

**OLD TESTAMENT TEXTS IN MALAGASY CONTEXTS:  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT  
IN THREE RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS IN MADAGASCAR**

by

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## SUMMARY

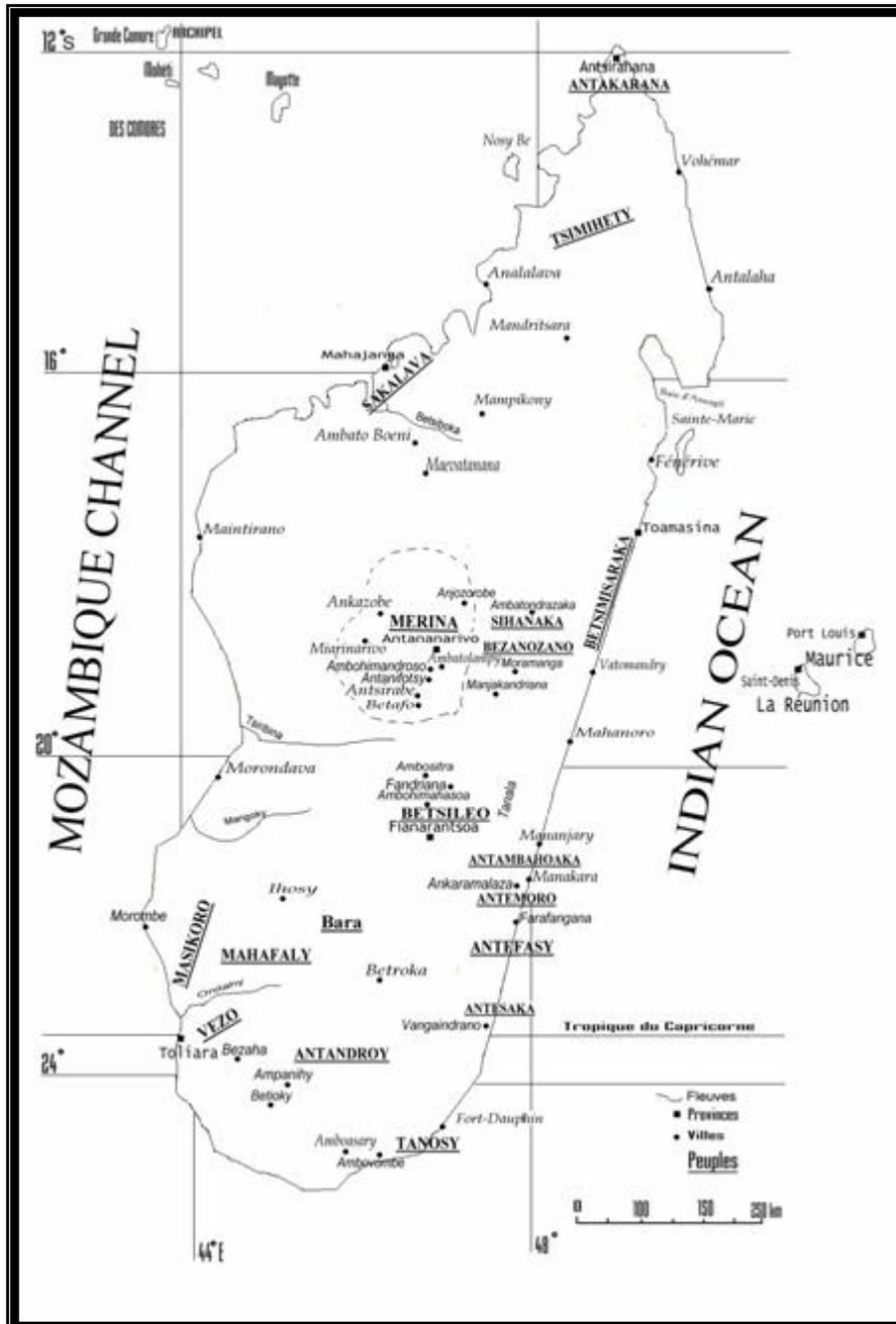
The Old Testament, which is one of the first books in the Malagasy language, plays an important role in the religious and cultural life of most people in Madagascar, for instance in an increasing tendency to use Old Testament texts in Malagasy religious contexts, which is noticeable both within and outside mainstream Christianity.

The first such case illustrating this trend within the Church is the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church's (MRCC's) application of certain texts in the *famadihana* (turning of the dead), a custom reflecting traditional Malagasy practices in their strongest form. Almost all the Malagasy churches from their beginning have unsuccessfully attempted to abolish it. Therefore, the MRCC decided to base it on biblical texts and incorporated it in her liturgy in order to make it a Christian celebration. Among the texts used here are: Genesis 49: 33-50: 13; Exodus 13: 19 and Exodus 20: 12.

The second case is the Malagasy Lutheran Church's (MLC's) employment of Old Testament texts to create certain items for Nenilava (Tall mother), the founder of the revival movement of Ankaramalaza, who was acknowledged by this Church and the members of this movement as a prophetess and priestess. To demonstrate these roles, and at the same time to confirm her consecration, the MLC and the 'children of Ankaramalaza' made for her a priestly robe modelled on the high priest's garments described in Exodus 28 and a silver crown related to Deuteronomy 28.

The use of the Old Testament outside the Church is illustrated by the third case, investigating tradition-practitioners' applications of Old Testament texts in their religious practices