as well as that of the nation, is centered on the observance of this sacred Ceremony. The nation must observe and partake in the *Incwala* cultural Ceremony. It can be viewed as an attempt to get approval and sanction to lead the nation, thereby getting connected to the world of ancestors. After all, the dead are said to be alive and closer to ***Mvelinchanti***, the Supreme God.

## 2. Relevancy of the Study

If the *Incwala* Sacred Ceremony is a national prayer to the Supreme God to intervene in the life of the King and the nation at large, then it plays an important role in the spiritual life and well being of the people. There are lessons to be learnt and it can be spiritually enriching if one goes deeper in an attempt to understand the Ancestral Veneration, and how Swazis attempt to relate to the Supreme God through it. There are tensions among Christians, especially those who partake in it. Some churches are against members who participate in such ceremonies and this is clear when members are disciplined. Ancestral Veneration itself is viewed as a sign of backsliding and going back to

the ways of darkness and evil practices that are not in conformity with the proper doctrine and teachings of the Holy Scriptures. Christians stand to learn and enrich their own spirituality if they could positively evaluate the Ancestral Veneration as practiced during the celebration of *Incwala* Ceremony.

There is no doubt that other ritualistic practices that are involved in this Sacred Ceremony tend to bring about confusion. For instance the role of Traditional Healers (*Tinyanga*) and medicine (*umutsi*) is problematic for the Christian church, especially from the view of the kingship as the strengthening of the position of the King cannot be possible without the use of traditional medicine. As for other rites and sacred activities like cleansing of the king, which is done in the sacred enclosure (*Enhlambelweni*), there is quite a lot that remains mysterious about *Incwala* Ceremony. The Ancestral Veneration, however, is central and a key element even during such activities.

### **3. Research Methods and Sources**

There do not seem to be many sources about such sacred themes. The researcher has conducted some interviews with traditional authorities and historians, over and above personal experience and the encounter with the ceremony itself. While Kuper, Matsebula and Mzizi have played a major role in shaping and influencing some of my

opinions about the theme, it should be said that it remains a unique sacred experience any scholar could research. There is therefore a need to critically evaluate the *Incwala* sacred Ceremony, as it remains such an important component of the Swazi customs and cultural activities. It is the writer's desire to revisit such a religious ceremony and find out how Ancestral Veneration is practiced during such an event. It is hoped that at the end of this dissertation, one will somehow gain an insight as to how Swazis relate to God through this ceremony as part of enriching the African traditional religious experiences that will indeed add value to the quest of seeking God and His dealings with humanity.

#### **4. Outline of the chapters**

Chapter 1 will be an introduction to the theme and Chapter 2 will give a brief historical background and clan lineage of the Swazi nation. Chapter 3 will then attempt to describe the *Incwala* Ceremony while Chapter 4 will then focus on the outstanding characteristics of *Incwala* Ceremony. Chapter 5 will then attempt to give a theological analysis of the Vision of King Somhlolo, address the ancestral and how it relates to Ancestral Veneration. Chapter 6 to will attempt to draw some missiological interpretations of *Incwala* Ceremony and how it could be used as a gateway to doing mission in Swaziland. Finally Chapter 7 will be a conclusion.

## Chapter 1

### **INTRODUCTION:**

I have not yet seen a serious and exhaustive academic work done on this relationship between the Christian faith and African traditional religiosity. There are innumerable articles by African scholars on African Religion itself – many of which are valuable and relevant. But the theological evaluation of this interreligious relationship has yet to be done (Mbiti: 1979:89-90).

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through prophets at many times in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, and through him He has made the universe (Hebrews1: 1-2 NIV).

Every nation has its own cultural norms and values that are imbedded in its system of beliefs. Within each nation lies a set of values and norms that are rooted and inculcated as religious acts that particular nation attempts to relate to the Supreme Being. Swazis are therefore no exception in that they have within their culture and customs rich national festivals and ritualistic ceremonies that make them quite an interesting cultural group for such a research within the Ngunis (*Bantu*) of Southern Africa. One such ceremony that has remained with them for quite some time is the *Incwala* sacred Ceremony that has continued to be a phenomenon and experience where traditional beliefs are at play and have withstood the test of time.

The *Incwala* Ceremony commemorated by the Swazi nation sees the blending and marrying of the traditional religion and significant cultural practices in an attempt to relate to the distant Supreme Being. *Mvelinchanti*, the Supreme Being though so distant, yet ever present in this life, is acknowledged as the creator and sustainer of all things. *Incwala* sacred Ceremony as a Swazi religious way of life, is attempting to relate to a supreme God who is the giver of life itself. While the Christian faith attempts to explain how human beings can relate to this God through believing in Jesus who is the ultimate source of human existence. *Incwala* Ceremony is the passage to that very God through the Veneration of ancestors who are believed to be closer to him. There is no doubt that methodologies and religious functions attributed to the *Incwala* Ceremony itself are quite inspirational to the adherents as well as enriching as humanity attempts to relate to the divine deity using the human's cosmological experiences. It should be highlighted that at the heart of every human being is the desire to relate to the Supreme deity, and the quest for such is equally stirred within the heart and soul of humanity because God has placed in every living soul a religious desire. This is the eternal longing for the personal encounter and relationship with God established because the mortal soul dearly yearns for the Divine Being.

The probing question is how do those in the land of the living enter into that spiritual level and be connected with the Divine Being who is so

distant and highly exalted? Swazis religiously observe the *Incwala* sacred Ceremony as part of the national physical attempt to communicate to the Supreme God seeking for his blessings, health and prosperity. The Swazi nation like any other African group should not be disregarded for their own attempt to relate to God through the *Incwala* sacred Ceremony. Rather such a festival as part of Ancestral Veneration is in itself central to their life and worldview that will go a long way in enriching the African Traditional religion. It is a shared experience and foreknowledge that the dead are alive and are part of those who live. Sitoalane (1986:18) paints a reality that is worth considering when discussing Ancestral Veneration:

...Whenever an African speaks about this experience of contact with *Badimo* is about a person to person contact, not of a vision or any apparition. The words used to relate the experience are: '*Ke bone ntate*' I have seen my father.

Honouring the living dead is therefore considered by the Swazi as part of what is expected of any given family as is also attested in the Holy scriptures that, "Honour your father and mother"(Exodus 20:14). Swazis do not worship the dead but venerate them, for they are believed to be closer to God. Mbiti writes something that affirms that the God Swazis worship through the *Incwala* Ceremony is the same God Christians claim to be worshipping. "...The God described in the Bible is the same God who was already known in the framework of traditional African religion" (1980:817).

Another reason the *Incwala* sacred Ceremony is so important in the life of the Swazi nation is the Swazi King's continued health and prosperity as well as that of the people, which are firmly enshrined and founded on this very sacred ceremony. The focus of this revered national sacred ceremony is entrenched in the core foundation of Ancestral Veneration that can be best described as the religious life of the Swazi nation. It should be stated that the dead are living and continue to influence the present life and national activities. This highly spiritual national prayer (*Incwala* Ceremony) is part of keeping the nation in touch with their departed ancestors and is celebrated annually when there is a king on the throne. When the nation is without a king (mourning) and the Queen Regent is in an acting capacity as the leader in his place, then it cannot be commemorated, as the presence of the King is a central figure during this event.

*Incwala* is a national sacred festival that is characterized by the mysterious activities done in secret and is held at the Queen Mother's residence (traditional Headquarters). It is an old ceremony that Swazis find to be refreshing and somehow fulfilling to those who partake in it. Matsebula (1987:330) a well-known Swazi historian argues that it is ancient and goes beyond the Swazi nation itself. He describes it: "It is a Nguni-wide Ceremony." He further claims that it is associated with Kings and their nations. Unfortunately most of the Nguni groups have lost their

monarchical status and Swazis have preserved it, while others like Zulus have since revived the same ritual ***Umkhosi Wokweshwama***<sup>2</sup> ceremony.

Sadly, the coming of the missionaries propagating the Gospel message somehow brought about unwarranted conflicts as new converts were made to discard observing such an important ceremony ritual as it was felt there was nothing spiritual about it. *Incwala* Ceremony is an ancient ceremony that could be best explained and experienced better when one participates in it. It is characterized by the ritualistic activities as well as the usage of the traditional medicine that forms part of strengthening of the Kingship. The role of the Traditional Healers (***Tinyanga***) and those administering other related rites in an attempt to communicate with the Ancestors cannot be underestimated. Other actors include the Ndwandwes of eLwandle (***Bemanti***), as well as traditional advisors who are well trained in the event management itself. The entire sacred ceremony is targeted towards keeping the nation united through the King and in tune with the powers and spirits of the ancestors and ultimately the Supreme Being, ***Mvelinchanti***.

During the ***Incwala*** sacred ceremony the King is secretly cleansed inside the ***inhlambelo*** (enclosure built specially by a special shrub, ***Iusekwane***), as part of removing all bad omens and any bad luck that may have befallen the King in the previous year. He is connected to the ancestors

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<sup>2</sup> A Zulu traditional ceremony where the King tastes the first fruits.

and God, so that he may acquire wisdom and strength to lead the nation. The event is marked by the involvement of traditional warriors (*emabutfo*) celebrating in song and dance as part of the ritualistic prayer to the supreme God and Ancestors. The rituals and the ceremonial cleansing are blessed and sanctioned by the Ancestors who are believed to be a guiding force in the national affairs.

*Incwala* Sacred Ceremony has its own special songs that are only sung in honour of the event and cannot be repeated<sup>3</sup> elsewhere or in any other national festival or ceremony. The festival itself is preceded by special preparatory duties by the esteemed clan of the Ndwandwes, who are referred to as “*Bemanti*” (water people). Their role of providing cleansing water is derived from the historic origins the ceremony itself has in that it was Zwide, of the famous Ndwandwe clan that consolidated it and was then followed by Zulus during the *umfecane* wars.

During the preparatory part of the *Incwala* ceremony, Traditional Healers are consulted. The Veneration of Ancestors is part of the festival. It is indeed an understatement to state that activities and rituals that are undertaken require the involvement of the spirits of the living dead and their approval. The period preceding the ceremony itself will see the slaughter of a special bull<sup>4</sup> or other approved animals (sheep or goats),

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<sup>3</sup> See also page 51.

<sup>4</sup> See also page 53.

which form the base for such a ceremony. Each and every activity that is invoked does need to be reported to the ancestors, as eventually all cannot succeed without their consent and sanction. This goes back a long way, even in the Swazi family affairs; ancestors are always consulted if something is to be done within any given family. Ultimately the Supreme God will then be expected to bless the nation by giving the good and wise leadership of the King, who is the symbol of unity and eternity of the Swazis. Hence the King's health and prosperity is of paramount importance for the sustainability of national unity and its continued existence.

Here are some questions that have stimulated me to critically evaluate this sacred ceremony:

1. Why do Swazis view Ancestral Veneration that is practiced during this ceremony as sacred and fulfilling as a cultural rite that forms the base for the national communication between them and the *Mvelinchanti*, the Supreme God?
2. If Ancestral Veneration through the *Incwala* Ceremony forms part of Swazis' spirituality and system of beliefs, what are the implications that can be learned or can enrich the evangelical traditional beliefs?
3. What is the impact in Swazis' world and lifeview of linking such a practice as a channel and a medium for the traditional religious

beliefs in attempting to establish a relationship with the God of creation?

4. What role, if any, do the other related traditional festivities and ritualistic activities undertaken during this period play in the religious life of Swazis and the conceptualization of the long held view that Africans were able to communicate with the Supreme God even before the Gospel message came to Africa?
5. Since the Gospel message was brought to Swaziland by the Missionaries, what were the misconceptions that led to the ongoing tensions that have continued to exist between the Western Missionary mindset and that of the African traditional religion of relating to *Mvelinchanti* even through sacred ceremonies like *Incwala Ceremony*?
6. How can we harmonize the Ancestral Veneration as practiced through the *Incwala* sacred ceremony in an attempt to strengthening the African theology and change the perception that the African traditional religion cannot positively contribute to the Christian faith's teachings?

All these abovementioned questions however, are not intended to be answered immediately but just to highlight the aim of my argument in this dissertation. In the following chapter we will attempt to lay a historical background of the Swazi Nation with the view of enriching the

research and to give an insight of how the nation has evolved to be what it is today.

## Chapter 2

### A HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OF THE SWAZI PEOPLE

#### 2.1 A Nation within the Ngunis of Southern Africa

The history and origins of the Swazi people cannot be easily divorced and separated from the other ethnic groups of Southern Africa, especially the Ngunis. By virtue of their belonging to this region, we can safely say they do not only belong to the same African cultural conglomeration, but also equally share a distinctive understanding of the Supreme God. Within each given ethnic grouping they can call Him by different names, but at the heart of every one of them lies a deep conviction that there is a Divine Being who must be feared and revered. Hence their sacred way of life is founded on the very belief that He is the giver of life and the creator of everything. Thorpe (1919:35) in describing Zulus writes:

One of the first observations of a religious nature by the early travelers, explorers and missionaries to Natal was the apparent acknowledgement by the Zulu of the existence of a Supreme being, whom they appeared to consider responsible for creation...

This is equally true of Swazis, who are not at all different. Zulus call him "***uMvelinqangi***", the one who appeared first and highly exalted. The Sothos, call him "***Modimo***", the very true living God. The Xhosas call him "***u-Thixo***" the unique one that cannot be understood by humanity imagination. The Shangaans call him "***Xikwembu***", the all-

powerful one and Swazis call him “**Mvelichanti** or **Mlentengamunye**”, one-legged being, for He is the Ancient of Days who is believed to be an old and experienced being.

As the Nguni nomadic tribes were moving across the Limpopo River in search of settlement and land, history has it that they were beset with instability, turmoil and conflicts. It is a historical fact that theirs was a matter of “survival of the fittest”. There are many reasons that have been put forward in an attempt to account for such conditions, but anthropologists and historians have agreed that there was a great deal of fighting amongst the Nguni groups. They struggled for supremacy over each other during the *uMfecane* movements as the Xhosas spearheaded the movement, followed by Zulus, Ndwandwes, Swazis and Shangaans. In addition, the Sotho-Pedi-Tswana groups were also on the move and some are now settled in Lesotho, Botswana and in the Limpopo province of South Africa.

Initially Swazis were not a big nation when this upheaval started. They were just a small group whose history began to be recorded in the latter part of the fifteenth century. Martin West (1976:57) concurs when he writes:

In the late part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century a group of the Nguni led by Dlamini, the man who was to become the founding hero of the Swazi nation, traveled down

to Komati River and settled in the area of Maputo (formerly Lourenco Marques) in Mocambique”

According to Matsebula (1987:7), one of the renowned historians of Swaziland, Swazi history may be traced way back to the time of the Stone Age. He argues for this early history because there is now evidence that Swazis did mine iron and they made axes and spears just like other African tribes.

The Portuguese, after discovering Delagoa Bay in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, did come across a small tribe known as the people of Dlamini who are, today, Swazis. This historical narrative have proven beyond any reasonable doubt that one can trace the ancestral roots of the nation to that of the Tsongas or Shangaans; hence, from time to time the Dlaminis are called, “**Ematfonga**” simply meaning Tsongas. The status of Swazis only became that of a nation during the 1600’s to 1700’s. The main reason for obscure dates and factual detail stems from the fact that Swazi history has always been transmitted orally (Matsebula, 1987:6).

The historical narrative of Swazis therefore can be understood only in the context of the other Ngunis. It is claimed that as Swazis were wandering and moving about, they grew in strength and ended up developed their own norms and cultural beliefs that have made them distinct and indeed unique. Hilder Kuper (1963:1) has observed that,

“They carried with them the heritage of the past from societies they left behind. With this they were able to shape their lives anew, adapting as they forgot”. It is therefore not surprising that the national coat of arms has an inscription attesting to their belief that they are unique: “**SIYINQABA**”.<sup>5</sup>

## 2.2 **Emaqhawe AkaNgwane NeBalondolozi (Heroes and Elders) The Founding Fathers of the Swazi**

For the purposes of this research one would not delve much into each and every detail of the founding heroes because it will be long and unnecessary. Rather, in preference one would rather pay particular interest to those who seem to have in one way or the other contributed significantly by playing quite an important role in the establishment of today’s Swaziland. It suffice to say that each King is very important. Without the royal line or genealogical tree they would not have had the continuity that they have.

King Mswati I, after succeeding his father Matalatala, whose title was Dlamini I, is greatly remembered for giving the Swazi nation an identity, for the nation got its name from him. Swazis are the people of Mswati (**Bantfu BaMswati**); hence they are referred to as Swazis. There is a historical narrative and claim that a revolt arose between *Mswati I*, and his brother Mthonga, over who should be the heir to the

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<sup>5</sup> We are unique and indeed a fortress.

throne of their father. It was then felt prudent that the brothers be separated and Mthonga remained with the people who are today known as the Thongas, who continue residing in the southern part of Mozambique, while Mswati proceeded with the other faction to build the nation. Matsebula (1987:9) is not agreeing that this was a power-struggle within the tribe by then. He is convinced that this was just one of those historical accidents emanating from the individual characteristics or peculiarities of the two brothers. Mswati I was followed by Ngwane III, Dlamini II, Nkosi II, Mavuso I, Ludvonga I, and Dlamni III.

Ngwane III is one king remembered for his achievement of leading Swazis across the Lubombo Mountains to settle in the present-day Swaziland, hence the Dlamini praises (*Behla Lubombo ngekuhlehlletela*). (As already indicated Swazis once settled in Tongaland that is in the southern part of Mozambique. It is not that clear though what necessitated the migration, but one can conclude that it was simply to find a better settlement that was suitable for more grazing for their livestock).<sup>6</sup> Right from the Pongola Valley Ngwane III incorporated the Nkambules and conquered the Sihlongonyanes, Nkonyanes and Nsibandzes. One sad historical detail that is recorded during his time is that he killed all his male children. Lamndzebele, one of his wives, shielded a son from this

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<sup>6</sup> See also page 17.

massacre, hence the royal lineage was saved as Zikodze was born and assumed the throne as Ndvungunye when his father died in 1780.

King Ndvungunye was called to be with his forefathers and was succeeded by Sobhuza I or Somhlolo.<sup>7</sup> He was dearly loved and adored in the Swazi history because of his unique way of doing things. He was totally opposed to bloodshed and avoided confrontation (Matsebula, 1987:20). He later established a friendship with Zwide of the Ndwandwes and that famous Zulu King uShaka ka-Senzangakhona. The friendship between Zwide is of paramount importance because of the arranged marriage<sup>8</sup> norm (**Kwendziswa**). The Incwala Sacred ceremony may as well trace its genesis from this background and soon became part of the Swazi cultural systems. It was because of this cultural practice (**kwendziswa**) that Zwide's daughter, Thandile, was then married to King Sobhuza I, hence a bond of marriage was struck and confrontations between these nations were avoided. Thandile was later to bear the next king, Mswati II as it is believed wives from important clans at that time

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<sup>7</sup> Swazi kings' titles are always repeated after every three following kings. Sobhuza 1 (Somhlolo) was therefore the first king to use this title. Others argue that his reign was a new era in that he actually laid a foundation by building the nation from being a mere clan of the Dlamini to become a formidable nation.

<sup>8</sup> In almost all the Nguni clans, this is a norm whereby the parents arrange a marriage with another family for numerous reasons, but the most important is an attempt to establish a relationship with the chosen family and the bride's family is then given cows. In some instances, an arranged marriage is for strategic purposes like begetting an heir if one wife only has girl children. Interestingly the girl or the bride-to-be had no say in the arrangements and negotiations.

were given the honour of bearing kings (*tintfombi takhona atidleli phasi*). It is also claimed that Somhlolo too gave two daughters in marriage to Shaka of the Zulu, namely Mpandzendze and Lonkhulumo, and the exercise paid off, for Zulus ended up unable to attack Swazis, since they had their own interest at heart: they had become relatives and their in-laws (*Bantfu bemtini, bakhoti or tinini*).

King Somhlolo was indeed a unique figure hence the Swaziland Independence Day is named after him (Somhlolo Day), as is the national stadium. Swazis have this belief deeply rooted in their minds that this country belongs to this legend. The name ‘*umhlolo*’ which is carried in ‘**Somhlolo**’, has a deeper relevancy and meaning to every Swazi. Bad luck or misfortune ‘*umhlolo*’ can befall anyone who dares to challenge the Swazi monarch and the king’s orders including royal commands.<sup>9</sup> It is not surprising then that one is often told of unusual events that befall those who dare challenge the Swazi authority, for the name “*umhlolo*” means something disastrous that can happen to you (*meaning LaSomhlolo live Liyahlolelana*). Booth in Matsebula (1987:23) sums up the accomplishments of King Somhlolo in this manner, “Like all the great figures who prevailed during those turbulent and troubled times he did so by successfully mixing force, political skill, diplomacy, guide and bluster.” King

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<sup>9</sup> See also footnote on page 19.

Somhlolo is forever remembered for the Vision he received from God in connection with the coming of the Missionaries with the gospel message to Swaziland.

King Somhlolo, like his peers, slept in the mountains with his forefathers and was succeeded by King Mswati II, who is said to have been blood thirsty for wars. He is believed to have enlarged his kingdom further to the north. Not only did he succeed in this endeavor, but also his name was greatly feared by the tribes and nations up to Zimbabwe. West (1976:57) describes his exploits as follows: “ Sobhuza I [Somhlolo] was succeeded by the great Swazi fighting King, Mswati II, who took over the fledgling nation and reorganized it along the Zulu lines...The Swazis now rose to become a warrior nation whose raids extended as far afield as Rhodesia”.

During this time Missionaries were also invited to come to Swaziland following the famous Vision of King Somhlolo that tells of the coming of the white missionaries with the Gospel. In 1844, a request was then sent to the Wesleyan Missionary Conference in Grahamstown. It was at this time that the Dutch people moreover came to Swaziland in search of a place to graze their herds. The Dutch Whites, led by Andries Potgieter, settled in the northern part of Swaziland. The Boers in their cunning ways misused the Swazi custom of seeking

permission to settle (**Kukhonta**) and assumed that by paying the required token of cattle that they were buying land from the King. They later prepared documents that Swazis were made to sign using their fingerprint or even crossing the papers with a cross, and ended up having divided the national lands as farms with title deeds. Thus began the influx of the White people, particularly of Dutch origin, to the Swazi Kingdom. Mswati II died in 1868 and was followed by Ludvonga who was however struck by lightning even before his reign commenced. Instead, Mbandzeni, King Dlamini IV) was installed as king in his place.

History has it that peace was a scarce commodity during this time as the sons of Mswati fought amongst themselves after the demise of Ludvonga. The arrival of the White settlers made matters even worse in that a new order was brought about in the history of the Swazi nation. Hilder Kuper (1986:11) refers to this painful history as “The Paper Conquest”, as the King was asked to sign documents not knowing that he was actually giving away the land which is a national asset of any given nation. At present, quite a larger part of the land in Swaziland is still owned by these Settlers who gained it through these unfortunate and clandestine deals.

By the time King Ngwane V (Mahlokothla) took over Kingship, too much damage had already been done to the Swazi dynasty and history. His reign was short lived and it was during the Queen Regent Labotsibeni's reign that things even became tense in the Kingdom. Swaziland was now a colony whose affairs were being administered in Pretoria by the colonialists. It was not until King Sobhuza II's reign that the situation was somehow halted and brought under control. In 1968 under King Sobhuza II the country attained her Independence from the British government which had won the territories that formerly the Dutch had controlled prior to the Anglo-Boer war.

King Sobhuza II (Mona, Nkhotfotjeni) was the longest reigning king by the time he went to sleep with his forefathers at the **eMbilaneni (e-Makhosini)** meaning the mountains where Kings are buried. His reign of sixty years was indeed history for the Swazi nation. It was during his reign that quite a lot was accomplished. He is remembered for his belief in settling disputes through dialogue and his famous statement "***I have no enemy-Anginasitsa***" affirms a King who was determined to peace and healthy relationships. It was also during his time that more missionaries came to Swaziland establishing churches, schools and hospitals. The churches of the Nazarene under the able leadership of Dr Samuel Hynd, The Evangelical Alliance Mission with Malla Moe a great missionary woman with an

inspiring history, were welcomed to Swaziland and encouraged by Sobhuza II. One of the greatest achievements during his lifetime was that he built a national church at eNkhanini, Lobamba, yet another indication that since time immemorial Swazi Kings had the respect and fear of God in their hearts.

King Sobhuza II is known to have been a traditionalist who preserved the Swazi traditional system of beliefs on the one hand, yet was equally open to Christianity and other faiths like Islam, *Bahai* as well as the Eastern religions. He is said to have welcomed those advancing their own religious course and gave them sites to build their centres. It can be said that during his lifetime no religion can claim to have been refused permission to advance their faith in the Kingdom. That alone is a clear indication and insight of how Sobhuza II showed his patriotism and for the nation.

It was Sobhuza II's open-minded approach that was characterized by his resolve that all religions lead one to the same God, and that no other religion should be undermined and looked down upon. He is remembered to have not openly stated which one he preferred. He is also remembered for his famous message and challenge to the Christian leaders to go and search for the footprints of Jesus Christ "**Bafune Lunyawo Lwa-Jesu**". Not only was his influence great in

Swaziland, but it was also extended throughout Southern Africa. Surely he led Swaziland so well that in 1981 when he celebrated his Diamond Jubilee<sup>10</sup> it was concluded that the country had progressed to greater heights economically, socially and politically.

At the moment the country is led by Makhosetive, King Mswati III. He has committed himself to follow the ways of his father, King Sobhuza II. He has like his father embraced the cultural norms and practices. He is very much open to other religions, even though at times he has openly declared his love for the Christian faith. However he will be forever remembered for refusing to endorse that Christianity be declared the official religion in the country's Constitution. One is, however, reminded of his statement of intent when he assumed office of Kingship;

I have pledged myself to your service, and throughout my life and with all my heart, I shall try to be worthy of your trust.... I shall endeavour to work, as my father did throughout his reign, to advance unity, happiness and prosperity of my people. I pray that God will help me to discharge worthily this heavy task that has been laid upon me so early in my life (Matsebula, 1972:325)

Whether this will continue to be true remains to be seen.

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<sup>10</sup> This was King Sobhuza II's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary that was commemorated in 1981. He was by then the longest reigning monarchy in the world.

## **2.3 The role of the King (*Ingwenyama-Lion*) and the Queen Mother (*Indlovukazi*).**

Swazis fondly appreciate their King and hold the Institution of Kingship (**Bukhosı**) in high respect. It is generally believed that the **Umvelinchanti** has provided the Swazi Nation their **iNgwenyama** (Lion) and the Ndlovukazi (she-Elephant) as their leaders and custodians of their cultural values, nationhood and identity. It is a long held view that when one attends the royal functions and festivals one is bound to hear the old men (**Balondolozi**) affirming that, “there is no way one can claim to be the follower of **Mvelinchanti** if one does not respect the king”. It is difficult at times to understand the dual roles of leadership by both the King and Queen mother since a king cannot lead the nation without a Queen mother, yet the Queen mother can rule when there is no King as Regent.

### **2.3.1 The King and his Advisory Councils**

It is a long held view that the King reigns together with the elders who are expected to give counsel and advice. They are called **Liqoqo** or Swaziland National Council Standing Committee. Generally speaking the King is greatly respected by the royal kingly salute ‘**Bayethe**’, and Swazis will go even further by bowing and crawling when they approach him. When addressing any person, those in attendance will be punctuating each and every word he utters, ‘**Wena waphakathi, Ndlamadoda, Lwand’ olukhulu,**

***umkhulu' uyesabeka***'. "...He is 'The Lion', 'The Sun', 'The Milky Way', Obstacle to The Enemy'..." (Kuper, 1930:29). The national elders and advisors are custodians of the Swazi culture and customs. They ensure that customs and all cultural rites are respected, adhered to and honoured.

The King is referred to as the mouth that does not tell a lie (***Umlomo longatsetsi manga***). Everything he says would have been discussed and endorsed by the elders '***Iabadzala***'. The well being of the nation is associated with the King's strength and virility, and he must neither see nor touch a corpse, nor approach a grave or a mourner. The major episodes in his life, his birth, installation and marriages are ritualized (Kuper, 1936:29). It is culturally acceptable that the view of enhancing his dignity. He is the unifying symbol and eternity of Swazis. There is that deep rooted belief that when He is approached people's problems will be resolved. Any answer or advice the King gives is considered authoritative and final. He is above all else even in matters of law, Swazi customary laws and political ideologies. His own influence the King must have his power strengthened (***Inkhosi iyaqiniswa***) with the view of enhancing his dignity. He is the unifying symbol and eternity of the Swazis. There is that deep-rooted that when He is approached people's problems will be solved. Any advice the King gives is

considered authoritative and final. He is above all else even in matters of law, Swazi customary laws and political ideologies. His own influence is further strengthened across the spectrum and country through the chiefs, who by extension, are leading the communities and chiefdoms (*imiphakatsi*) on his behalf (*Belusela Inkhosи*). The King and his counselors approve the chiefs after they are identified and appointed by their own local inner councils and family clan (*Lusendvo*). They are expected to always respect the King's authority, failing which a fine of a cow or discipline them heavily.

### 2.3.2 The Indlovukazi

The *Indlovukati* (Queen Mother) is regarded as the Mother of the Nation. She rules together with the King and is also highly revered and accorded that respectful title: “*Mhlekazi*” (the most beautiful one). Kuper (1963:29) writes “... ‘The Lady Elephant’, ‘The Earth’, ‘the beautiful’, ‘Mother of the Country’.” When the King dies, she automatically becomes a Queen Regent, and remains Head of the State until a Crown Prince has come of age to assume the kingship. The office of kingship can never be left vacant as Matsebula (1987:323) has rightly observed that, “Kingship to Swazis means stability, tranquility, unity and prosperity.”

It should be highlighted though that not every King's wife can actually be elevated to the position of becoming a Queenmother. This is reserved for the King's mother, who will be expected to take over from the Queen Mother who might have been a Regent before the identified Crown Prince is installed. In the true Swazi way of life Queen-Mothers come from special clans or surnames such as, Nxumalos, Khumalos, Nkambules and Mdlulis. This also is aimed at creating a deep relationship between the royal House and that particular clan or surname thereby producing stability, especially as these privileged clans are often given high posts in government and within the political structure, thus affirming the long held view that the hierarchy of Swaziland, in actual fact, consists of relatives (*Bosibali/Balamu*).

#### **2.4 The Clan lineage and the Family structure within the Swazi Nation.**

Any research of every given nation cannot undermine the importance of a meticulous description of family units. Suffice to say that national harmony derives its power and sense of direction from the influence of a home or family. It cannot be disputed that families are gifts from *Mvelinchanti* and one might as well believe that they are sanctioned and endorsed by Him. It goes without saying then that the influence of such an ordained institution goes a long way in influencing and shaping our thinking, attitude and behaviour for as long as we live.

Swazis as can be appreciated have a family structure, thus each person derives a sense of belonging to that lineage. When meeting a person within the Swazi context one will always seek to find out one's surname in an attempt to be able to associate that individual with a chief and the area of their origins. A Simelane person for instance will definitely trace his/her roots from KoNtshingila in the Shiselweni District. The Nxumalos will be either from eNkhambeni, eLwandle or Ezikhetheni. The Maziya people will be from ELubonjeni near Sitegi. Interestingly some clans are so related to one another that even inter marriages cannot be allowed. A Mabuza, Ginindza and Mavuso are not supposed to marry each other as they are classified as from root ancestor. These can be further realized and noticeable in the extended praise name "**Tinanatelo**".

It is beyond any reasonable doubt then that a marriage within the Swazi community is somehow regulated. Of course there will be exceptions when it comes to the Royal family, especially the **iNgwenyama**, as he is allowed to marry a Dlamini. If the King so chooses, then that queen (**Inkhosikati**) will never be called **inkhosikati LaDlamini**, but will be given a title called by her father or grandfather's name. That is, if the father is Gcwalisa Dlamini, then the **Inkhosikati** will be named '**Inkhosikati La-Gcwalisa.**' It should be

put on record that if any other person were to be found marrying within the same family then the long held myth has it that it can actually result in the couple bearing children that are handicapped. Why the King is exempt from such notions remains an interesting subject matter. Others, however, will argue that the King is beyond reproach and he cannot be equated to the commoners, hence his actions should not be questioned.

Every marriage is solemnized after having gone through cultural norms such as the payment of dowry '**Lobola**'. This should not be viewed as recompense for the woman, but rather a token of appreciation given to the family of the bride. In most African cultures cows are given, and within the Swazi culture the number to be given is determined by the importance accorded to the surname or clan of the bride. For instance the Dlamini, Mamba, and Ndwandwe clans are very important and any person who wants to marry them should be prepared to pay quite a substantial herd of cattle as they are highly priced clans in Swaziland. Originally the custom of **lobola** was operated on a goodwill basis whereby people were under normal circumstances expected to pay anything they could afford, but unfortunately this benevolence has become a commercial activity. For the Swazi people **lobola** was never completed as the women cannot be paid for all at once, hence the long held view and idiom

**'Akacedvwa kulotjolwa umfati'.** This was a relationship building process that was cemented between the two families involved. Any remaining cows are paid for later even after death; those who remain will see it through on behalf of the deceased.

In each given homestead there will be the head of the family (***Inhloko or UMnumzane***). Figuratively speaking, he is the figurehead of that particular family and is accorded the highest form of respect. Culturally, he may marry many wives depending on how wealthy he is. Now in the context of the Swazi people, a man's wealth is measured by the number of cows he possesses. Interestingly, even though there may be so many wives, there is the underlying understanding that only one can be considered as the main wife and such status is reserved for the first or senior wife. The rest are just ordinary wives. It is the first wife who is expected to produce the heir, '***Inkhosana or Indlalifa***', who then would be entrusted with the heavy task of overseeing the welfare of the family when the head goes to join his forefathers.

Girls are viewed as blessings within the Swazi context, because a man who has many girls is considered wealthy, for he will be given cattle when they eventually get married. Undoubtedly, bearing of children is indeed an integral part of the Swazi community, and if a

woman does not conceive and produce children she might well be not accepted fully in a given family. Her own family will then be expected to provide a sister or a close relative to bear children on her behalf, hence the '*inhlanti*' practice. It should be stated categorically that marriage within the Swazi context is a link between two families and not merely the couple, Hilder Kuper (1987:24) has written so well about this when she argues, "Swazi marriages are essentially linking of two families rather than of the two individuals, and bearing of children is the essential consummation of wifehood."

The **Kwendziswa** rite (arranged marriage) is still an integral part of the Swazi cultural system. A woman or girl child is given to a man whom the father or her family chooses for her. It does not matter whether she has agreed to that or not, the father has the power culturally to enter into such an arrangement and be given cows instead. As matter of fact, this was and continues to be an acceptable rite, as it is believed that it establishes closer family ties. Since the emancipation of women and gender mainstreaming it has become quite a controversial matter as many women feel very strongly against it. King Sobhuza II's daughters were given into marriage to some of the Royal House and chiefs in Southern Africa, for a example, Princess Mantfombi was given to King Zwelithini of Zulus. There are others married to the Ndebeles and Xhosas Royal households.

Within the Swazi culture divorce was never an issue as culturally speaking it could not be allowed or accepted. Divorce, however, can be allowed if there is witchcraft involved or a murder of a spouse, only then can a person be sent back to her own people. The family of the accused will be expected to pay a fine in an attempt to cleanse the family to whom she was married to. But if for any reason the husband is not interested, then the brothers of the groom can take over and bear children on his behalf (***Kuvuswe umuti***). If a husband dies, there will be mourning for a period of two years, and the wives are expected to wear mourning clothes for the duration of the said period. It is only after the cleansing rites (***Kuchinsa/kugezwe emanti***) that the deceased brothers are then permitted to inherit the wives (***Kungenwa***) and take over the responsibility of being a husband and helper to the widow concerned. This is organized by the elders of a given family and the relatives (***belusendvo***). It should be stated that the consultation and approval of family members is of paramount importance in whatever decision needs to be taken.

Swazis believe very strongly in good morals and discipline. A married man remains a child as long as his father lives. So even if one is married, if the father continues to live, then he will exercise authority over every person in that given family. He is the master and director,

as he will be expected from time to time to direct the affairs and solves all the problems that the members of the family may from time to time encounter. A father is the custodian of all family rites and tradition. This will incorporate administration of family rituals during births of children and organizing Ancestral Veneration within a family. He therefore sees to it that ancestors are happy through organizing the ceremonies where special cows are slaughtered and home made brew (*umcombotsi*) is drunk in their honour.

While the voice of the women is not as important<sup>11</sup> as compared to that of men, it should be stated that their roles in any given family remains very important and respected. A mother's word carries weight, as it can be equally authoritative in the absence of the husband. But when the in-laws are around, that woman will resume the respectful position of remaining quiet as if she was not there, but that does not necessarily mean her views are not sought by the family members before any major decision taken.

In the following chapter we will then explore the *Incwala* Ceremony as the heart of this research. We will attempt to critically evaluate its significance and how Swazi kingship derives its existence from it as customary rite. It is the glue that has held the very together because it is a sacred ceremony and accorded much respect and dignity.

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<sup>11</sup> According to male chauvinism.

## Chapter 3

### THE INCWALA SACRED CEREMONY

#### 3.1 Introduction

God is never far from an African's thoughts or perceptions of the world. He is, above all else, the Creator of all things, and as such the ground and being of all that is. God is the presence, continuing providence, a mysterious power in all things, the one that renders people capable of acting and who consequently holds them morally responsible for their actions (Dupre in Thorne, 1991:109).

Before coming to the core subject matter that this research is examining, it is perhaps prudent to state that the *Incwala* sacred Ceremony should not be viewed as a pagan cultural practice totally opposed to humanity's desire and quest to relate to the Supreme God. Missionaries tended to conclude that anything that was related to Ancestral Veneration was and still is ungodly and therefore satanic. Such a narrow view that lacks informed missiological principles and attempts of reaching out to such people has tended to deprive Christians from discovering rich historical beliefs of Swazis that would go a long way to enriching anyone's quest of research on African spirituality that is traditionally based. Matsebula (1987:330) claims that, "In fact the *Incwala* is a dominant national ceremony." It is therefore more sacred and religious than any other rite or ceremony.

Unfortunately the white Missionaries were never well informed and exposed to the sacredness of this ceremony and were so totally opposed to it that is it was viewed negatively. They could not realize that such rites were part of the world and environment for Swazis and to undermine them was indeed unpardonable. It suffices though to indicate that such preconceived ideas have actually resettled in a barrier that hinders progress in conducting mission in the traditional Swazi context. Instead, they should have appreciated the sacredness that a festival of this magnitude meant to the nation, thereby identifying linkages to their own attempts of doing mission in such circumstance. It is beyond any reasonable doubt that the Swazi people cherish *Incwala* Ceremony as a cultural belief system that is core foundational to their identity as a nation. *Incwala Ceremony*, this is deeply rooted in the Swazi traditional belief systems and it is the basis for their religion. Dickson (1984:52) in his *Theology in Africa* attempts to paint the religious nature of Africans and he writes:

Without going into any more detail about misrepresentations of African religion, especially where the attitude to the environment is concerned, we would say that the African's world coheres for him. The Universe is for him a living universe, and he is part of it. To appreciate African religions one has to first appreciate this attitude to environment.

*Incwala* is a rite that is considered to be above all other rites and is viewed as the Swazi way of recognizing God as central to the Swazi core-existence and worldview. It is also observed through the Veneration of ancestors. It is equally true that it attempts to present itself as a channel and the passage of praying **Mvelinchanti**. One cannot undermine the importance of the influence the Ancestral Veneration has in this sacred event. In the Swazi context, things that are meant to be communicated to the Supreme Being or the spirit world must be done in accordance with the approval of **emadloti**. Early Missionaries failed to recognize the elements of African traditional religions such as *Incwala* that would challenge the Gospel and missionary work in future. There was no way to avoid this unfortunately as Mbiti (1971:232) has commented:

Mission Christianity was not from the start prepared to face a serious encounter with either the traditional religions and philosophy, or the modern changes taking place in Africa. The Church here now finds itself in the situation to exist without a theology.

*Incwala* sacred Ceremony is perceived to be another attempt by Swazis to constantly seek God's ways and purposes for mankind. There is therefore a deep devotion within their belief and awareness of **emadloti** and **Mvelinchanti**. There is also an intercession and arbitration through the spirits of the departed (**emadloti**), whereby they are consulted as mediators on behalf of

the living. On the other side national prayers are believed to be eventually heard by ***Mvelinchanti*** through ***emadloti***. This is a preferred traditional way and norm that the nation attempts to engage in as a corporate prayer and ceremonial in their attempt to relate to the unique God, the giver of rain, peace and stability. Through the medium of spirits of the ***emadloti/labaphansi/labalele*** the living communicate to God and make known their desires. After all, the living dead are believed to be closer to Him and are therefore capable of expressing their requests and petitions in a way and language that is believed to be acceptable to Him. ***Emadloti*** are the revered spirits who are believed to be residing in the closer proximity to God the Supreme and are thus wishing us well in this present life. Perrinder (1961:126) has attempted to give advice on how we could reconcile this view:

...Prayers are made to the ancestors, and the only possible way in which such cults could be reconciled to a monotheistic faith would be by permitting prayers to be made for the dead to supreme God.

By venerating the ancestors during the *Incwala* sacred Ceremony, Swazis are not elevating the ancestor or ***emadloti*** to the same level as ***Mvelinchanti***, but rather are using them as a channel to reach out to the same God. It is wise to be acquainted with the Swazi system of beliefs, for in the process it cultivates the attitude of respecting such norms and values. Indeed it is discouraging and

somehow undermining people's core belief system if someone quickly concludes that sacred rites like *Incwala* Ceremony are pagan and evil. At least one should take solace in that there is recognition of the supremacy of God and that should be viewed as a link that could be used effectively in doing mission in the context of the Swazi people and Africans.

Mbiti (1969:59) attempts to highlight the important point regarding the understanding of such beliefs within an African concept regarding the status of ancestors. The living dead are a symbol of communalism, a recognition that the deceased are still kinsmen and a sign of respect and remembrance. It is within this context that *Incwala* sacred ceremony is commemorated. To Swazis, there is a perception held that they are alive and are a link with ***Mvelinchanti***. This cannot be easily divorced from the traditional system beliefs of Swazis, and as a result, it ought to be used as a link and the open door to some form of constructive engagement when dealing with their spirituality and system of beliefs.

### 3.2 Preliminary Concepts

*Incwala* sacred Ceremony could be traced back to the times of Queen Thandile (Tsandzile) or LaZwide (Swazis are fond of calling their wives by their father's first name) who came to the Swazi

people from the Ndwandwes, who were under the leadership of that famous hero Zwide, and is believed to have been very fond of such a ritual. Although historians like Matsebula (1987:330) argue that it is an old ritual that was practiced even before that particular time and period, in the Swazi context, it was re-affirmed and firmly embraced as a value system during this period. Anthropologist Hilder Kuper (in West, 1986:61) sees it as a "... dramatic ritualization of Swazi Kingship in all its complexity-economic, military, ritual..." As can be seen the health, power and prosperity of any King that sits on the throne in the Swazi context is accorded dignity and respected highly.

It goes without saying that *Incwala* is an affirmation of the King's rule and endorsement thereof by ***Mvelinchanti*** and ***emadloti***. If the King is of good standing he will successfully come out of this sacred and ritualistic encounter (passes the tests), then it will be like a confirmation and endorsement as it were by the supernatural powers to lead the nation into yet another year. If for any reason anything does not go according to the expectations and dictates of this ritual rite, he will not survive the sacred ceremony (***ayibuyi inkhosи eNcwaleni***). It is with this understanding that such a sacred ceremony is viewed seriously and accorded such respect and dignity. Christian Missionaries were totally opposed to this rite

because of the use of the traditional herbs. Their bone of contention was why a rite that embraces the use of traditional medicine was to be considered as an attempt to pray to Mvelinchanti, hence their resolve to discard its religious significance.

### 3.2.1 Commencement of the *Incwala* Ceremony

Once the time has matured, (full lunar month) as dictated by traditional astronomers, *Incwala* sacred Ceremony commences when the King who is the center of focus, goes into seclusion because of the *Incwala* ceremony. Those who are familiar with the history of this sacred ceremony can attest to the fact that the country's activities actually slow down, as most of the activities are grounded as the nation fast (*kuyatilwa/kuyazilwa*). The King cannot be expected to listen or entertain any matter where his blessings or intervention are sought. This also serves as a time for reflection and soul searching, hence the commonly held view that it is a time for prayer and fasting. Matsebula (1987:331) writes so well when he says, "From the day **Bemanti** are sent out, the **Ngwenyama** goes into seclusion and is not expected to attend public functions until after the *Incwala* period is over." Every Swazi is made aware of the sacredness of the event and it has since become part and

parcel of the cultural heritage of the nation. To look down upon this sacred ceremony is like despising the powers of ***emadloti*** and ***Mvelinchanti***.

### 3.2.2 ***Bemanti*** – The Mkhatswa Clan (Water Party People)

The Water party (***Bemanti***) is despatched to the East (Indian Ocean) to fetch the water for ritualistic cleansing purposes. They are often separated into two groups, one consisting of the northern group and one of the southern group and they are both sent to fetch the water from the sea. ***Benguni*** of ***eLwandle*** (Mkhatswa) and the ***Benguni beningizimu*** (consisting of the Mngomezulu and Myeni clans) are historically responsible for undertaking this task. Traditionalists claim that the trip to the east is of symbolic nature as Swazis came from the “east” where the sun is rising from. Going to the “east” therefore, is a sign of seeking for good life and health of the King that is supposedly characterized by wisdom and prosperity. The long held view is that entrances to the ***Sibaya*** and ***indlunkhulu*** should face the east as well. Before both groups are sent out they are given instructions and commended to behave. Matsebula (1987:331-2) has written so well about this:

The ceremony of sending out Bemanti is conducted by the King and Indlovukazi at the shrine hut. They sit outside with the leaders of the groups and some senior councilors, between the doorway and the windbreak, provided it is not raining, in which case the ceremony takes place inside the shrine hut. From here the ceremony moves to the sibaya where the King sternly warns Bemanti to behave themselves well along the route and not at all to molest or embarrass the public.”

They both carry with them the famous calabash (**Sigujana or Inkhosatane**). The involvement of **Bemanti** who consist of the Ndwandwes of e-Lwandle is historical and they have been playing the key role during the sacred ceremony itself for quite some time. It is further claimed that they historically came with it to Swazis from the Ndwandwes of KwaZulu-Natal. Going to and from the east is another sacred journey filled with its own episodes that are quite mysterious and quite fearful to say the least. Traditionally it is believed that when they finally arrive at the seashore of the Indian Ocean at the Island of ka-Tembe (the northern group), the calabash will be thrown into the sea to be accepted by the beast (**Silo**) who will then take it away into the depth of the sea. Hence in the praises you will often here “**Okandaba uyiSilo**” (the King is equated to the mighty beast of the sea). In a couple of days the calabash will then emerge from the sea floating

towards the Water party<sup>12</sup> full of water and the might of the sea, believed to be endowed with majesty and power that will eventually be conferred to the reigning King at the height of the ritualistic performances of *Incwala*. There is another view though that the water that the **Bemanti** fetches is not necessarily from the sea. It is from the intercession of the two rivers Komati and Mbuluzi in Mozambique (Matsebula 1987:331). Such a view is still hotly debated though as recent research on this indicates that it is the water from the sea that **Bemanti** are sent to get for *Incwala*.

### 3.2.3 **Benguni Beningizimu – Mngomezulu and Myenis**

The second group of the **Bemanti** consists of another important group of people that plays a pivotal role during the *Incwala* sacred ceremony; these are the Mngomezulu and the Myeni of Ngwavuma (**BeNguni Beningizimu**)<sup>13</sup>, who presently are residing at eNdzenvane and eLubulwini respectively. This group of people initially were living peacefully at Ngwavuma valley north east of KwaZulu-Natal just below the Mozambique southern boundary. They played

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<sup>12</sup> Bemanti people are a group of the warriors from the Ndwandwe Clan of eLwandle outside Manzini. They are tasked with the duty of ensuring that the water from the east used for cleansing the king during the rituals done at the height of the Incwala Ceremony is available. They are key role players in the kingship-making process, and are known to be experts in the ritual process of the sacred ceremony.

<sup>13</sup> BeNguni Beningizimu, are also key role players during Incwala they originally are tasked with the duty of bringing the Luselwa (Calabash) that forms part of the rituals. They are from the Southern part of Swaziland and were residents of eNgwavuma.

their role and performed their duties accordingly during the *Incwala* Ceremony up until uprisings erupted in the late seventies and early eighties where Inkatha followers declared war on them following the claims that the Ngwavuma area historically belongs to the Swazi nation, but was taken away during the scrambling for Africa and erecting of boundaries. At the height of these uprisings, they then left Ngwavuma and finally sought asylum during the times of King Sobhuza II's reign and were then settled at Lubulwini area, where they have been ever since. Before then, they used to religiously perform their duties to Swazis.

**Benguni Beningizimu**<sup>14</sup> are also despatched to take the southern trip to the Delagoa Bay (as southern group) to do almost the same thing the eLwandle people are sent to do. What is of paramount importance though is that during this festival they bring along '**Luselwa**'<sup>15</sup> another wild fruit shaped like a calabash is collected by the Southern group in Ngwavuma area that is also to be eaten by the King as part

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<sup>14</sup> See also page 43

<sup>15</sup> **Luselwa** is a wild fruit eaten at the height of the ceremony and there are rituals that are undertaken as it is eaten together with certain cleansing herbs. Once the King has eaten its contents, the calabash is then thrown away to mark the main day of the *Incwala* ceremony itself. Tradition has it that it is not supposed to land on the ground, but someone amongst the warriors should catch it.

of tasting the “first fruits”, hence the praises given to him ‘*Indlaluselwa*.’

All key role players and clans within the Swazi nation play their important part for the success of the *Incwala* sacred Ceremony and this is an exercise which involves everyone (*ayibukelwa*). One reason advanced for having the two groups sent to fetch water is that in case something goes wrong with the one other group there will still be possibility that the other one will eventually bring the required sacred water instead. The trip lasts for a week or so as the groups walk in a pilgrimage a distance of about 200Km to the Indian Ocean and back on foot. Along the way they will be singing war songs as their pilgrimage is equated to going to battle on behalf of the Kingdom.<sup>16</sup> Once the *Bemanti* return then *Incwala* Ceremony commences in full swing. Matsebulu (1987:333) has written so beautifully about this:

On the afternoon of the day the moon is said to die before the new one appears the following evening, Bemanti carrying two emakhosatana and some ritual medicines enter the traditional sibaya by the main entrance through which

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<sup>16</sup> The pilgrimage is undertaken as part of observing and in keeping with its cultural significance of keeping with the “old order” and preserving it. Along the way as the warriors pass through chiefdoms dressed in their Incwala traditional regalia, the chiefs along the way are expected to show their support by giving them food and any other provision in ensuring that the pilgrimage is a great success. A lot of collaboration takes place because this is a vital ritual that has its core foundation in the process of the making of the kingship. Tradition has it that even during the wars in Mozambique, the Tembe and Shangaan clans were very much aware that they needed to provide passage for the Swazi warriors (Bemanti) to the sea and ensure their safety.

they left. The leaders sing the praises of the Kings and when he finishes he and the rest move up next to inhlambelo...

What is worth noting though is that during this time there will be the singing of the “Kings praises” as it is actually an attempt to communicate with the spirits of ***emadloti***. They are believed to be closer to ***Mvelinchanti*** and are continually watching over Swazis and somehow influencing the direction of the national affairs. ***Emadloti*** imparts to the king and the elders wisdom through visions and dreams to lead the nation to prosperity as well as maintaining national unity. It is not surprising that you often hear other elderly people claiming to have seen visions or have heard voices in their dreams of their fathers communicating important instructions with messages for the welfare of the Swazi nation and at times their own families. Even the King from time to time does shares such personal experiences during the height of this festival. Setolane (1986:16) share the same sentiments when he writes:

...Whenever an African speaks about this experience of contact with Badimo it is about a person to person contact, not of a vision or an apparition the words used to relate the experiences are; “Ke bone ntate” I have seen my father

### 3.2.4 The return of Bemanti

As the **Bemanti** make their way back to the traditional capital (**Indlunkhulu**), which is a ceremonial and spiritual capital, their arrival will be welcomed in song and celebration. There will be an attempt to report their successful expedition to the **emadloti** (**babike indlela neluhambo Iwabo**). This marks the commencement of the little *Incwala* Ceremony (**Incwala lencane**). Such a celebration of the arrival of the water party and their safety becomes yet another milestone of the commemoration of the sacred ceremony. The coming in of the calabash (**sgujana or inkhosatane**) is so important that every person has reason to celebrate as it carries the very important significant water for the cleansing part of the *Incwala* itself. **Labaphasi/emadloti** would then be reported to regarding the success of the trip of the **Bemanti** and this will be viewed as an approval and affirmation, because like a triumphant entry of a successful army, their trip is perceived as like going into war. Thus their successful return is considered a conquest of their foes. Every activity during this sacred period is believed to be blessed and sanctioned by the spirit of the living dead (**emadloti/labalele**) and ultimately **Mvelinchanti**, hence a need to commemorate any

successful endeavour undertaken. The King as the maker of enemies (***Mbangazitha***) considers this a blessing because it would affirm that he has conquered even his enemies as the water party people returns.

### 3.2.5 Administration of muti by Traditional Healers

While the ***Bemanti*** party are busy with their assigned tasks, back at the traditional capital, in this case ***eLudzidzini***, there will be yet other ritualistic performances by the traditional ***muti*** people, who will be administering traditional herbs (***muti***) in their resolve to strengthen the King (***Bayayicinisa***).

If you are part of the traditional regiments (***emabutfo***) you will be exposed to Traditional Healers administering and mixing the herbs and all the mysterious activities that are believed to be part of invoking powers that go with the kingship.

During such times Swazis will even use the proverb or idiom that indicates that there is so much usage of muti, '***Umutsi udlala bantfwana***', basically implying that children also will have a field day playing with the very muti. Fortune tellers on the other hand (***Tangoma neTinhloli or Baphenguli***) will be using their own spiritual powers of foretelling the future as

they cast their bones, seeking even those who are enemies of the Kingship and thus calling for neutralization of their bad intentions and evil thoughts (*bayehlulekiswa*). The office of Kingship and the person in that position is considered eligible to be making enemies by his very declarations and pronouncements, and thus he needs divine protection and intervention of the Ancestors and *Mvelinchanti*.

### 3.3 **Lusekwanne Ceremony (Part of a pre-*Incwala* event)**

This is a very important ceremony that is commemorated as part of *Incwala* rite. The young boys who would have not engaged in sexual relations with women will then be summoned by the *Indvuna* (traditional Prime Minister) to the Queen mother's residence that is regarded as ceremonial and traditional headquarters for such a sacred ceremony. Their duties during this festival are to gather the special shrub that is used in building the sacred enclosure called '*Inhlambelo*'.<sup>17</sup>

This sacred shrub is used to build *Inhlambelo* which is built inside the bigger *sibaya* (kraal) and it is where further cleansing rituals are to be undertaken during the height of the *Incwala*

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<sup>17</sup> Tradition has it that the shrub of the young men who are not sexually active will retain its freshness even though the branches have been cut from its mother tree, while those whose branches have wilted are then beaten up and chased away from the group because they would have been declared promiscuous and thus having brought about shame to the regiment. Whether this can be proven scientifically remains an interesting one indeed.

sacred Ceremony and festival. Perhaps it is important to mention that ***sibaya*** generally speaking forms a central part as it is a very sacred place within the royal kraal itself including the entire Swazi family especially those in rural areas. In case of the Royal household, it is at ***eSibayeni*** that national meetings are converged and national issues discussed including the pronouncements by the King. ***Sibaya*** then can be viewed as a unifying symbol where the spirits of the Ancestors dwell and are connected with the living.

By partaking in the cutting of the Lusekwane<sup>18</sup>, the young regiments who are after all very active, will show their sign of respect. During the times of King Sobhuza II, the *Gcina* and *iNkhanyeti* regiments were active, in Mswati III's reign the *Inyatsi* regiments are accorded that honour. It should be mentioned that during the long march to the main region where the shrubs grows (***esikhale ni selusekwane***) the boys are taught to value their cultural heritage and adherence to the traditions of the nation that is cemented on the ideals and principles of according respect for the elderly. The king's influence is affirmed during such opportunities as the young men will then join the traditional regiments (***bagane inkhosi – babutseke***), once they take such

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<sup>18</sup> A traditional shrub whose branches and leaves are used to built the sacred enclosure (inhlambelo) inside the cattle byre (kraal).

an oath, and by so doing they would have fulfilled their national duty of paying allegiance to the monarchy. The Nguni tribes generally speaking believe very strongly in grooming the boys. The Xhosas an example take the young boys to circumcision and initiation schools where they are then taught the responsibilities of manhood. During the **Lusekwane** cutting ceremony and subsequent weeding of Infabantfu (King's fields) elderly men resume their advisory role of passing down the values and norms to younger regiments as part of grooming them to entering into manhood. This is also done at their huts (**etihhoncweni/emalawini**) within the royal residences.

### 3.4 The Rituals and the Key role players of the *Incwala* sacred Ceremony

*Incwala* sacred ceremony has its own songs that are only to be sung during this sacred ceremony. They cannot be repeated or sung in any other event once this sacred festival is over. Matsebula (1987:333) has described it so remarkably, “This stage is termed the opening of the *ncwala* hymns. They may only be sung from this time until the moment the King throws luselwa Iwe-Embo<sup>19</sup> on the main day...” There is also special traditional regalia (**imvunulo**) that is to be used during this time.

**Inyoni, sigeja umdada** and **ingwe** are some of the regalia that

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<sup>19</sup> See page 47 footnote 15.

the warriors put on and it is not every commoner who wears such regalia, but it depends on the status and seniority of the person concerned. The stage will now be set for the rituals of the *Incwala*, which again are not done publicly and are not to be handled by the ruling Dlamini dynasty (***Ematfonga***), but are reserved for those clans and entrusted people, who carry such a heavy responsibility of ensuring the continued reign of the ruling monarchy to his ultimate end. The king's life is now handed over to the kingship's makers to perform and carry out the rituals.

#### 3.4.1 ***Sesulamsiti (Lamatsebula - the Ceremonial wife)***

Ideally during the height of this festival the King is to undergo a ritual cleansing as stated earlier.<sup>20</sup> As part of that intricate process, the Kingship makers are to check his manhood (***budvodza bakhe***), because a King cannot command respect if he is unable one-way or the other to fulfill his obligation of meeting the sexual needs of his wives, as well as bearing children. The King therefore will be given herbs (***libangalala***) and at the height of the cleansing process inside the erected enclosure (***Enhlambelweni***) he will be expected to prove his manhood with the ceremonial wife, while the selected kingship makers are watching. Proving his manhood will be yet another indication that he is still a 'man'

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<sup>20</sup> See page 38-39.

and therefore capable of leading the nation, thus receiving an approval and affirmation from the ancestors and ***Mevelinchanti***.

#### **3.4.2 *Masilela and Mavuso – (Some of the Muti people)***

As already indicated the role of ***muti*** people is reserved for trusted servants of the King and they are viewed as trustworthy custodians of the crown and loyal servants. The Masilela and Mavuso clans are some of the well-known clans who are entrusted with such tasks, especially during the *Incwala* Sacred ceremony. While the King is at liberty to consult other muti people during the year, at this time of the year his life is in the hands of the Masilela and Mavuso clans. Of course as to how they are chosen remains a mystery, but other traditional authorities claim that it is a hereditary procedure, whereby a man was administering the same muti, then one of his sons or even closer relative would then be earmarked to take over this role if he had passed away.

#### **3.4.3 *Symbolism of the Black Bull - Kubulal'inkhunzi***

One interesting activity that is performed by the boys after cutting the Lusekwane shrub is to prove their power and

might in the killing of the ceremonial Black bull. As part of the process of cleansing, the King inside the enclosure will wash away all bad omen and all forms of bad intentions by his enemies over the ceremonial black bull inside the *inhlambelo*. The bull that will have been tied up while the rituals were taking place will then be set loose and the hundreds or even thousands of members of the regiments will then have to kill it with their bare fists. As it would be carrying upon itself the bad intentions and curses as it were that would have otherwise been directed to the king, it comes out intoxicated and carrying upon itself all these evil spirits. Once it is killed it is then skinned and roasted and is to be eaten there and then. The King would have now been set free from any bad luck or omen and is now ready to face the challenges of the coming year as he would lead the nation to prosperity, peace and stability.

#### 3.4.4 *Throwing of the Gourd (A Melacholy Canticle) – Kujikwa*

##### *Kweluselwa:*

There is an important occasion when the King is to be seen as the head of the Dlamini, but then he is then given over to the commoners to perform another important ritual of throwing away of the gourd (**kuphoswa kweluselwa**) that

was brought by the BeNguni Beningizimu (the other Bemanti sent to Ngwavuma area). The chasing away of the Dlamini from near the king concludes this activity. Matsebula (1987:336) describes it as follows;

The warriors surge after the blood royals. Eventually the Ngwenyama disappears into the sacred enclosure where he dresses in a more historic and ritual costume... Then a shout is heard: "Awaphume ematfonga" (Let the Tfongas i.e. Dlamini leave the byre). Soon thereafter the Ngwenyama throws the ritual gourd known as luselwa lwe-Embo..."

#### 3.4.5 *The rainmaker – Lamotsa*

One of the expectations of the nation from their King is that he should be seen to be able to be the rainmaker in times of drought. The King as the symbol of stability health and prosperity of Swazis should be seen to be able to rise above natural disasters and be able to cause rain for the vegetation and cultivation of the fields. Hence the Motsa people are referred to as those who cause the rain to fall '**Bomvulane.**' It should be stated that all this happens around the *Incwala* Sacred ceremony. Of course there will be times when the king is approached to make rain even outside this period, again the Motsa people, especially the ceremonial wife LaMotsa and her people, will be involved in the process.

There is this belief that when the King inspects the guard of honour before joining the thousands of traditional warriors and there are diplomatic representatives to watch the event, then that is *Incwala*, but to me it is just a culmination of the ceremony and not the real sacred ceremony. Otherwise the real *Incwala* happens as a process and a lot of events are done at night in the privacy of ***Inhlambelo*** and ***Indlunkhulu***. This is a process and there are many factors at play for its success, one such fact that cannot be denied are the constant consultations of the ***emadloti***, especially those of the departed kings. They are forever believed to be present because they are the living dead, whose involvement through this process is sought and hence the nation continues enjoying peace, stability and unity.

In the next chapter an evaluation of the Ancestral Veneration as part of a belief system that has shaped the views about the Supreme Deity within Swazis will be undertaken. It is an understatement to even mention that it is firmly embedded in the religious life of Swazis and is sometimes used as a reference to how to relate and communicate with the Supreme God within the Ancestral Veneration as means of a vehicle for communication between the living, the living

dead and ultimately to Mvelinchanti to communicate with the nation. This is part of the African theology that continues to cement the Ancestral Veneration that is at the core of the traditional system of beliefs that has continued to withstand the challenges brought about by modernity and Western Christian attempts to transform the African religious life. Walls (2002:121) has rightly observed so well when he writes:

The continuity in African religion pre-Christian and Christian, is due in large measure to continuing world views the application of the material of the Christian traditional to already existing African maps of the universe. It has been the most fruitful single source of misunderstanding of African Christianity that the continuance of such maps somehow makes the resultant practice less Christian.

## Chapter 4

### **OUTSTANDING CHARACTERISTICS OF *INCWALA* – ANCESTRAL VENERATION AS PART OF THE TRADITIONAL RELIGION.**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Africa recognizes only one God, the Supreme, Universal God...one and same God, the Creator of all the ends of the earth... Idowu (1957:12). To take the ancestors from an African is robbing him of his personality. Senna in Bediako (1992:216)

The greatest challenge when approaching any African traditional religion and indeed a sacred rite like ***Incwala*** Ceremony is that one may be much tempted to make unfortunate conclusions without realizing the deep spiritual meaning attached to it by Swazis. At the core of the debate is the realization that there seems to be no respect by the missiologists accorded to this fundamental reality, except to condemn such without an informed research or study especially when it borders around the issue of ancestors. Unfortunately sweeping statements have become the backbone of judging other people's religious orientation and spirituality in Christian missions. The fact of the matter is that God was and still is at work in the lives of Swazis even through the *Incwala* Ceremony. It is with this in mind that Max Warren (Race 1983:3) has given a warning to missiologists:

Our first task in approaching other people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on men's dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival.

This is so true when discussing about the *Incwala*, because it is such a spiritual act by Swazis that their devotion to ***Mvelinchanti*** is evident and sincere. Mbiti (1969:3-4) shares the same sentiments when he writes:

Because traditional religion permeates all departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and secular, between the religions and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material of life. Wherever the African is, there is religion.

The Swazi people as already argued, through the *Incwala* sacred Ceremony portray their own traditional religious inclination.<sup>21</sup> As in showing their resolve to uphold its religious significance in their lives they are forever devoted to it as it connects them to the Supreme Being. As part of the life and worldview of the Swazi people, this sacred religious life is a genuine attempt by the people to relate to very God who hates evil, so that through Ancestral Veneration the nation derives a sense of belonging and togetherness. After all they believe that will eventually live in peace and stability.

Through this ceremony, a traditional Swazi is guaranteed some form of protection from the forces of the evil one, as any bad intentions targeted to the King and his people can be rebuked and avoided through Ancestral Veneration and the yearly national prayer during the *Incwala* festival.<sup>22</sup> Such a religious mindset and act by the Swazi people cannot be ignored as it is a high level of spirituality and it is worth tracing the significance as we will now examine and interrogate the implication of Ancestral

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<sup>21</sup> See page 38.

<sup>22</sup> See also page 40.

Veneration as part of celebrating *Incwala* Ceremony. Any traditional religion that embraces good intentions and frowns at all forms of evil should be encouraged. *Incwala* is characterized by this very reality of hatred of evil and therefore should be embraced by Swazi missiologists who must begin to engage it as an attempt at doing missions and reaching out to the Swazi people with the message of the Gospel. Any form of good intention that has the goodwill of the people in a given context should be a welcomed link and doorway of doing mission. The Christian church is at fault and equally guilty of undermining such a religious rite that would have had positive impact on the agenda of mission in Swaziland. Baeta in Bediako (1992: 269) has commented so well about this unfortunate scenario, “It was a serious mistake that the Church took no account of the indigenous beliefs and customs of Africa when she began the work of evangelization.”

Historically Christian missiologists have been at fault and indeed guilty of having undermined the spirituality of sacred ceremonies like *Incwala* with its Ancestral Veneration emphasis by Swazis. Instead converts were being called to do away with such practices. No wonder Christianity has not had an impact as they have remained firm in their beliefs and their the world and life view. These have people have resisted any change and withheld any test from the very other foreign influence. Bediako (1992:269) has rightly put it: “...Africans were somehow being required to shed their

Africanness as part of the process of becoming Christians..." This has indeed a test for Christian witness in Swaziland.

It is beyond any reasonable doubt though that the coming of the missionaries has somehow diluted such a rich Swazi traditional religion and as such it becomes quite difficult to call for reconsideration of traditional ceremonies like *Incwala*. The preconceived mindsets by missiologists of thinking that there is absolutely nothing good that can come out of ceremonies like *Incwala* is indeed regrettable. We cannot deny the fact that before missionaries came to Swaziland already there was a form of religion that was practiced and acceptable to a Supreme God. It is a big mistake to want to alter such religions without appreciating their significant role and the meaning they have to the people concerned.

In many instances the Christian missionaries continued being enemies of any positive impact Christianity would have made on the Swazi traditional religions. What was bound to happen was that tensions were created unnecessarily because of the manner in which the Gospel was presented. Instead of seeking for dialogue and mutual understanding of the traditional religions, there was a lot of imposing of the western Christianity expectations that at times became a hindrance for missions and evangelism thrust. A certain high level of respect for the traditional religions is more critical than ever before and would be a welcomed ideal

way forward of doing mission in Swaziland. This ‘better than them’ syndrome that white missionaries have knowingly or not, has indeed destroyed any success that we would have had. Christian missionaries have always attempted to alter the traditional religious life of a given people. Swaziland is no exception as we present continue to be faced with unnecessary tensions and poor relationships created that have been going on for quite some time between the adherents of traditional religion as practiced by the Swazi through *Incwala* Ceremony and the Christian Missionaries. The church has continued to be viewed as a catalyst of change and champion in castrating everything that Africans have been embracing as religious framework of relating to God through the traditional religion since time immemorial. Saayman (1995:2) has rightly observed:

Altering historical realities such as shifts in economic or military power, changes in regimes, etc, result in ever-mutating relationships between adherents of differing religious convictions.

#### **4.2 Emadloti are part of the Swazi life**

Ancestral Veneration is part of the Swazi people just like any other tribe in the Southern part of Africa. It is attached to their belief system and is deeply rooted to their way of life. Mbiti (1996:170) has written something that attempts to paint a disturbing picture of how ancestors were viewed negatively by the Westerners:

Starting in the nineteenth century, foreign missionaries, colonial administrators and overseas anthropologists gave their home countries the first inkling of African Religion

which, as is well known, they often painted in the most gruesome terms, mostly with very wrong interpretations.

Most African traditional systems of beliefs in general hold the view that **emadloti** (ancestors) are part of their lives and are believed to be equally capable of influencing the events of this life. This underlying belief system is firmly established in the traditional religion mindset of the Swazi people that the dead are actually alive. Such a view is strongly rooted in the life and worldview of every Swazi hence the reference to the ancestors as the '**labalele**' (those who are sleeping) and it is closely associated with the African theology notion that they are the 'Living dead'. The term, 'Living dead' has become part of the religious orientation of the African people and even within the Swazi people is embedded in their religious orientation. Swazis like any other African tribe will go all out to pay their respects to the 'departed' ones; in fact they are revered by Swazis as viewed as part of their culture.

*Incwala* sacred Ceremony is part of that traditional system of beliefs of the Swazi and when the nation commemorates it they are actually paying honour and respect to the departed Kings, and eventually offering thanks and appreciations to **Mvelinchanti** the true Supreme God. Thorne (1992:1) affirms this when he writes, "...Throughout Africa there is a prevalent belief in Ancestral spirits... A belief in Ancestral Spirits, the Shades or recently dead

(sometimes called ‘Living dead’...” It should therefore be highlighted that in any given African context both religion and culture are closely associated and cannot be easily divorced. African theology is founded on the very pillar of the African Traditional System of Beliefs, and is further enforced by the awareness that God who is the creator, is indeed the giver of life to all living beings and is involved in all aspects of their living. The ancestors are therefore a bridge that Swazis attempt to relate to that very Supreme Being, ***Mvelinchanti***. It is also equally important to note that both culture and religion within the African mindset and indeed that of Swazis in particular are very close to their hearts.

Dickson (1984:47) correctly spells it out when he writes:

This means that the culture of a people embraces its economics, politics, legal systems, and all the other societal systems and arrangements set up to ensure the welfare of the community. Moreover, in some societies all this is inseparable from religion; certainly in African society culture and religion are not easily separated. Religion is regular accompaniment in a person’s life; chief’s role, the relations between members of a society, morality, the stages in a person’s life... All these areas are not disassociated from religion in traditional African society.

#### 4.3 Death does not separate ***Emadloti*** from those living

Swazi people have a long held view that death does not completely separate the ***emadloti*** from the living. There is a strong belief and view that those who “fall asleep” become a link between the living and ***Mvelinchanti***. It goes without saying that in the spirit they are still part

of any given family. Setiloane (1986:17) has attempted to explain this when advocating for the consideration of this system of beliefs within the African context. He claims that,

The interaction of one's "seriti" (Vital forces) with those of the other people in the community does not terminate with the dead. Even after death the vital forces participation of the deceased is experienced in the community in general and in the home and clan circle in particular.

Such a Swazi traditional life and world view leaves one with a sense of certainty that it is almost impossible to divorce Swazis from their Ancestral Veneration which is part of their traditional system of beliefs. In fact, why should one even attempt to do such a mammoth task because people's beliefs should be treated with some respect as their beliefs are just as sacred. It is, however, worth mentioning that Missionaries in Swaziland failed dismally to force Swazis to get rid of change these views, so that even after giving their teachings to the new converts, Swazis still feels duty bound to venerate their departed ones. Even today, in the privacy of their homes far away from the churches and missionary localities Swazis venerate their ancestors. To Swazis this is their way of life and if anyone were to deny such interaction between the dead and living it will be like calling Swazis to denounce their own identity and heritage.

#### **4.4 Good behaviour makes one becomes a good ancestor**

There is a long held view that a person's life conduct and behaviour does in fact give a clue as to what kind of ancestral 'spirit' they will eventually become after they have departed from the land of the living. Swazis believe very strongly that a good person who lives a honourable life by conducting oneself well and caring for the people will eventually become a 'good' ancestor. Taylor in Thorpe (1991:5) comments about this,

African people are inclined to objectify attitudes and feelings such as jealousy, hatred, and fear so that what happens inside a person spills out to touch not only other people, but even the environment as well. This negative, selfish attitude may take on a life of their own, as it were and be conceptualized as witches and sorcerers.

This unfortunately has a direct bearing on the spirituality of the Africans and it goes without saying that Ancestral Veneration has tended to impact such beliefs that eventually shape the spiritual World of Swazis. It is, however, regrettable that the missionary evangelistic programmes never made an effort to engage Swazis in an attempt to learn more about their core traditional beliefs, one of which is Ancestral Veneration. One would have thought that through dialogue they would have had made a great contribution in finding common beliefs and then develop linkages between the western Christian faith and the traditional system of beliefs. It is the separation of these two systems of beliefs that has led to so much tension and resistance as Swazis felt that they are being forced to

forego their traditional beliefs and then are expected to embrace the western approach to religion.

#### **4.5 Status of ancestors within the Swazi traditional beliefs system**

Within the African traditional system of beliefs there are concerns that have become a bone of contention whereby missionaries tend to undermine African theology. They demonized every form of spirituality. Even Ancestral Veneration was viewed as barbaric and against the Bible and the teachings of the Christian faith. The truth of the matter is that the African traditional system of belief has no dogma and written scriptures it is based on the experiences of people and is passed down by the elders as part of people's culture. When it is practiced in any given context one can be passed down to the next generation as a form of a cultural orientation of which any nation can be proud.

It is quite disappointing that Swazis are then expected to easily divorce themselves from their traditional beliefs. The truth of the matter is that any form of a belief system or theology of a given people is heavily influenced by the cultural heritage and religion. Mushete in Kubi & Torres (1979: 27) "African Theology attempts to take due account of Africans to whom culture, religion, and civilization. It advocates the right of Africans to whom the faith is addressed. It takes note of African Christian's culture religion, and civilization. It advocates the right of

African Christians to ponder Christianity and its truth in their own terms..." This is very crucial when contemplating the implications of Ancestral Veneration and how it attempts to relate to the Supreme God.

Ancestors are believed to be living on the other side of this life, but yet ever present in the land of the living too. It is assumed that they daily relate to the living and interact with them during the good or even bad times. As a matter of fact, they are believed to be behind the events that unfold in the day-to-day living. ***Emadloti*** are perceived and believed to be higher beings and considered spiritual but not equated to ***Mvelinchanti***. God is supreme and in the Zulu context He is often referred to as ***uNkulunkulu*** (the Great Great one). The ancestors are said to be spirits who appear and communicate through dreams or visions by those who are adherents of the African traditional religion. It should be said that from time to time they will make claims that are so real and personal about their own encounter with their departed relatives. Sitoalane (1986:18) has commented so interestingly about this: "Whenever an African speaks about this experience of contact with *Badimo* it is about a person to person contact, not of a vision..." Such personal convictions and encounters are not easy to refute, but suffice to say that they can also be open to abuse, manipulation and interpretation. There is, however, a long held view that the ancestors

are indeed able to communicate with the living in any manner and fashion they so choose. This is core to African traditional belief not forgetting that there are close relationships between ancestors and the very Christ (the Great ancestor) whom Christians worships. Bediako (1995:218-8) has argued:

Because ancestors, even in their realm of spirit existence, remain in African understanding essentially human just like ourselves, they cannot therefore ultimately be rivals of Christ in Christian consciousness. Just as there exists a qualitative distinction between Christ as ancestor and natural ancestors.

#### **4.6 Ancestors are venerated and not worshipped**

While the Ancestral Veneration theme happens at a personal level, most Swazis are of the view that all festivals associated with ancestors should not be viewed as an attempt to worship them. Rather, theirs is just a form of remembrance where the living people pay their respects to them for who they are in their lives, as they are a vehicle and channel to reaching the true God. Christian missionaries often claim that they brought God with them to Swaziland, when in actual fact they found Swazis already worshipping the very same God like other Africans as a Supreme deity. It is therefore not fair to conclude that these missionaries brought God to Africa. Even renowned African theologians like Mbiti (1980:817) are quite vocal about this: "... God described in the Bible is the same God who was already known in the framework of traditional African religion." To claim that Swazis are not

well informed about God's existence is indeed regrettable and undermining their religious orientation. *Incwala* Ceremony and Ancestral Veneration as practiced within the Swazi context are footprints that there is foreknowledge that God exists, and attempts are forever made to communicate with Him through these rites and festivals.

#### **4.7 Complexities associated with Ancestral Veneration**

After having briefly scanned through some views regarding the beliefs that are behind the theme of Ancestral Veneration, perhaps it is quite crucial that one now reflect more on some of the complexities that emerge when discussing this theme.

##### **4.7.1 Ancestral Veneration is part of the culture**

It is quite clear that Swazi Churches in particular should reconsider their stand regarding the Ancestral Veneration by Swazis. At the very heart of the Swazi traditional system of beliefs is hidden the truthful value system that ancestors are part of their culture and to pay some form of respect to them is indeed crucial if one wants to appease them. This is blended as part of the cultural heritage and life view, where communication between the living and dead is entered into through some spiritual mediums, visions and indeed dreams. This form of

communication is part and parcel of the religious system of the Swazi and *Incwala* sacred Ceremony in particular. Perrinder (1961:126) has written something that throws more light on this subject; “prayers are made to the ancestors, and the only possible way in such cults could be reconciled to the monotheistic faith would be by permitting prayers to be made for the ancestors to the supreme God.” It is with this in mind that Swazis venerate the dead a means to enter into some form of dialogue with the other spiritual world.

#### **4.7.2 Ancestral Veneration as means of faith**

Ancestral Veneration, which basically is means of faith by which one communicates with the ancestors with the understanding that they are capable of interceding on one’s behalf, is an interesting phenomenon. To a Swazi mindset and rationale ancestors command certain power that is believed to be capable of shaping the events and as they are believed to be behind the success and failure of any given family. Suffice to say that there is a long held view that ancestors are responsible for the destiny of any member of a given family as nothing is done without their involvement or even sanction. There is a strong recognition that they should be venerated because they care about families’ welfare and should be called upon to intervene in matters of

success in life, health and family crisis that may befall families.

Mbiti (1969:59) comments about this view: "...The living dead are a symbol of communality, recognition that the deceased are still kinsmen and a sign of respect and remembrance." It is imperative that one respects such a traditional system of beliefs because somehow Swazis view ancestors as still related to the mortality of the soul as espoused by the Christian faith and the teachings of the Bible. This view seems to indicate that there is life after the grave. Now to maintain that linkage, Ancestral Veneration becomes the ideal vehicle and norm to Swazis and a form of belief system. Fashole` Luke in Bediako (1995:225) sums this up:

"...African ancestral cults are 'expressions of the family and tribal solidarity and continuity' and what was needed was theology of the communion of saints that will satisfy the passionate desire of Africans and non-Christians alike, to be linked with the dead ancestors..."

#### **4.7.3 Communication with ancestors and associated rituals**

Communication with the ***emadloti*** happens within the context of rituals and sacrifice of animals as part of appeasing them. Some families within the Swazi will go all out organizing the feasts and festivals as part of the Veneration process. A sacred cow (***Inkhomo yemadloti***) is set aside and is slaughtered during such festivals and family rituals are part of the high spirituality

level of Swazis. Such a “sacred” cow is well taken care of and never treated like any ordinary cow. After all it is a sacred cow that carries on its shoulders the hopes and aspirations of the living family members and their connectedness with the ancestors. A traditional beer is often brewed and given in honour of the “living dead” during such ceremonies. Such festivals are held after consultations within the family elders who by virtue of their seniority are custodians of such rites and anyone who wants to conduct such events cannot do them without their sanction and blessing. Lungu (1982:44) argues so strongly in advocating for discarding such events and claims that there should be no worship at all offered to the ancestors because they are not God. But he seems to miss one point that is crucial, and that is, the devotion Swazis in particular accord to the dead through such rituals and festivals are not an attempt to worship ancestors, but rather an endeavor to relate to a Supreme power. This is a form of offering thanks to them and seeking their intervention one way or the other in the many challenges people face in good times. This is also part of Swazis’ resolve to venerate ancestors and inculcated in their value system where there is deep craving for celebrating such festivals in a communal setting as part of strengthening family bonds.

#### **4.7.4 Ancestral Veneration as a link with the spiritual world**

Ancestral Veneration should also be viewed as a core cultural linkage within a given clan. It is a quality time when relatives are able to get together even if there might be some differences on certain issues, but at this time they are put aside. It is like a healing process and the rekindling of family ties that brings back fond memories of the past and of course a sense of belonging is rekindled cultivated. Mthimkhulu in Setiloane (1996:9) throws some light on how an African family feels about such an event:

The social ties binding the African to his extended family and clan have always been stronger than the forces of separation that arise from members of different denominations. The important family occasions like births, marriages, funerals and clan festivals bring together in one place... relatives with confessional background

The family will then be able to celebrate their achievement and even failure by being supportive to each other in times of difficulties, which other members might be facing. Unity is then attained and the family bonds tend to be strengthened as this encourages community and a sense of belonging. However, it should be emphasized that when families celebrate such festivals neighbours will also be invited to the feast as generally speaking families are equally concerned about good

neighbourliness. The involvement of other people in these festivals is also an attempt to avoiding ethnicity or any other ethnocentric and negative attitudes to people tend to have against others. After all Swazis believe in good communal living and peaceful co-existence with neighbours. This might as well be seen as part of cementing those relationships and encouraging peaceful co-existence within communities.

#### **4.7.5 Ancestors are not equal to God**

Perhaps it is equally important to mention that Ancestral Veneration should not imply that ***emadloti*** are being equated to the Supreme God. Swazis just like any other Nguni people and indeed Africans, have a deep-rooted respect and fear of God who is believed to be creator and sustainer of the universe. He is the God who gives rain to both, the good and the evil, as well as even causing the sun to shine up them all because of His mercy and love. Veneration of ancestors does not replace Swazis' belief and faith in God who should be revered and worshiped. The very notion of worshiping ancestors is basically a western problem that is imposed on Africans by missionaries as argued by Setiloane (1986:17): "... The confusion was made even worse by the fact that among the Sotho-Tswana the name that described them –***badimo***- is undoubtedly derived from the same

root as the name the Missionaries decided to use in translation of their concept of ‘God.’” As already indicated Swazis will then argue that their Veneration of ancestors cannot be equated to worship, because in actual fact, only ***Mvelinchanti*** deserve to be worshipped. Dankwa in Bediako (1995:219) has brought to the fore another dimension in this debate when addressing the same theme but basing it on the Ancestral Veneration and experience within the Akans of Eastern Ghana, when he forcefully argues that:

The Akans regard ancestors still as heads and parts of the family or communities to which they belonged while they were living human beings...Since Akans are not supposed to worship anybody within the living community, it follows that the ancestors, being part and parcel of the living community, also cannot be worshiped.

#### 4.7.6 ***Kubuyiswa* ceremony as part of Ancestral Veneration**

Hidden within the rite of the Veneration of ancestors is the long held view and belief that a human soul departs from the living body and is then transformed into a spirit and lives in the other world. The ancestral spirit will then become a messenger of the living and a link, hence the long held view that ancestors will then “oversee” and “protect” those who are on earth. It is often not a hidden fact that the ‘***kubuyisa***’ ceremony is then conducted, whereby the spirit of the dead person is brought back to be part of the family. The spirit of the ancestors is considered very

powerful within the African traditional system of beliefs. Daneel (1989:136) in his notes on the same theme says, "The Traditional African experience has a dimension of trust in and dependence on the protection of the ancestors.' This then gives yet another insight in understanding why a Swazi in particular will go all out to appease the 'Living dead'. There is a deep-rooted belief that those who do such rituals enjoy some form of good luck and are promised greater success in their life. In fact, others have claimed that peace often prevails in the families of those who have not given up on this rite of venerating the ancestors. Lest one underestimate the power of the traditional belief system of the people, Swazis go all out when they venerate ancestors as Mbiti (1969:4) has observed:

What people do is motivated by what they believe springs from what they do and experience. So then, belief and action in African traditional society cannot be separated: They belong to a single whole.

#### 4.8 Ancestral Veneration and the power of traditional medicine

There is no doubt that traditional medicine (**muti**) and beliefs in supernatural existence of spirits are what characterize Ancestral Veneration. There is a strong linkage between the living and their ancestors, which is like a chain that connects the living with **emadloti**. The family members are believed to be connected this very link and it further acknowledged that the living dead are very

concerned about family peace, stability and progress. Thus the elders of any given Swazi family will see to it that everything that happens in the land of the living will be reported to those who are in the other world as ancestors. Inter-family relations are of vital nature and taken very seriously. Obengo (1997:48) has this to say regarding the link of family and their ancestors:

In religious context, behaviour is determined by the various levels of human society such as family, the clan and the tribe. Such a community in Africa is composed of both the living and the dead who maintains a close relationship, with the dead continuing to influence the affairs of the living.

#### 4.8.1 Family death is reported to the Ancestors

When a person dies most families will attempt to report the death to the ancestors. The one who dies is then ushered into that land of the “living dead” as their messenger who will act as a “emissary person” (*lincusa*). It is generally an accepted norm that the ones who have gone before will always be ready to accept the new spirit (*Lidloti*) into that saintly status, hence any death in a family is accorded with high respect and dignity. Interestingly the dead need to be brought back as spirits family (*lidloti*). Another sacred ceremony of “**Kubuyiswa**” will then be held. Such a ritual ceremony as practiced among the Ngunis particularly,

amaZulus, amaXhosa, and the amaNdebele is considered and commemorated and accorded great respect.

Thorpe (1981:39) trying to give a picture about this has observed as follows: “Additional ritual actions must be performed. Among the Zulu ‘*Ukubuyisa idlozi*’ ceremony (bringing home of the spirit) is held a year or two after his death.” During such a ritualistic ceremony it is then believed that the dead person is re-incarnated and given the status of a saint or *lidloti* (a sprit). This will then enable the family, especially those who live to be able to communicate with that *lidloti* spirit, implying that the living dead person would have assumed certain revered status. Other families will then slaughter a cow, goat or sheep as other portions of the meat are then given as part of the celebration of the enthronement of that spirit. Once this ritual has been undertaken, it is believed that the *lidloti* will then begin its protection role as matters of the family are brought to its attention and the ancestor’s intervention can be expected.

It should be said that life is very important to any Swazi, and to live is indeed an honour and blessing. One may also add that attempting to venerate ancestors is part of seeking for

that privilege of living happily and enjoying life, Swazis look up to such a privilege. Goba and Mofokeng (1991:40) have rightly stated that:

Nothing is more important to traditional Africans than life or being alive...in greeting each other the basic questions are always [around] an inquiry into whether those who are meeting are alive, together with their families.

#### 4.8.2 How Ancestors manifest themselves

Ancestors within Swazis generally are believed to be able to manifest themselves within a given family. Others believe that ancestors can appear and reveal themselves in the form of snakes that are green and are often seen crawling around the kraal or approaching the main hut (*endlunkulu/ka-Gogo*), which is the main sacred house of a family. Family members are strongly warned not to kill the snake because it is considered taboo to destroy it. If the snake, supposedly *lidloti*, is seen around a given family, the elders will then welcome it and then family rituals need to be conducted as part of appeasing the *emadloti* are undertaken. In other instances these ritualistic activities are characterized with the singing of praises to the *emadloti* of that given clan. One *sangoma* (traditional healer) interviewed on this research has claimed that these snakes are not harmful because they are part of the family and are representatives of the departed

one who wants to visit the living from time to time. They are believed to be bringing good wishes and blessings of the family. In the same vein Obengo (1997:57) has stated that, "Ancestors are believed to be always interested in the best welfare of the family...they would like for instance, that the wealth of a family be taken care of and used responsibly."

#### **4.8.3 *Sitfunti* and *Kubuyisa* ceremony**

When undertaking another interesting phenomenon this research was the discovery of the concept of *sitfunti* (the shade) of the dead person. It is also equally imbedded in their world and life view that the status of the dead people carries with them this "shade". It is claimed that as long as that person who has died is not brought back to the family, they continue wondering somewhere without rest and peace. Especially those who die mysteriously or are involved in car accidents. It is a must that they should be brought back through the '*kubuyisa*' ceremony. It is also believed that their souls are believed to be always wondering and want to be brought back and there will be no peace in that family unless such a rite is undertaken. Thorpe (1991:39) attests to this when she says,

While all the dead people go to the spirit world of shades, the ritual practices connected with *ukubuyisa*

*idlozi* authority figures seem to fulfill cultic requirements sufficiently to re-establish and maintain communication between the physical world and the spirit world where ancestors reside.

It therefore goes without saying that in the Ancestral Veneration theme, every person has a shade which when one dies rises to reality and this will later be elevated to becoming *lidloti*. This process does not just happen as there are ritualistic processes that must be undertaken as stated earlier<sup>23</sup>. Thorpe (1991:40) has said it when he wrote, “Ancestral shades or spirits can make themselves known by unusual signs...”

#### 4.8.4 Ancestors and their involvement with family genealogy

Another very important aspect of Ancestral Veneration is their involvement in the continuation and maintenance of the genealogy or family tree. At birth or even during the reproductive times spirits are believed to be actively involved. They are after all associated with fertility as rituals are often conducted at birth as part of this process. For instance the umbilical cord of the child in some families is buried in the kraal where the spirits of *emadloti* are also believed to be within reach as it is the gate to where they are believed to be living. In fact, it is even suggested that this is

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<sup>23</sup> See pages 62 and 75-6.

their resting place where they reside. This is part of linking that newborn child with the blessings of the ***emadloti***. There are, however, other scholars like John in Daneel (1980:134) who are convinced that the dead do not live or influence events of this life and therefore they exist only in spirit form. Such a narrow view is regrettable though because there is every reason to believe that there is life after this present world, and it is in that same vein that Ancestral Veneration is practiced. To think that life ends in the grave is not at all accepted in the African traditional belief system. In fact, even the Christian Bible that Christians missionaries used points to a life beyond the grave and a life of “spirit” world (***kwelemimoya***).

#### **4.8.5 Ancestors and their appearance in dreams and visions**

Ancestral Veneration is also confirmed as part of the culture within the Swazi context as ***emadloti*** are believed to be able to reveal themselves through vision and dreams. It is not considered abnormal when a family member wakes up with claims that there was a visitation by one of the relatives who might have died long ago. More often than not, they will then give them specific instructions or even important messages for the family’s wellbeing that should be adhered to. When

such instructions are given, then a family gathering is convened where a sacrifice or festival to their honour will be held in an attempt to avert any disaster that the family might have been warned about through such dreams. Interestingly, there are those who do not view any sacrificial ritualistic performances done for ancestors as a form of worshiping the ***emadloti***. For instance, Mosothoane (1973:23) is equally convinced that such sacrifices should not be viewed as some form of worship as Christians would do to God. Thus in the Swazi context this is rather a token of appreciation to ***emadloti***, who are after all part of one's life and indeed spirituality. Their visitation is therefore a welcome encounter that carries with it good luck and ancestral blessings.

#### **4.9 Administration and the role of traditional medicine and Ancestral Veneration**

Time and again when one evaluates Ancestral Veneration there is bound to be confronted with the well documentation about the ancestral involvement when administrating traditional medicine (***muti***). Even during the ***Incwala*** sacred ceremony the usage of traditional medicine is quite central if not a firm foundation of the sacredness of the whole event. ***Emadloti*** and ***muti*** are interrelated and possess so much influence in the world and life

view of the African traditional religion. Medicine and healing are sacred things within the Swazi context and indeed of the African people, and ancestors are believed to be involved when medicine is administered to the people. The ***emadloti*** gives wisdom and counsel because they are very much concerned about the family health and their success.

#### 4.9.1 How Ancestors choose those to administer muti

Emadloti of their own violation can choose any family member to become a traditional healer, thereby being tasked with the powers to administer medicine. The success and health of the family in the Swazi context is equally important and those who respond to the ancestral calling to perform such duties are revered and accorded much respect. The adherents wearing special attired when administering traditional medicine characterize such a calling. Even the manner a traditional healer will behave oneself is a testimony that such a person has been set aside for such a high ancestral calling. ***Tinyanga*** (traditional doctors) and the ***Tangoma*** (traditional medicine person with powers or possessing the spirit of divination) are believed to chosen and appointed by the very ancestral spirits. There are even claims that those who are tasked with such a heavy

responsibility at times go for days without washing and even eat only special diets as per the instruction of the ancestral spirits. The role of the Traditional Healers is to administer good medicine to the family and the people and they are often given some totems or medical portions by the traditional healer that are used for protecting family members from any harm that might befall them. In some instances they are believed to be able to control even natural disasters and calamities such as lightening.

The integral role Traditional Healers play is not only important to the family, but equally so to the entire community and the traditional structures that are known to derive power from such people. A Traditional healer is then called upon to interpret dreams and visions or even plead to the spirit world on behalf of the living through the casting of bones (*kushaya ematsambo*) that are then interpreted and the message is conveyed to the individual concerned. Traditional Healers operate under a heavy influence of the ancestral spirits and inspiration. Thorpe (1991:42) says something worth reflecting on: "Both men and women may be called to be diviners, but among the Zulu the majority are women. Men who become diviners dress like women

especially during the initiation period.” It is very important to note though that such a process has its own rites and mysterious activities which can be an interesting research on their own. However for the purposes of this research it suffice to say that for any message through dreams and visions interpretations must be sought with things should never be left to chance.

#### 4.9.2 ***Batsakatsi* (Witches)**

While Traditional Healers administer good medicine are equally concerned about the good health of a family, unfortunately there are witches (***batsakatsi***) who administer bad medicine that causes harm to the lives of people and society at large. In the Swazi context “***batsakatsi***” (and the Zulu call them “***Abathakathi***” or “***Muroyi***” as in the Shona language) are indeed feared lot. Witches generally speaking are often viewed negatively by members of the general public and are not at all well received in any given community. History has it that they are often chased away from any given community once it is ascertained that they are responsible for any death or omen they inflict to people. They are perceived as dangerous and outcasts who are enemies of peace in that they possess evil powers, which

can be directed to attack innocent people they feel, are not wanted and must be removed from this life (***babulawe baphanjaniswe nemvula***). Some of the powers they are associated with is their ability to inflict a person with evil spirits that can be manifested through hallucinating and people often screams at the top of their voices, with claims that there are seeing people following them and wanting to kill them.

The role of Traditional Healers comes in handy during such trying times because they are believed to be able to exorcise such evil spirits out of a person under such attack. The ***sangoma*** is also able to foretell through divination the source of such evil spirits. When a family is under such an attack from any kind of evil spirit or demonic forces, in the Swazi system of belief such an occurrence demands the intervention of the ancestors. Family or clan rituals play an integral part in such processes. Rituals as already indicated are then performed to appease the ancestors.<sup>24</sup> The role of the medicine person is to ensure that such rituals and family rites are performed to the latter. It should be stated that within the Swazi system of belief nothing just happens without a supernatural cause or reason.

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<sup>24</sup> See pages 76-77

## **4.10 Ancestral Veneration and the Views about Jesus Christ**

It will be quite unfair not to comment about the views about Jesus within the context of Ancestral Veneration. The missionaries have tended to create tensions that are non-existent in the mind of Swazis about the Son of God and the ancestors.

### **4.10.1 Role of Jesus in a traditional setting**

In the mind of the Swazi and indeed that of an African, there are already clearly defined roles and links that the Son of God is indeed an ancestor. A Zionist Bishop consulted and interviewed has expressed his unwavering support and is convinced that there is indeed a linkage between the Christ of the Bible and the ancestors that Swazis venerate. He sees absolutely nothing wrong with venerating the ancestors because after all they once lived, and Christians speak of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The one wonders why Africans don't then stand up and not be ashamed in believing that the "living dead" are actually risen in the form of ancestral spirits and are a link to God. This bishop argues that even missionaries often speaks of a person "Christ" who rose from the dead and is to be worshipped, so why all of a sudden do Christians become so negative about the Veneration of the

ancestors. Is it because Africans are viewed as inferior when it comes to the matters of faith and spirituality? Thus the emphasis should be on honouring the dead, and according to his own conviction, Jesus is an ancestor who should crystallize the fact that Africans' understanding of Christ, as ancestor could be a link towards harmonizing the mission strategy to the traditional Swazi.

#### **4.10.2 Existence of Spiritual forces**

The New Testament teachings strongly support the existence of the spiritual forces and powers. So that those who dare sacrifice something in memory of the dead are often viewed as paying allegiance to the demonic forces. The New Testament also attests to the powers of darkness which Christ himself is claimed to have conquered through his death and resurrection. Christ as a powerful ancestor is authoritative enough to conquer all evil forces and powers of darkness, yet it is regrettable that Africans still are caught up in the fear of spirits that tends to cause them to seek the intervention of ancestors who are themselves spirits after all, instead of trusting the mighty God alone instead. Daneel (1989:136) says, "Thus the Spirit world may be experienced as a threatening force that might be combated by ritual." It is

here then that complications arise whether it is a matter of trusting Christ who is seen to be fighting and protecting the living alone or perhaps the issue arises when people seem to look up to their ancestors to protect them. In the final analysis the reality is that in the Swazi system of belief that ***emadloti*** are equally capable of influencing this life as exalted spiritual beings.

#### **4.10.3 The Spirits of the dead as ‘Saints’**

Another confusion brought about by the Christians missionaries regarding the spirits of the dead is that in some church traditions there is the mentioning of ancestors in that they embrace them as “saints” in the context of Catholicism. If then within the Christendom there exists a doctrine of the Saints one is baffled as to why it becomes such an issue to go to greater lengths of condemning Swazis’ Ancestral Veneration even though the *Incwala* sacred Ceremony. It is through this Veneration of Ancestors that Swazis attempt to be looking up to their own departed family spirits are who after all closer to God and are known to be capable of intervening on their behalf one way or the other. Mbiti (1971:180) advises that we had better not become too dogmatic about the life after death especially when reflecting

on Ancestral Veneration. He says, "...We cannot speculate beyond this point... the details of what happens beyond historical plan of human existence are neither for you nor me to dogmatize about." It is better to appreciate that Swazis just like any African group have that sense of respecting their ancestors who are believed to be the 'living dead' and such a thought and belief system cannot be easily wished away. Thus *Incwala* sacred Ceremony as a celebration of the Swazi spirituality and traditional religious system order through the Veneration of Ancestors is affirmed.

In the following chapter, there will be an attempt to link the Ancestral Veneration with the Vision of King Somhlolo, one of the founding fathers of the Swazi nation. In this chapter we will evaluate the vision and its impact on Swazi religious life. As to how a King who foresaw through a dream and got an instruction ancestral aunt could actually lead to the discovery of the coming of the Gospel message to the country that has shaped our religious inclination and traditional views about the supreme God. Can God of the Bible reveal himself to a "heathen" King using traditional religious system, while we have no record of missionaries sharing the Good news to him or his people prior to this dream?

## CHAPTER 5

### **THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS-THE VISION OF SOMHLOLO – Another motivation why Swazis Venerate Ancestors**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The continuity in African religion, pre-Christian and Christian is due in large measure to continuing worldviews, the application of the material of Christian tradition to already existing African Maps of the universe. It has been the most fruitful single source of misunderstanding of the resultant practice less Christian. It is true, as we shall see, that the relationships between the components of those maps-God, local divinities, ancestors, objects of power – have changed, and changed radically, as a result of the Christian impact; but as components in understanding the world and society, they remain in one guise or another. (Walls, 2002:122).

The greatest struggle that African theologians and missiology researchers need to address is the view that God on his own divine initiative has revealed Himself to mortal human beings in times past outside the confines of the Holy Scriptures. It is beyond doubt that such claims have found root in the traditional religion of the African tribes including Swazis. To crown it all, traditional religion is somehow related to ancestors and those people or legends that are highly venerated because of the unique role they might have played, and are perceived as a symbol of a ‘special’ revelation.

King Somhlolo is one such legend in the Swazi context and it goes without saying that Swazis honour him highly and he has become a

revered ancestor within the dynasty of Swazi Kingship and indeed a “Saint.” Legends and founding fathers of a nation are adored ancestors, and are actually believed to be influencing to events taking place in the nation and in the general life of Swazis cannot be underestimated. The traditional religion is influenced by that continued lifeworld and existing African (Swazi) maps of the spirituality of the nation. Ancestors are well respected in this life and as for a legend like Somhlolo, to Swazis he truly remains a national hero whose significant role is forever remembered and is indeed a revered ancestor. Not forgetting that Ancestral Veneration cements that family bond that seems to be glue that keeps together the nation that derives its strength from that rich heritage. Obengo in Bediako (1995:51) has shared the same sentiment:

Each member of the African family is part of the composite whole. One must play one's role within the family in order to gain the approval of both the ancestors and the living elders who are always on the verge of becoming ancestors...

Ancestral Veneration is foundational in the life dreams and aspirations of Swazis in general. The nation owes its continued existence to that very realization that the aspirations, hopes and wishes of the people are immensely influenced by ancestral blessings, endorsement and sanction.

## 5.2 Preliminary Concepts

Within Swazis there is a long held view and acceptable common knowledge that *Mvelinchanti* took it upon Himself to take the initiative to be revealed to the Swazi nation. The mere fact that it is claimed that He intervened in the religious inclination of Swazis through their former King Somhlolo, is reason enough that Ancestral Veneration has found its roots in the Swazi culture and indeed world and life-view. While many theologians argue about such claims, one should not doubt the supremacy of God whose ways are higher than ours. At the same time though, one should be clear that the role of the King and his pronouncements within the Swazi context as stated in chapter 2 couldn't be underestimated.<sup>25</sup> ‘He speaks no lies’ and therefore remains a link and a symbol of that connectivity between the spiritual life (divine) and the world of the living (Cosmos). The underlying observation of course being that the Swazi historical narrative points to the fact that God did reveal himself to King Somhlolo as supreme God worthy to be worshipped and had unique plans for the national religious life. Daniel (1989:111) could not say it better when he writes, “All African religions speak of a Supreme being...” Swazis’ religious experience should not be viewed differently from the other African experiences.

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<sup>25</sup> See page 25-26

However, the questions that a great challenge are, can God use an ordinary King like Somhlolo whose religious inclination and experience is unknown to us? Can He decide to make known his divine purposes to a King of a small nation like Swazis? The missionary mindset would claim that God uses messengers who themselves should first be the Christians to spread his Gospel message, not just any other intervention where a heathen king can become God's instrument. Such doubts tend to undermine any contribution to the debate by scholars and followers of African Theology, who will strongly support the Vision of Somhlolo. God is believed to be alive and therefore able to be revealed in any given context. In fact Swazis like the rest of the African tribes are a religious people who believed in the existence of a supreme being. Thorpe (1991:27) attests to this when she writes, "...No people, no tribe in Africa does not believe in a supreme being..."

Swazis point to the fact that God intervened in their history and spoke to them in a manner that would be understood and acceptable to their traditional religious worldview and value system. It should be emphasized that Swazis regard their King's words as authoritative. After all his mouth speaks no lie (***Umlomo longacali emanga***). King Somhlolo's followers would have listened with awe

and respect to whatever message he would have pronounced. This, however, should not be taken to mean that the King is infallible, but within the traditional system he would have consulted his advisors and reasoned with them first, before calling the nation (***Imbizo*** or ***Sibaya***) to inform them of the Vision and the implications of the message. God, in His supremacy and wisdom, knew the traditional beliefs of Swazis and that for this message to pass on to the Swazi life and reasoning, it would be through their King. Swazis were quite welcoming and when the Whites finally came they were well received as Hilder Kuper (1986:11) has written something quite interesting about this historical narrative:

The initial relationship between Swazis and Whites was friendly and cooperative. Informants relate that Mswati's father Sobhuza I (Somhlolo), was forewarned of their arrival in a dream, even before cloth, beads, and guns substantiated their existence and before news of bloody battles between them and tribes to the south spread to his people.

What remains a mystery is that there seems to be no evidence or recorded account of whether the King consulted the medium of spiritual diviners (***Baphenguli netangoma***). According to the cultural expectations he would have sought confirmation and interpretation from these spiritual mediums regarding such a strange Vision. Some would argue that such an action would probably have clouded the Vision and perhaps a controversy would have arisen, as most evangelical Christians would be opposed to

such an attempt to check the authenticity of the Vision. To them divination or seeking any other any other spirits' interventions would be considered works of darkness. There is, however, a strong possibility that diviners would have been consulted, as it is a way of the Swazi life and a norm, but as to what their conclusions would have been regarding the validity of the Vision remains a closed chapter. There is a deep underlying belief in Swazis' worldview of consulting the diviners who play important role in their national religious and spiritual life regarding dreams and visions. Kabasale (1996:116) writing about the same issue says:

Throughout black Africa we find conviction that no one has ever seen god, nevertheless God maintains contact with created beings. Contact with God is made by way of certain divine envoys and delegates, or intermediaries, who are precisely the beings closest to the source of life- beings who by a particular gift of God, have been endowed with a special communications network with God. These are soothsayers...

God could have used many other avenues, but this historical occurrence had a culturally acceptable normative order, which would have been acceptable within the given cultural context. While one cannot run away from numerous theological debates and views that would arise regarding such an intervention, we still can argue from the premise that God is supreme and therefore in its divine wisdom and omniscience knew what would be acceptable within Swazis. It would therefore be folly to deny that God could have

chosen and used such a “special” revelation to accomplish His divine intended purposes. After all, God is a Supreme Being whose acts at times surpass our human intellect and reasoning capacity.

### **5.3 The Vision as historically narrated**

It is a long held view that King Somhlolo’s Vision was of significant value to the history of Swazis. There are different views, of course, regarding the manner in which God is claimed to have spoken. There are strong views expressed for Ancestral Veneration in that it is still claimed that God spoke through the King’s ancestral “Aunt” who was already an ancestor, the ‘living dead’ in that dream, yet again an indication that God is quite accommodating to the important roles ancestors play in the communication praxis between the living and those believed to be in the other world. One is therefore left with yet another challenge of finding out how did God speak to a person whose religious Christian ideals and experiences are not known? Furthermore, how does God speak outside the written Word (Scripture)? Another burning question that cannot be ignored is, can God be limited only to the pages of the Bible? One could spend pages compiling quite a number of convincing arguments for or against such questions. It is perhaps better to accept that God can choose any way and manner deemed suitable and fit to communicate with His created beings. It is quite

interesting that in God's providence, communication with Swazis was made possible in this manner because it is claimed that they would have no problems or qualms because traditional authority was not in any way being challenged. God cannot be limited to one view of how he relates to humanity; God is still a Supreme Being. This is indeed a contribution to understanding religion within an African context that ought to be appreciated, as Sitiloane (1983:63) has remarked: "But Africans are bringing something to Christianity. A view of divinity much higher, deeper and all pervasive."

It is said that King Somhlolo in his Vision saw a white man, different in colour and outlook, compared to his own people holding in his right hand "***uMculu***" (book) and in his left hand he had "***indilinga***" (button/coin). This person seen in that very Vision had long hair like the tail of a horse. In his sleep, Somhlolo was advised to accept the book and live by its teachings and commands. It was strongly stated in that Vision that the Swazi nation should lay her foundation on the teachings of this book and that this would ensure lasting peace, prosperity and indeed stability. He was further advised to build the Kingdom on the firm foundation of the '***uMculu***', and avoid establishing it on the principles and emphasis of ***indilinga***. His 'aunt' is said to have warned him not to spill the fair person's blood, but rather to open his arms and welcome him as herald and

messenger of the supreme God, as well as special guests of the Royal household. What is very interesting is that Somhlolo was communicated to by an ‘ancestor’ who happened to be ancestral aunt, and by the very positions aunts hold in any given Swazi family, he quickly shared it with his counselors and the entire nation at that time.

What is very interesting is that King Somhlolo’s Vision involved an “Ancestor” who happened to be an ancestral aunt, and by the very positions aunts hold in any given Swazi family, he quickly shared it with his counselors and the entire nation at that time. Within Swazis aunts are equated to their brothers when it comes to addressing family affairs. Their identity and roles are equally important when giving counsel and advice (*banelivi lelidvuna*).

It was at this juncture that many believe that the seeds of the Christian faith were planted, and as such became an integral part of the Swazi way of life. Ancestral Veneration then is founded upon the realization that the living dead can give instructions to the living on behalf of the Supreme deity; such was the case in the Vision of Somhlolo. Something had to be done as culture and custom will dictate once the king informed the elders and advisors. The long held view within the Swazi context that the involvement of an

'ancestor' in a dream is considered sacred and viewed as very important must not be forgotten as Kabasale (1996:117) has rightly pointed out:

It was to the ancestors that God first communicated the divine 'vital force'. Thus they constitute the highest link, after God, in the chain of beings. But they still remain human beings. In their death passage they have become more powerful than other human beings...

#### 5.4 The Symbols - "*Umculu*" and "*Indilinga*"

Symbols that have been used in conveying the message of this Vision is quite interesting, and the hands holding them were quite significant. The right hand in the context of Swazis is regarded as vital and of great value. Because the ***uMculu*** was held on the right hand, Somhlolo would have known that it had a momentous message and needed to be heeded. The unavoidable question that on its own is quite explosive is what book was being spoken of here? Well others attest to the fact that it was the Bible, while others claim perhaps it was the Koran or even the book of Mormon. Perhaps the book was a reference to wisdom that is gained through reading and studying, which was also brought to Swaziland by the same missionaries who were bringing the Gospel message.

The ***indilinga*** is claimed to have been in the left hand and refers to money. Scripture states clearly that the love of money is the root of all evil, (1 Tim 6:10). King Somhlolo was strongly warned against building his Kingdom on money-oriented principles. Dr A.B. Gamedze in Mzizi (1990:48), a well-respected Christian leader and theologian, claims that the coin symbolizes materialism that finds its fullest manifestation in the Marxist-Leninist Communism or Atheistic Socialism. It is quite interesting that God in the gracious acts forewarned Swazis to be careful by ensuring that the Kingdom is built upon the principles of Godliness and the Bible, thus avoiding Atheistic Socialism or any other system that is associated with the meaning and symbolic interpretation of the coin. When looking back now, the fact that many communist countries which were founded on Atheistic socialism have since disintegrated, and even the so-called Capitalist countries are under great threat, then it suffices to mention that the Vision God communicated to Somhlolo to guard against the coin appears to have been quite prudent.

Emphasis on the foregoing is of course that it was through Ancestral Veneration that such a Vision was conceived and communicated to Swazis. Such a context cannot be ignored and discarded easily as it forms the basis for arguing for respect and traditional religious life. It becomes quite disturbing though, when

evangelical Christians begin to doubt such claims and frown at those who subscribe to Ancestral Veneration in general. Such traditional beliefs are cemented on historical narratives to which that people can relate. Bosch (1997:430) has written about people's experiences on contextual approach, "... People look not only at where they are at the present moment, but also at where they come from. They look for real, reliable and universal guides to the truth and justice of God, to apply as criterion in evaluating the context." This Vision is historical and happened within a given context and it would be wise not to ignore it forever, as it forms a certain value system that has religious implications, especially for Swazis. Ancestral Veneration forms the basis for religious life of Swazis and it would be folly to undermine its influence. Mbiti (1969:59) has said something worth reflecting upon, "The living dead are a symbol of communalism, a recognition that the deceased are still kinsmen and a sign of respect and remembrance." It is with this thought that one cannot underplay the importance of Ancestral Veneration in the Swazi community.

#### **5.4.1 Can this Vision be seen as a means and reason for Ancestral Veneration**

One cannot even begin to doubt that a Vision of this magnitude happened within the context of Ancestral

Veneration whereby Somhlolo's ancestral 'Aunt' was part of the communication process. This act alone points to the fact that Somhlolo could easily relate to God because it was part of His people's way of life and belief system. Kabasele (1996: 117) have remarked interestingly when he says, "It was through ancestors that God first communicated the divine "vital force." Thus, they constitute the highest link, after God, in the claim of beings. But they still remain human beings. In their death passage they have become more powerful than other human beings – in their capacity to exert influence, to increase or to diminish that vital force of earthly beings...".

In the Swazi cultural context generally dreams communicated through 'known' figures from the living or dead are accorded much respect. In fact they are divine vehicles that God and the ancestors use to communicate something of great significance to a given family. To hear claims that people have had a dream encounter whereby they receive messages from their ancestors is not a unique occurrence in the Swazi context. In fact, it is acceptable to be told that a family member has had a dream in which an ancestor (grandfather or Mother) would have given

instructions that, they are ‘thirsty or hungry’ (*bomile/balambile*) and want a special meal prepared for them. Such a dream culturally would be interpreted to mean that the ancestors are calling the family to remember and venerate them in the form of a family feast. If one were to fail to carry out such an instruction then a disaster may befall that person to whom the dream or instruction came through. This may be followed by a death that is unnatural, a person having bad luck or even encountering unfortunate circumstances. But by adhering to such commands one can be guaranteed and assured of continued good health, prosperity and success. Dreams and visions of this magnitude are taken seriously by the larger sector of the Swazi people. Mbiti (1969:83) as if to affirm the important link and the role played by the ancestors in the African spirituality and religious life states, “...they speak the language of men with whom they lived until recently. And they speak the language of spirits and of God to whom they are drawing nearer ontologically.”

The Christian community in Swaziland has time and again been confronted with hot debates and counter-accusations that Somhlolo’s Vision was merely a dream that cannot be

viewed as from God. Seemingly there is the involvement of the ancestor ‘the Aunt’ who was supposedly dead by then. That alone is believed to be unacceptable because it will be as though the Supreme God condoning the Veneration of the Ancestors. Dreams are sometimes perceived as just nightmares that should not be viewed as Godly approved. What one finds even more interesting is that we are also taught that in times past God did use dreams as a means of communicating and to accomplish His purposes. The story of Joseph in Genesis 37 underpins the very reason why dreams cannot be ruled out. Convinced by the story of Joseph, believers go as far as claiming that Somhlolo’s Vision was Godly inspired and approved. They also base such an argument on the scriptural reference of Joel 2:28, “And the sons and daughters will prophesy, your old **men will dream dreams**, your young men will see visions’ (my emphasis). As it seems King Somhlolo was mature person, he definitely would have been an ideal candidate to dream as part of God communicating with him.

#### 5.4.2 Was it a myth – Based on the cultural norm orientation?

There are claims that Somhlolo’s Vision is a myth created and constructed by the very missionaries of the day in

attempting to cause the Gospel message to become more acceptable and accommodated in the life and world view of Swazis. This claim is founded on the realization by missiologists that the founding missionaries could have studied the traditional and cultural order of the Swazi and that in the process would have succeeded by going a step further to establish an accepted way of making their message more contextual and relevant. Bultmann (1979:370) has described myth to mean, “The use of imagery to express the otherworldly in terms of human life, the other side in terms of this side.” Alternatively, Setiloane (1986:9) prefers to view myth as a, “mirror through which people’s consciousness of themselves surfaces.”

It is possible to accept the Vision as a myth when considering Bultmann’s explanation, because Somhlolo saw a picture or image of white people (*belungu*) carrying a book and a coin. It was not just Swazis views about themselves as such, but something unique. Instead, it conveys impressions of this life in terms of the human life and things to which Somhlolo could relate. To be quite fair Somhlolo heard the voice of his late aunt, instructing him not to kill the Whites, but rather to welcome them and heed the teachings of the

book.<sup>26</sup> The use of the voice from the other world may seem to place it in the category of a myth. Again, it could be argued that the voice was a culturally recognizable feature used to facilitate God's higher purpose for the Swazi nation.

Setiloane's definition of myth is rather interesting and full of promise in that it was perhaps an attempt by Somhlolo who could have been externalizing his aspirations for his land and people. While reflecting further, however, it seems unlikely that a pagan king who had no contact with Whites beforehand would have initiated such a desire, to be generous in accepting aliens into his vulnerable nation. The Vision testifies, in remarkable fashion, to other-centeredness and prophetic mystery which goes beyond one's psychological musing. To conclude that the Vision is a myth seems, then, to be improbable.

#### **5.4.3 Could this Vision be viewed as merely a philosophy?**

Perhaps the Vision should be viewed as mere philosophy. Every great leader, it may be argued, has in one way or the other acted under a powerful conviction, which is founded from a dominant philosophy of that time. The Vision as it stands could be regarded as a philosophy of King Somhlolo

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<sup>26</sup> See Page 94 – Symbols of King Somhlolo's vision

or perhaps one can just call it **Somhloloism**. When assessing the Vision in terms of philosophy, we could say that such a thing is, “the search for a comprehensive view of nature and an attempt at a universal explanation of things” (Brantley, 1960:14).

Of course there are issues that arise from a definition such as the one above that cannot be avoided. Firstly, a philosophy is born out of a deliberate search for meaning. It is uncertain that in Somhlolo’s case he was perhaps searching or even contemplating life with seriousness. To our knowledge, it appears that this Vision ‘intruded’ upon him during the natural course of life.

Secondly, a philosophy attempts to be comprehensive in its scope, while attempting to integrate as many aspects of living in order to be universally relevant. The Vision does contain elements which can be generalized to life. As Gamedze (in Mzizi, 1990:48) remarks:

Somhloloism may be parochial in History and name, but as a philosophy, it is universal. A pointed out earlier, our Lord commanded that Swaziland would build her world and life-view on the Bible and not on the coin or currency, which, as a philosophy, symbolizes materialism.

The Vision also points to matters of ethics, and nation building, some of which are general in nature, but it does not provide, in itself, a comprehensive account of life. The Vision is too sparse in its detail to be accepted as a philosophy. It possesses philosophical features, but it is not a philosophy in its own right.

As matters stands, it points towards something in the future, around which a philosophy could be fashioned. The book not the Vision would perhaps provide the basis for a new nation. Of course, much will depend on whether the book would be embraced as authentic representative of that element of the Vision, in determining whether the Vision would be secular philosophy, and overtly religious philosophy (Muslim, Mormon etc), or Christian philosophy. Yet as one orientates oneself to the Vision, it seems improbable to conclude that it bears the marks of a philosophy.

#### **5.4.4 Perhaps it is a “special” revelation**

Idowa, in Muzorewa (1985:19) writes, “There is a place, age or generation which did not receive at some point in its history some form of revelation.” A critical look at the Vision would attest to the fact that Swazis like any African nation

and tribe in general, are so fond of their history that it has been affected by a revelation of some sort, which of course is found through their Ancestral Veneration. Gamedze in Mzizi (1990:45) endorses the view that the Vision of Somhlolo was true special revelation. In his argument Gamedze's usage of the term 'special revelation' for the Vision raises some concerns for evangelical scholars, in that he fails to articulate the notion of Ancestral Veneration attached to the whole panorama. Accordingly ancestors do come back to influence the events of this life. Thorpe (1991:39-40) has written what is so vital in reference to the role and respect accorded to the dead who eventual have a great impact on the theme of Ancestral Veneration:

While all the dead people go to the spirit world of shades the ritual practices connected with *ukubuyisa idlozi* authority figures seem to fulfill cultic requirements sufficiently to re-establish and maintain communication between the physical world and the spirit world where the ancestors reside...Ancestral shades or spirits can make themselves known by unusual signs...

In fact, theology has come out with distinction between general revelation (that comes through nature, history, moral experience, universal religious sense) and special revelation (that is said to come through Christ and the Holy Scriptures).

Bruce Milne (1982:19) shares something that is worth

reflecting upon, “Biblical religion is a religion of revelation... a faith based on the claim that God has come to us and disclosed himself in His Son.” While one appreciates Milne’s conviction, it should be stated that in the case of Somhlolo we see a special revelation of Mvelinchanti making known the purposes and plans for Swazis in a manner that is understood within the given cultural setting. The Vision, however, provides no Christological disclosure and therefore one cannot refer to it as an instance of special revelation in the traditional sense even if the categories of general revelation assist African Theologians to depict God as both immanent and transcendent (Muzorewa, 1995:9).

Whether one begins to doubt that the Vision is perhaps not ‘special revelation’, Swazis still view it as special because of its character and the impact it has exerted on the religious life and belief system of the nation. The writer of Hebrews 1:1-2 in keeping with this notion seems to attest to the fact that before the coming of the missionaries God spoke in different and various ways. In times past God spoke through prophets because that was his own choice. The divine acts of God were aimed at communicating an important message disclosing to created humankind the

existence of the divine being. It is therefore not a far-fetched truth that God would have acted in miraculous ways by using even Ancestral Veneration as a means of special revelation to the Swazi nation. This prepared the way that later would be embraced as the fuller revelation of God as Missionaries finally came with the ***uMculu***. One will therefore not be off the mark to liken the Vision to Pharaoh's dream, which was subsequently interpreted by Joseph in Genesis 41. The supremacy of God does point to the fact that He can choose a person to fulfill His own purposes, and this was the case with King Somhlolo.

Suffice to say that the Vision is not therefore consistent with the characteristics of a myth, philosophy or even special revelation, but its scope and its prophetic, preparatory nature lend it the status of a Vision that has Ancestral Veneration as its core foundation and base, by means of which a group of people begin to be discerned. In the interest of the theme of Ancestral Veneration under discussion it can be open to the possibility of being misinterpreted for whatever reason. It goes without saying that even biblical revelation that came through the prophets is open to hermeneutical mistreatment, but such a possibility does not invalidate its original intention

whereby God used Ancestral Veneration to make known the divine intentions to Swazis. We can therefore conclude that Ancestral Veneration was at work when the Vision was given as God attempted to make known the purposes for the Swazi nation.

### **5.5The fulfillment of the Vision in the midst of Swazi Cultural Heritage**

There is one thing that is a bit sobering, that is, King Somhlolo just like any of the other Swazi Kings who lived before him, had many wives as Swazi custom permits. He participated in the *Incwala* sacred ceremony, thereby venerating ancestors and participated in other sacred festival rites of the Swazi kingship. Many theologians can even begin to question the dealings of God with ‘heathen’ kings as seemingly He is a ‘Holy’ God. Somhlolo finally fell asleep and was laid to rest with his forefathers in the sacred mountains without seeing the Vision fulfilled in his life time and reign. It was only during the reign of his son King Mswati I that the early contact with the Whites was finally made. The Whites came to Swaziland for different purposes. The Boers, for an example, came for grazing land even before their conflict with Zulus in KwaZulu-Natal. Others came looking for mineral resources as there were traces of iron-ore (Ngwenya), gold deposits (Piggs

Peak) and asbestos (Bulembu). Swazis managed to welcome the early settlers without spilling their blood is a fulfillment of the Somhlolo's Vision, as other nations like Zulus were at war with the Whites. Hilder Kuper (1986:11) paints a positive scenario regarding this:

The initial relationship between Swazi and Whites was friendly and cooperative. Informants relate that Mswati's father, Sobhuza I (Somhlolo), was forewarned of their arrival in a dream, even before cloth, beads, and guns substantiated their existence and before news of bloody battles between them and tribes to south spread to his people.

This was to be the beginning of the arrival of Whites who were later instrumental in the shaping of Swaziland and its present form. Not only did they bring the Gospel, but ended up colonizing Swaziland. Interestingly these were challenging times in that some of the land was taken in clandestine ways that would have led to bloodshed. A traditional Swazi believes that the Whites came with the Bible to fool them, while they divided the country among themselves. The spreading of the Gospel message was bound to take place in the face of suspicion. But because through Ancestral Veneration and the respect for Kings' pronouncements, Swazis embraced the message of the book because their former Kings had implanted in their minds the Vision of King Somhlolo, who was a 'big ancestor.' His orders are being carried out to the letter even today, as they did

not die a natural death and become mere history (*kalifi livi lenkhosi*).

In about 1845, Rev Alison, his wife, Rev Johan Betram and twelve evangelist-teachers arrived in Mahamba in the southern part of Swaziland to set up the first missionary work. Their missionary approach was that of mixing evangelism with education, as those who converted to Christianity were then taught to write and read, thus right from those early and humble beginnings education was integrated with Christian missions. Interestingly, the Rev Alison pioneered the use of the indigenous siSwati language. His sensitivity is worth applauding in that he realized the importance of the Swazi language and in one way or the other encouraged the learning of the native language so that communication of the gospel would not be hindered. His translation of the catechism, “*Tenkatekismi ta la Bawesley*” appeared in 1846 (Matsebula, 1987:41). This was indeed an indication that missionary work was now gaining ground and the Vision was being fulfilled.

In the midst of this positive beginning of missionary work, there is, however, one instance that is recorded where white missionaries had clashes with the Swazi authority. This was in the infancy of the missionary work of Rev Alison of the Methodist church. The Mission

was caught up in inter-tribal fighting around 1846. Alison fled across the border taking with him about 1,000 people. Though it was not clear as to what the problem was that prompted these uprisings, it affected the relationship between the missionaries and the Swazi authorities. It was considered inappropriate for a foreigner to become involved in disputes affecting nationals. The mere fact that over 1,000 Swazi Nationals had been taken away by the Rev Alison was unfortunate and the ancestors would have not approved of it. The mere fact that taking people away from their land of origin, leaving behind the graves of their forefathers, was an unpardonable act of insubordination and a gross violation of the Swazi authority (ancestors would have been angered by this act). King Mswati is said to have been so annoyed and angered by this act that it delayed the missionary work in Swaziland. Mswati then even refused to allow the Berlin Mission to begin work in 1860 as a direct result of this act of dishonesty and interference on tribal issues by the missionaries.

An interesting story is told of a Swazi national, Daniel Msimangu, who embraced the Christian message and was part of the group that fled with Alison. He later returned to Swaziland in 1880 and was instrumental in recommending and reviving the missionary work left in a shambles following the uprisings. The Mahamba

mission station still stands today as a true testimony that Swazis were instrumental in spreading the good news (Froise,1989:110). To claim that Swazis were not involved in the early missionary exploits is indeed an understatement, for they were initially part of breaking ground in missionary work.

### 5.6 The implications of the Vision

As Swazi culture dictates, Somhlolo had spoken and would have given his followers a challenge that something had to be done about this Vision. It should be stated that this was a new phenomenon that unfortunately was imparted without further clarification and clear instruction but left to interpretation by the Swazi authorities of the time. In fact, this was a closed book that needed further interrogation. A further understanding and internalizing of the implication of the ***uMculu*** and its message was indeed necessary.

Upon the arrival of the missionaries there arose some tensions and resistance to the Gospel message as it was compounded by the non-contextualized approach to doing mission on the part of the white messengers of the Gospel. Missionaries tended to present a Western religion that did not accommodate the traditional religious experiences of Swazis. Swazi culture was not reconciled with

western theology as the Christianity being propagated at that time was too western and influenced by their western cultural biases in the process of evangelizing. Swazis were told to amend their dress code and at times were forced to change even their names and sing the hymns from the west if their prayers were to be acceptable to God. Traditional regalia, for example, was not accepted in the Missionary churches. What was so unfortunate is that this was done on the premise that traditional dress and activities were deemed ‘demonic’ and had ‘heathen’ connections.

Such an attitude by former missionaries tended to deprive the Swazi nation from developing a relevant theology that would be suited to the context of Swaziland. Consideration of the traditional religious way of life and world-view would have had a positive impact on missions in Swaziland. The missions’ programmes should have allowed the Gospel that would shine according to the cultural norms and idiosyncrasies. Sadly the western cultural value system and not the biblical based values influenced the missionaries in their conclusions and judgments as to what was right and wrong in the culture of Swazis. This then led to some form of rejection of the Gospel and the resistance of what was considered un-Swazi.

### 5.6.1 ***Mvelinchanti* approves Swazi customs and culture**

Swazis believe that Mvelinchanti approves their customs and cultural activities.<sup>27</sup> The mere fact that we speak of the Somhlolo Vision could as well be regarded as a stamp of approval for the cultural heritage of the Swazi. Apart from the fact that God chose an acceptable Swazi way to communicate the important Vision, it goes without saying that they find it a bit unfair that their values and norms are time and again under attack from the Christian community. This view is used to challenge those who from time to time question cultural norms and features on the grounds of their incompatibility with Christian morals and standards. The polygamous marriage (***sitsembu***) that the King practices, Ancestral Veneration, as well as those rituals and festivals that are seen as not upholding Christian principles remain unresolved. The Vision was never closely investigated and discussed in forum so that a relevant theology would be constructed to evaluate if the church should condemn or even condone such practices. It was missionaries taking the lead in proclaiming what was to be acceptable as the gospel truth and what was not acceptable as the evangelism strategies unfolded. Yet Luzbetak (1970:65) throws some more light about this:

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<sup>27</sup> See Pages 71-72, 90-91

Missionary's message, whether spiritual or socio-economic, must at all times be focused on the local culture as an adaptive system. The missionary's message from the pulpit, in confessional, or perhaps is presented not as a list if isolated and arbitrary laws but as suggestions that can transform the traditional adaptive system. Christianity should be presented as Divine Wisdom intended to teach all mankind how to adapt itself to the problems of life in truly meaningful and successful way.

#### **5.6.2 The Book's Contents should be read and understood**

King Somhlolo's Vision mentions the *Umculu* as a closed book, yet it was going to be prudent that it be opened and be allowed to confront Swazis with Gospel truths that would eventually call for change and transformation of their value system if there was a need to do so. It is perhaps worth noting that the Christian faith and teachings in particular, were going to bring about newness of life within the Swazi context. This new life that was to be based on the teachings of the Holy Scriptures was certainly going to set a new order and usher in a value system that was going to become biblically based. Those who are involved with mission will attest to the fact that the task to Christianize a given community should not be biased towards the missionaries' convictions, but rather should allow themselves to be informed about the dealings of God in that given community before even proclaiming the gospel message. Trans-cultural

truths should have been allowed to surface and that Swazis should have been consulted beforehand about their own religious inclinations. Seemingly through Ancestral Veneration they were going to be able to relate to the God the missionaries claimed they were bringing over through evangelism. Swazis should have been engaged beforehand when mission was being done so that their traditional religious experiences could have been embraced in an attempt to enrich this evangelism thrust. Consultations and understanding of people's belief system is critical in any envisaged mission strategies.

#### **5.6.3 The Vision is not a blanket approval that God approves Swazi Culture and Custom**

The Vision therefore should not be viewed as blanket approval on the part of God upon the Swazi culture and its customs. Culture, after all, is a design for living that any society adapts for itself. It should not be embraced as godly, but must be put in the spotlight of the teachings of *uMculu*. It was supposed to have been opened and studied accordingly, and it goes without saying that it would have confronted all cultural practices that are not God-honouring. Even today, there is a need for all concerned to allow the

Vision to be fine-tuned to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures, so that the nation becomes the people that will put their cultural heritage and practices in the mirror of the Word and if it calls for it to be transformed then it will have to. Not forgetting that Swazis, just like any African group, are a religious tribe whose respect for the dead is beyond doubt. E.W. Smith in Setiloane 1986 has observed, "It is a noteworthy fact vouched for by many missionaries that when one goes to pagan Bantu one does not have to prove the existence of God..." And as if to affirm such respect for the dead which is at the heart of the religious passage of African theology and traditional beliefs, O'Donovan (1992:218) says "Traditional religions often require elaborate relationships between the living and living dead. These relationships can include ritual sacrifices and offerings which must be made to satisfy or persuade the ancestors."

There was and still a need therefore need to study and read the scriptures (contents of the book) with the view and knowledge that every tribe and Swazis in particular, are still influenced by the Ancestral Veneration. It is through studying of *uMculu* that the Christian community will go a long way in making missionary work become more effective as it will give

birth to a nation that fears and respect God's teachings.

Unfortunately the judgmental approach that missionaries applied when engaging Swazis on the theme of Ancestral Veneration tended to be counterproductive, and should be discouraged. There is a need to create dialogue and facilitate healthy national debate as this would make mission work possible in the context of Swaziland as we seek to craft a relevant theology. Such an initiative has to driven from within and be initiated and led by the very Swazis who claim to have seen the light, not forgetting those traditionalists who claim to be custodians of the Swazi traditional religion.

In the following chapter 6 some missiological lessons will be drawn in seeking to formulate a relevant mission strategy for Swaziland. In view of the impact the *Incwala* Ceremony has on the world and lifeworld and the Ancestral Veneration of Swazis, perhaps a relevant approach for doing mission is crucial in helping enhance the evangelism thrust. Swazi missiologists including of course other collaborating partners, cannot be blind to the traditional based religion that has withstood the test of time and firmly rooted in the religious life of Swazis. It is perhaps an opportune time to begin to embrace Ancestral Veneration as practiced through the *Incwala* sacred Ceremony in seeking for points of entry in coming up with an effective missiological strategy.

## CHAPTER 6

### **MISSIONAL INTERPRETATION OF INCWALA**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

As we bring to finality discussion around the implications of Swazi traditional beliefs as founded on the *Incwala* Ceremony and indeed the Ancestral Veneration theme, one would like to borrow these words from Maimela (1991:5) acknowledged that:

Accordingly, in all life's pursuits an African will always strive for the maintenance of a dynamic relationship with his or her extended family, clan or tribe, ancestors, God and nature.

Such a realization cannot be ignored any longer, while on another dimension there are well-known theologians in Africa who are affirming the continued tension and challenge between the relationship between God and Ancestors:

The relationship between God and the ancestors within the African Christianity has been an ill-defined and sometimes uneasy one, with theory and practice sometimes in tension and different inferences drawn from similar premises... (Walls, 2002:127).

Having therefore discussed issues around the *Incwala* Ceremony as part of the Ancestral Veneration by Swazis, it is perhaps now prudent to relate lessons learnt and highlight some theological and missiological considerations as part of doing mission in a traditional

religious set up like that of the Swazi nation. One is equally aware that cultural values and customary rites are so dear to any average Swazi, and to summarize the lessons learnt from such a research in itself is a mammoth and challenging task as one keeps on discovering new hidden theories that are on their own quite complex.

It is indeed quite unfortunate and regrettable that messengers of the gospel (missionaries) have tended to look down upon such rich cultural norms and rites as practiced by Swazis. Unfortunately, those practicing and holding on to such customary rites have somehow been despised and considered backwards and uncivilized. Such immature and narrow-minded views when considering doing mission can hinder any effective progressive strategies of engaging such traditional religious inclinations in a more aggressive manner in driving the missions' agenda. It should, however, be stated that any theological reflection and mission happens within a given context and praxis, and messengers of the Gospel should not be blind to such realities as they have an immense impact to the way mission is conducted. Failure to be aware of this might end up causing the Gospel message not being received and embraced.

Any form of missions' engagement in any given context should be somehow greatly influenced and informed about the religious

inclination, beliefs systems and practices the given community being evangelized. It is therefore a very big mistake to underestimate the impact of people's traditional beliefs (*Incwala* Ceremony and Ancestral Veneration) as mission in general happens within a framework of traditional based belief system that cannot be ignored. Kritzinger (1988:6), in his Doctorate of Theology thesis calls for the consideration of the context of the people when doing missions, and he submits that:

Mission is... the attempt to embody God's liberating presence [incarnation] in every human situation. It never takes place in a vacuum, but is always concerned with specific people in specific situations, and searches to discover the meaning of the Good News in each context.

In a traditional setting like that of Swazis who already have a religious background one needs to be constantly reminded when confronted with the Good News, that already there has been prior sensitization of these people about the existence of a Supreme God. To ignore such fundamental realization when doing mission can be quite disastrous and counter productive. In the quest of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, God's liberating power should be sought to bring about insight to such traditional context. In Swazis' quest of trying to relate to the Supreme God *Incwala* and Ancestral Veneration attached to it have a strong influence. In the preceding chapters especially in chapter 3, it has become crystal clear that such customary rites are deeply rooted in Swazis' life and worldview. They cannot be easily wished away and ignored in matters of religion, faith and conduct of

the nation. Anthropologist Kuper (1947:97) paints a picture about the *Incwala* ceremony attests to the fact that is the heart of the religious thinking of every Swazi, and she writes:

The *Incwala* can be abstracted from Swazi culture, in the same way as any other situation... but it has a wider and more representative personnel, and Swazi recognize it as the most important of all national ceremonies, and the most essential event of the year. Personal joys and tragedies, the birth of a child or the death of a loved one, affect individual men and women, but *Incwala* is the heavy play of all the people.

Within the Christian church attempts are being made to encourage corporate celebration of worship. Christian worship attempts to call all believers to join in union as they celebrate the goodness of God so that thanksgiving becomes central to every member. The Psalmist even declares, "Behold how good and pleasant it is when brethren dwell together in unity... It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessings, even life forevermore" (Ps 133:1 & 3). Here we are again confronted with the emphasis of unity and the fellowship of believers. Swazis will then argue that the *Incwala* ceremony affirms this very corporate worship and thanksgiving. During this ceremony the nation comes together for their national prayer and those who cannot be physically there join the multitudes in prayer and thoughts wherever they are during this festival.<sup>28</sup> Yet another realization that the nation prays and intercede that the year to come will be blessed with good health and prosperity

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<sup>28</sup> See pages 38-39

starting with the very life of the King, who is the symbol of unity. Mzizi (1995,120) has stated that *Incwala* brings the commoner and nobility together as they struggle through life. He states that:

In the Swazi context, full humanity is epitomized in the national ***Incwala*** ceremony. I have underscored the national significance of this event, and deliberately downplayed and deconstructed the prevailing notions that it is meant to consolidate kingship. Swazis do not worship kingship, but in kingship they find their true identity as a nation. Kingship not only defines their national aspiration, but cements human relationships within the circle of human existence. The ***Incwala*** thus is not an elevation of Kingship as though kingship is always in dire need of elevation. It is the celebration of communal life, the life in which ancestors interconnect with the living in an egalitarian fashion.

The point that is to be underscored is based on the very notion that ancestors ‘interconnect with the living.’<sup>29</sup> It is quite imperative that such a deep-rooted traditional belief system is highlighted as the very reason that Ancestral Veneration practiced during the *Incwala* Ceremony has shaped the religious mindset of Swazis. It continues to be regarded as a pillar of the sacred religious life and very much central in the integral life of the nation as it assist them to relate with the divinity and spiritual world. So when the nation goes through this sacred ceremony and customary rite, it is more than just a mere act or national duty, but actually impacts heavily on the national duty of the citizens as it is part of a religious instinct and the very lifestyle of the people is influenced and results in guaranteeing corporate responsibility and national bonding. National unity is of paramount

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<sup>29</sup> See page 62.

importance and any traditional action that promotes such is welcomed and appreciated, like in the *Incwala* sacred Ceremony.

## 6.2 The mysterious characteristics of *Incwala*

The *Incwala* Ceremony has been marked with its mysterious characteristics and other hidden ritualistic processes that happen inside the *inhlambelo*.<sup>30</sup> The majority of the people partaking are not privileged to see all these events and somehow not necessarily aware of their ritualistic implications thereof. Some of the rituals are so ancient and old that many might as well think that it is just a national prayer. The secrecy and mysterious aspect around the *Incwala* Ceremony has clouded the event, and it comes as no surprise when Christians become a bit disturbed about the mystery and secrecy around the rituals that are performed during the event. It is unfortunate that these matters are not meant for public debate and scrutiny, as such discussions cannot be openly held so that we get to engage those who are intimately involved.

The Christian church, therefore, cannot be blamed for rightly or wrongly concluding that perhaps these secretive activities are certainly ungodly and the Christians are then told they should not be seen associating themselves with such secretive events. As the research was being undertaken, it became quite clear that perhaps the time has

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<sup>30</sup> See in depth explanation and description of Incwala in page 37-38.

come where we should cultivate a culture of engaging those who are closer to the main event and play a significant role that perhaps it is now an opportune time to open up this ceremony so that people can partake from an informed position of what is actually involved. It is only then that we will freely avail more information about such events so that that a healthy dialogue begins and then the witnessing of the Good News becomes more possible as there is common ground and consensus. One cannot blame the Christians for being sceptical of this sacred event because it is rather a closed event that is clouded with so much secrecy. But the importance of observing this ceremony cannot be doubted as there continues to be great interest shown by Swazis today. The underlying question is, what is so special about this ceremony that would force each and every person (especially Swazis) to want to get involved? At times one wonders why Swazis who participates in such a sacred ceremony feel fulfilled and spiritually uplifted.

### **6.3 The Gospel Should shine its light to the *Incwala* Ceremony**

There is something that is profound and special about the Christian Gospel that could assist one to draw from it in arguing that such faith carries more weight than any other philosophical missionary approach. The Gospel message transcends all cultural biases and upholds the truth of God and brings about transformation both culturally and

spiritually. Its message remains relevant and undiluted even by the interpretations and pre-judgmental tendencies. Gray (1991:1) expresses something worth reflecting on regarding the Gospel message:

Inevitably the Gospel carries implications which transcend the understanding of those who proclaim it. Christian scriptures and sacraments have, as it were, escaped from the hands and minds of those who brought them, and have spoken directly to various very different needs of Africans.

While the Gospel message does withstand the test of culturally based beliefs and traditions, interestingly the *Incwala* Ceremony as a ritual is somehow closely related to that of Christians observing the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Of course, such a statement can be viewed as radical and quite unsettling, as others will claim that a statement of this magnitude is blasphemous as nothing can be equated to the Lord's Supper sacrament. In the Catholic, Anglican and Greek Orthodox traditions there is no doubt that a high level of much reverence is accorded to the sacrament of the Holy Communion. There are special dishes set aside for the administration of the wine and bread as symbols of the blood and body of Jesus Christ which are central during such a service. These traditions use the burning of incense that is believed to be an attempt to cleanse the place before Holy Communion is administered. The Priests, who are believed to be servants of the Lord, are the only ones entrusted with this duty of administering the bread and the wine. It is not every individual believer that can be

entrusted with this duty except those specially set aside for that sacred service. During the *Incwala* ceremony they have in place ‘National priests’ (**Bemanti**) known as the people of the sea who go to collect some ingredients to be used during the rituals (West,1976:61). They, like priests, play fundamental role in ensuring that all rituals are performed accordingly.

It then baffles one as to why it should even become an issue that within the *Incwala* ceremony there are priests and entrusted elders who are responsible for administering herbs and traditional **muti** is burnt during the commemoration of the *Incwala* ceremony. There are special wooden dishes (**nemigwembe**) and special jars (**tindzengelo**) of clay that hold the herbs even during these processes. Christians are very disturbed by the use of **muti**, but then the argument will be what is wrong with the usage of good **muti** not meant to harm anybody, and is only used as part of the cleansing process of the King.<sup>31</sup> Swazis then become more disturbed when the Christians condemn the use of muti. Their point of argument is based on the same understanding that God created and gave humankind the very herbs to further their own health as clearly stated in Genesis 2. During the *Incwala* ceremony such herbs are used when administering health and prolonged good life for the king, as well as a means of protecting him to become whole again in preparation for the approaching New Year.

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<sup>31</sup> As clearly articulated in pages 38-39 (3.1).

### **6.3.1 The partakers and administrators of *Incwala* as compared to those administering Holy Communion**

Within the Christian church, the Lord's Supper is commemorated in memory of Jesus Christ the 'Great Ancestor.' When celebrating this event, Christians are urged to remember Him to be mindful of Christ's death and subsequent resurrection. He is the sacrificial Lamb of God, and such an act makes him a revered ancestor. Christ is the central figure during Holy Communion and the reason for the event. Traditionalists within the Swazi context will then argue and claim that the *Incwala* Ceremony is commemorated as a means of remembering their good works in memory of what they accomplished. By venerating them it affirms the long held view that *emadloti* are believed to be actively involved in our daily lives and are quite capable of influencing events of this life.<sup>32</sup> Ancestral Veneration as practiced during the *Incwala* Ceremony is not an act of worship, but rather a means of affirming their resolve and foundational belief of relating to ***Mvelinchanti*.**

There are claims that a sense of belonging is derived from the Christian faith and realized when one participates in Holy Communion (Lord's supper). Swazis will then advance an argument that through the *Incwala* Ceremony there is that realization and

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<sup>32</sup> See Pages 69-70

sense of belonging that is derived. Musopole (1994:173) has observed that “Since time is one of the natural givens that human beings can do little to alter, the dictum, ‘I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am,’ serves as the most suitable key or heuristic tool for understanding African ontology, philosophy, and religion ...” If the celebration of Holy Communion is the affirmation of one’s interdependence to Christ as well as enabling one’s faith to have that spiritual connectedness to God, then it can be concluded that the *Incwala* ceremony within the Swazi context is equally a religious journey and attempt meant to keep the living connected to the other world where God and ancestors live.

### **6.3.2 Results of Celebrating *Incwala* Ceremony**

The Christian church considers the Holy Communion holy and sacred. Those participating in it are expected to have spent time in preparing themselves for this event by confessing any known sin in their lives before partaking in this sacred event. In fact, in the Catholic tradition, confession times are set aside for those wanting to participate in Holy Communion. It is firmly founded on the desire of maintaining unity in the church of Christ and for the witnessing of the Good News of the Gospel message. Oduyoye (1983: 223-225) writes:

The Eucharist should be for us a symbol of unity of all humanity and the hope that we shall experience this

unity even here on earth, and that all will come to recognize the sovereignty of God over all creation...Our unity as a community of believers is for a purpose. Jesus said, "I pray that they may be one ... so that the world will believe that you sent me"...

Those who have participated in the *Incwala* Ceremony will attest that it is also meant to consolidate national unity and prayer that the nation may continue standing united. Mzizi (1995: 120) has argued strongly that, *Incwala* is a call for national unity, friendship and cooperation, the question of hierarchies in the Swazi aristocracy is down played during such an event...". This event is therefore able just like in the case of the Holy Communion to bring together a commoner and nobility so that they are seen as one in the presence of the great.

### **6.3.3 The partakers and administrators of *Incwala* as compared to those administering Hoy Communion.**

Those who perform and administer the ceremonial rituals are certain chosen people.<sup>33</sup> This is to ensure trust and affirms the sacredness of the event itself. While Christians are not happy with the use of traditional herbs and medicine as part of cleansing the King who is central in this ceremony, it should be stated that these are means of a visible action to remove bad luck and omens from the monarchy.<sup>34</sup> The Christians believe that one should not be

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<sup>33</sup> See also page 4 and 45.

<sup>34</sup> See also page 46.

expected to partake in the Holy Communion once there are known sins and unresolved issues. In (1 Cor 11:27) it is stated that “Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the Body and Blood of the Lord.” During the *Incwala* Ceremony those responsible ensure that the King, who is the symbol of the unity of the nation, is worthy to participate in this sacred ceremony on their behalf.<sup>35</sup>

#### 6.3.4 Results of Celebrating *Incwala* Ceremony

Once the *Incwala* Ceremony process has been fully celebrated and completed the nation is guaranteed that a sense of renewal has occurred, as national prayers would have been made to ***Mvelinchanti*** and the ***emadloti***. This is further confirmed as an assurance that the nation may face the New Year with vigour and determination.<sup>36</sup> There is normally a deep sense of contentment and fulfillment, as well as an assurance derived from the full knowledge that ***Mvelinchanti*** has sanctioned the nation under the leadership of the King to carry on with national tasks and duties. Going through this sacred process also affirms that ***emadloti*** too would have endorsed the national aspirations as peace and stability will then be guaranteed and ensured. Christians on the other hand

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<sup>35</sup> See also page 49

<sup>36</sup> See also page 52

affirm that they are encouraged once they have participated in the Holy Communion as they do this in the memory of Jesus.<sup>37</sup>

#### 6.4 The Black Ceremonial Bull – A Sacrifice during *Incwala*

During the *Incwala* Ceremony a black ceremonial bull is slaughtered after the king has cleansed himself in the sacred enclosure.<sup>38</sup> It is believed that it carries on its shoulders all the bad luck and national sins committed during the course of the previous year, thereby becoming a sacrificial animal. As the King is the symbol of the people, whatever he does on behalf of the nation it is believed that it is actually the very prayers and aspirations of the nation. Kuper (1963:70) has captured this event as follows:

The main event of the day is the “killing of the bull,” the symbol of potency. The king strikes a specially selected Black Bull with the rod docctored for fertility and “awakening,” and the pure youths must catch the animal, throw it to the ground, pummel it with their bare hands, and drag it into the sanctuary where it is sacrificed.

There will obviously be many arguments that are advanced as to what is the significance of this sacred bull? Christians are aware that in Holy Communion they view Christ as the sacrificial lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Walls (2002:127) and indeed all the unrighteousness of humankind. In Isaiah 53:2-5 (NASV) this is well described;

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<sup>37</sup> 1 Cor 11: 26

<sup>38</sup> See 3.4.3 page 52

He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face, he was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon him, and by his scourging we are healed.

#### 6.4.1 **Symbolism of the Sacrificial bull**

The undeniable fact that can be put on the table for our further discussion and interaction purposes is the symbolism of the sacrificial ceremonial bull for the *Incwala* ceremony that can be equated to that of Christ. This ceremonial bull is supposed to be blameless and without any deformity. It is to be well preserved and taken care of before the ceremony is undertaken. Can't this be true of the Christ who is believed to have been without sin when he finally went to the cross to die for humankind? Interestingly, the bull is there for ritual purposes and is to be sacrificed once the King has gone through the cleansing ritualistic processes.<sup>39</sup> It carries with it life's joys and sorrows of the previous year, as the King enters the New Year with rekindled hope and determination.

#### 6.4.2 **The killing of the Bull to replace the life of the King**

The ceremonial bull is killed in a gruesome manner and its death is indeed a painful one symbolizing a hard life full of trials and

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<sup>39</sup> See page 53.

tribulations. It is beaten with fists and no other weapon is used, it is made to bleed to death, as the young boys will be all over it. That groaning of the bull is indicative that it is used as a substitute for the life of death that would have otherwise been upon the king and his people. Once the rituals have been carried out on it, it is said that the bull is actually overwhelmed by the bad luck that it is now carrying on its shoulders. The weight of the national sins that the bull carries is then offered as a sacrifice to the ancestors seeking for their intervention and pleading for their protection. Such claims can be equated to the fact that when the Son of God died for humankind, he carried with Him all the bad things that would have otherwise befallen humanity as sinners. During Holy Communion Christians are reminded of that very sacrifice and the sins that Christ bore on their behalf.

#### **6.5 Christianity should not underestimate people's cultural beliefs**

It is the recommendation of this research that in all honesty, Christian mission should not underestimate people's cultural beliefs and traditions that are found in their given context.<sup>40</sup> There are bound to be tensions experienced when mission is conducted. In fact such tensions, they have always existed before whenever cultural norms are seen being challenged by the messengers who are bringing the Gospel message to a traditional setting. Any given community,

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<sup>40</sup> See detailed explanation on why it is important to consider religious inclination of the people in a given context in page 118.

including that of Swazis, consists of many people who though seen as individuals, should be understood to be part of a greater cultural system and set-up. No person is an island, and the influence of cultural norms shapes every individual religious pursuit. There is a need, therefore, to seriously consider that a theme such as Ancestral Veneration through the *Incwala* Ceremony will one way or the other lead to tensions between Christ's Gospel message and the given culture of that community, in this case the Swazi. Hesselgrave (1976:79) has observed that missionaries, "...they touch culture every time they speak and wherever they work...they are agents of cultural change in accordance with the commands of Christ..." It will therefore be folly for any missionary to be blind to what cultural beliefs dictate in a given situation, and *Incwala* is such a sacred cultural practice that will forever be a challenge to the Christian witness and mission in Swaziland. Attempts of sharing the Gospel with any culture must consider the cultural practices of a given community. Pityana (1992:9) attests to this when he writes; "If the Gospel is incarnated in a culture it becomes part of it and is the basis for judgment. If it is alien to it fails to take root." It will be a big mistake to undermine culture in missions and the Gospel must be incarnated in the culture of the people.

### **6.5.1 *Incwala* Ceremony as a gateway to doing mission with the Swazis**

Saayman (1991:7) has stated that; “Mission (evangelism) is the attempt to embody God’s liberating presence in every human situation. It never takes place in a culture vacuum, but is always concerned with specific people in specific situations, and searches to discover the meaning of the Good News in each context.” *Incwala* as a cultural rite provides a specific context to doing missions in that Swazis’ religious context. When *Incwala* is approached with respect and open minds it could as well become a fertile ground for missions and indeed to a greater extent a strong link for evangelism purposes. Suffice to say that one will not be starting from scratch when sharing the Good News in Swaziland. There is a need therefore to seek for those links and practices that have some religious significance, just as Paul did when he identified in Athens an altar with the inscription ‘to an unknown god’ and thereafter he proclaimed the Good News using that very same link. Cultural issues such as *Incwala* Ceremony are not to be undermined because people are closely connected to their cultural heritage and are not going to easily give up what has been part of their value system.

Culture is such an all-embracing phenomenon that one cannot underestimate it in mission. Taylor in Shorter (1988:4) summarizes culture when he referred to it as, "...that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." It is beyond doubt that culture shapes a person's behaviour and belief systems and is somehow the very core foundation of a given cultural context. Missions should therefore be sensitive to such cultural norms and practices as *Incwala* Ceremony and the Ancestral Veneration. Unfortunately Christian messengers (missionaries) have tended to be very much judgmental and in the process end up being biased towards these traditional based beliefs that have religious characteristics as Setiloane (1986:17) has rightly observed,

It is my sincerely conviction that the question of Ancestors - "The Living Dead": *Badimo, Iminyanya, or Amadlozi*, has been wrongly approached right from the beginning. The people who first brought it to notice of the world outside were missionaries who were definitely biased..."

#### **6.5.1.1 Christianity Confronts Culture**

The undeniable fact is that Christianity confronts culture and as such any cultural value system cannot be left unchallenged by the Gospel message. Messengers of the Gospel will always have to be mindful of their message and biases because of the

very tensions that already exist whenever the Gospel message is shared. After all, Gospel messengers are agents of change as Hesselgrave (1978 : 79) suggests,

“...agents of cultural change in accordance with the commands of Christ... It is important, therefore, that they have a biblical view, not only of Christ, but also of culture.... They must recognize that every culture has elements of divine order... each has potential for the revelation of God’s truth and for its concealment or mutilation...”

It is very disturbing that when missionaries came to Swaziland quite substantial mistakes were made as they came face to face with the reality of a traditional context with cultural rites that had a religious flavour. No wonder their message was somehow resisted when they began to question cultural practices such as *Incwala* Ceremony that is sacred and is viewed as a time for national prayer and is believed to be a divine revelation of God. Regrettably missionaries condemned such rites without giving themselves time to study the history and religious relevance they have to include the nation and its people.

#### **6.5.1.2 Culture is the creation of God**

As in all other nations, God has given to Swazis culture and that they have practiced it over many centuries. It is therefore imperative that cultural rites such as *Incwala* Ceremony are revisited and evaluated as Swazis uphold the fact that that they

are a gift from God. The Gospel message and should then be allowed to shine on such rites and if there are any wrongs let them be exposed by the Gospel message not people's biases. It should be stated that even before there was any missionary work undertaken in the nation, God in His own divine initiative planted some seeds indicative of His existence in the subconscious minds of the people. Such religious actions in any given context should be appreciated, as a God given and that there could be methodologies employed by missiologists in which such rites are used, as links to the very same God whom the Missionaries presented should become part of the mission agenda. Let alone if the emphasis of such activities is on prayer and somehow embraces traditional religious nature that recognizes the existence of a Superior and Supreme Being. Thorpe (1992:30) observes when she writes, "...No people nor tribe in Africa does not believe in a Supreme Being..." *Incwala* and Ancestral Veneration therefore are indeed gifts from God to Swazis and remain the shining light and preparation for the Good News that was to come.

#### 6.5.1.3 **Embody the Gospel to a given culture**

There is a need to embody the Gospel message into a given culture through identification process of those things that can

become links for the advancement of the Gospel message. By so doing attempts therefore should be made to seeking within a given culture traits that have a Christian inclination and avoid only picking out and condemning the wrongs in the given culture. *Incwala* Ceremony as a process is an attempt to relate to God that should be viewed positively. According to Hesselgrave (1978:90)

Mission, in fact, begins with Identification and communication with God made possible because He has identified and communicated with us.

It makes sense then to begin identification process even within the *Incwala* Ceremony so that linkages and bridges are then established. Through Christ God has identified with humankind and then he continues to reveal himself with humanity as His own after all people are made after his image.

#### **6.5.1.4 Possessing the culture for Christ and His Gospel**

Mission generally should attempt to possess the culture of Christ. This then implies that cultural rites such as *Incwala* Ceremony should be reposessed for Christ because of their significance to the theme of mission especially to a culturally sensitive group like Swazis. The fact that such rites carry with them an element of godliness should be viewed as showing beyond any reasonable doubt that God is sovereign. It becomes

a bit irresponsible when messengers of the Gospel decide to be so opposed to traditional based religion that in any way would assist and make the sharing of the Good News become more possible. It will also create a link that would allow for a point of entry, as people generally are more likely to relate to things with which they are familiar with. Through Ancestral Veneration as evidenced during the *Incwala* Ceremony Swazis seek for God's interventions in the life of the nation as they seek his face.

## 6.6 The Incwala Ceremony giving a sense of belonging to the Swazis

The *Incwala* Ceremony gives the Swazi a sense of belonging and indeed an identity.<sup>41</sup> The fulfillment derived from partaking in the ceremonial rites and prayers to ancestors brings about security and affirmation. All people are equal and there is no class or status that can hinder a Swazi from participating. Mzizi in Bujra (2002:166) describes it as, "Working behind the scenes is a conglomerate team of traditional doctors and Zionist prophets. National elders and certain clans play various roles in the event ..." He goes on saying, "*Incwala* ceremony thus brings commoner and nobility together in a solid symbiotic relationship that ties the Swazis together..." (2002:167). It should be reaffirmed that this a national event and part of and parcel being a Swazi and is all-inclusive. Interestingly, when partaking in Holy Communion there is emphasis that this is a service of fellowship and it

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<sup>41</sup> See page 88

carries with it that sense of belonging and togetherness and somehow Christians derive an identity. Christians are urged to wait for each other (1 Corinthians 11:33). They are to partake at the table on an equal footing, and are not discriminated against because of their race, sex or status.

#### 6.6.1 The King as the main player of *Incwala* Ceremony

“The main player and centre of attraction during *Incwala* is the King” (Mzizi in Bujra 2002:166). The Swazi people look up to the King as a part of a link and connection to the Ancestors and ultimately to God. The fact that he plays a central role during the event marks him as significant in the sacred ceremony itself. Earlier it has been said that he is the symbol of unity, and the ceremony is only observed when he is alive.<sup>42</sup> Surely though we cannot equate a mortal soul to the level of Christ. I find it quite significant that the person who is central in the Holy Communion is Christ as this commemoration of Holy Communion is Christ as this sacred Christian service is held in his honour. I see the role played by the king as somehow a link that could be used in actually presenting the Gospel message, as Christ becomes the central figure as in Holy Communion and no mortal being including the king can be equated to the son of God. Christians can view this as blasphemous statement, but in actual fact this dissertation is merely

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<sup>42</sup> See page 40 (3.1)

highlighting some similarities that can enrich the understanding of the *Incwala* as a religious rite and passage.

#### **6.6.2 *Incwala* Ceremony adds value to the traditional beliefs of the Swazis**

It should be stated that *Incwala* Ceremony as a traditional system of belief adds value to the religious passage of the Swazi. It has given a realization and foreknowledge of the existence of a Supreme Being believed to be behind all the things that we see being part of the created order. Such a recognition adds value indeed in mission because it becomes a link that could be embraced as part of propagating the Good News. It becomes such a crucial theme of focus when one realizes that if it were to be explored further, it would not be like starting a long journey all over again that people would not have gone through before. The fact that it gives a spiritual dimension to the national agenda makes it good point of entry as the messengers will link their message with something with which the people are familiar. Setiloane (1983:63) has rightly put it: “But we Africans are bringing something to Christianity. A view of Divinity much higher, deeper, and all-pervasive.” Such a contribution becomes a bridge indeed and needs to be appreciated and commended because it reaffirms that God was and is at work to accomplish His purposes even using

traditional based rites and cultural ceremonies like *Incwala* Ceremony that has spiritual impact.

### 6.7 The Incwala and Ancestral Veneration as part of religious life of the Swazi

Many arguments could be advanced for or against Ancestral Veneration through the *Incwala* Ceremony if they could add value to the religious life of Swazis. The fact of the matter is that it should be appreciated that Swazis have a view about life and life beyond the grave. This has been advanced so well by reputable scholars like Mbiti and Setiloane showing that Ancestral Veneration should not be viewed as a form of worshiping the dead who are after all known as ‘Living dead’. Swazis revere the existence of God and are spiritually connected to him through Ancestral Veneration. Setiloane has shared this in the poem *I am an African* where a relationship is firmly established between ancestors and the Supreme God. Daneel (1987:120) comments so well about this when he writes, “...Though direct identification with ***uMvelingqangi, uNkulunkulu, Modimo, Modiri and Lesa,*** Yahweh is introduced in the context of traditional religion and respected as the Great God in whose presence the deceased ancestors dwell. The ancestors who act as mediator between the living and God...” This is well affirmed by Swazis through the

*Incwala* Ceremony as an attempt to relate to God to offer thanksgiving in a more traditional religious sense and Christians have a lot to learn from this without being judgmental and biased. Matsebula (1987:330) in his argument for commemoration of *Incwala* Ceremony articulates it when explains that:

It is a thanksgiving occasion for the ending year and a prayer for the New Year. The King, as the national leader and unifying symbol, is the foremost actor. Hence it is called the ceremony of Kingship. In a less serious interpretation it is known as the first fruit eating ceremony....

#### **6.8 The *Incwala* Ceremony – A Mystery of interlink Communication between the Living and the Living Dead.**

*Incwala* Ceremony and Ancestral Veneration present one with that mystery of interlink communications between the living and “living dead.” This is a deep theological issue within African theology and the traditional system of beliefs that could well become a contribution to mission in Africa. Ancestors generally within the Swazi traditional belief system are believed to be alive and are able to communicate with the Living. Such a view brings in a higher level of spirituality where claims of visions and dreams as a means of communicating with the dead are believed to be possible. This is even affirmed by the story of Lazarus and the rich man in the gospels.<sup>43</sup> It is then affirmed that we surely cannot discard Ancestral Veneration as a means of communication between the living and the dead and subsequently to God.

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<sup>43</sup> John 11:43

## **6.9 *Incwala* Ceremony Rituals –Faith healing versus traditional Healing**

The challenge that keeps on arising and cannot be avoided when discussing the *Incwala* Ceremony and Ancestral Veneration is the claim by faith healers that they too derive their powers from ancestral spirits. This brings about confusion as even Traditional Healers end up claiming that their healing methodologies are also sanctioned by the same God Christians worship. It should be stated that healing and good medicine is for the good of the people and therefore godly. However one is bound to grapple with the other rituals associated with traditional medicine that are somehow not in conformity with the teachings of Scriptures. The so called revelations that people claim to receive as to who is behind such attacks can indeed bring enmity between people and relatives. Hence the complication that arises within the Christendom, because God could not approve of such as had shown when King Saul in the Old Testament consulted spiritists.<sup>44</sup>

## **6.10 *Incwala* Rituals as an attempt to relate to the Supreme**

While *Incwala* Ceremony and Ancestral Veneration attempt to assist Swazis to relate to the supreme God, there is no mention of Jesus Christ whom Christians strongly advocate as the healer whose death and atonement brings about healing. Traditional Healers who are normally the main actors during the *Incwala* Ceremony cannot be

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<sup>44</sup> 1 Samuel 28.

equated to Jesus Christ the healer. There are even calls though that the elevation of the Traditional Healers to be above Christ is not encouraged as Kibongi in Daneel (1987:129) writes "...Congolese nganga was never a mediator between '*Muntu*' man and ***Nzambi*** (God), but only between man and departed spirits..." There is, however, a lesson to be learnt here that even though Traditional Healers play such a pivotal role, Christ still could be presented as a great healer and indeed above all else, thus giving another opportunity for doing mission in the context of Swazis as healing plays an important part.

#### **6.11    *Incwala* Ceremony a highly spiritual religious rite acknowledging the existence of the Supreme**

Ancestral Veneration as practiced during the *Incwala* Ceremony is indeed a highly spiritual religious rite within the Swazi people. It is underestimated that even through Christians who oppose such ceremonies the fact of the matter is that they will be here for quite sometime because they are imbedded in the people's cultural heritage and are part of their lifestyle. Right from the time a Swazi person is born until one departs from this world Ancestral Veneration is crafted and firmly rooted in the religious inclination. It becomes quite a challenge to even discard such a value system that has is firmly established as part of Swazis' norms and values. One is rather

optimistic that Swazi Missiologists can begin to engage traditional beliefs system and somehow be cultivating a framework for a continuous debate and dialogue with adherents of such religious practices. God is a Supreme God who has created all people and Swazis do not choose the cultural group in which they are brought up with cultural rites that are characterized by customs that still affirm a certain level of spirituality and religious mind set. The truth that He chooses to reveal Himself through such religious rites should be appreciated because even in the *Incwala* ceremony and the Ancestral Veneration one can still find links and indeed bridges for engagement as we all try to seek ways and means of relating to the God who has created everything. It is like a journey of a thousand miles that begins with a few steps, and thus the *Incwala* Ceremony and Veneration of the Ancestors are but a process pointing towards the ways and direction to the Supreme deity to which we derive to relate to. To this end through this research one has discovered that there is more to the *Incwala* Ceremony and Ancestral Veneration, and through the rich interaction with the processes, God is indeed supreme and His ways are just beyond our imagination.

#### **6.12     Swazis Are connected to the Spirit World**

Another component that cannot be denied or even downplayed when one reflects critically on the theme of Ancestral Veneration is that

Swazis are strongly connected to the spiritual world. Ancestors are therefore a key to a Swazis' hope for the future, as they possess power to influence their daily lives. What one finds interesting though, is that there is a long held view that they actually have powers to mediate to God on behalf of the living which is firmly established in Swazis' world and life view. O'Donovan (1992:218) has described this, "In African traditional religion, there is a very important relationship between the living and those who have died (living dead)..." Traditional religions often require elaborate relationships between the living and the living dead. These relationships can include rituals, sacrifices and offerings which must be made to satisfy or persuade the ancestors." When presenting the Gospel message one has to be aware of this rich cultural heritage that Swazis enjoy, and therefore the *Incwala* Ceremony with its sacredness becomes quite a sensitive area when pronounced evil and demonic by the messengers of the Gospel. The reality that is there for all to see is that *Incwala* Ceremony and the Ancestral Veneration, are pillars of the Swazi traditional religion and will indeed still be around for quite some time. The *Incwala* Ceremony should therefore be used as a "bridge", leading to the very heart of the Swazi culture. Just as the Vision of King Somhlolo was preparatory from a historical point of view, this sacred ceremony should be used in opening the way for a fuller exposure of the Christian reality to the entire Swazi nation.

## CHAPTER 7

### Conclusion

Traditional Ceremonies like *Incwala* Ceremony are yet an indication that Africans have a high sense of spirituality. Ancestral Veneration should therefore not be discarded as ungodly as Swazis and other nationalities in Africa are actually bringing to our Christianity another dimension of humanity quest to relate to the Supreme God. *Incwala* is a Swazi and to be Swazi is to celebrate the *Incwala* sacred Ceremony. I think Maimela (1991:11) has concluded well when he observed that Traditional African religion is still meeting the very real needs of Africans as they are availing a better solution and procuring salvation for social ills, evil spirits and witchcraft.

There is no doubt that Africans are reluctant to break with their traditional religion as it is deeply rooted in the fact that it still gives them relief, hope and help in the challenges they face daily and in their everyday needs. This is very true of the Swazi people who as a nation will continue joyfully celebrating and commemorating the *Incwala* Ceremony year after year and pay their respects to the “living dead” ***emadloti*** as they are convinced this is part of their religious and cultural heritage given to them by their forefathers who were the founders of the nation. After all Swazis do relate to the Supreme God through Ancestral Veneration and this is a

contribution to the quest for understanding the African traditional religion as contained in the African theology theme. Swazis remain ready and indeed a fertile ground for mission and the propagation of the Gospel. The challenge is upon us all, especially the Swazi Missiologists, to reach out to the nation as Christ once said, “behold the fields are white and ready for harvest.”<sup>45</sup> The Great Commission remains so true and relevant to Swaziland.<sup>46</sup>

I conclude with this thought as articulated by Kabasale (1996:116):

...In the Bantu conception, life is comparable to such a liquid: the individual receives it from the first vessel. Which represents his or her Ancestor, and with which the individuals remains in an ongoing communication. Everything that later happens enhances the degree of participation in the life of the highest interest to ancestors, and has repercussions on all other members of the clan.

This is so true with the *Incwala* Ceremony and the ongoing commemoration of the same as founded on the Ancestral Veneration by Swazis. It certainly does add value to Swazi missiologists and their desire to do missions by declaring the Good News as we help establish the Kingdom of God in Swaziland. To undermine the impact and significance of *Incwala* Ceremony and the Ancestral Veneration in the religious life and spirituality of Swazis would be to commit a great blunder as it does have bearing on Swazis' understanding of what ***uMvelinchanti*** expects of them.

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<sup>45</sup> Matthew 9:37

<sup>46</sup> Matthew 28:16f

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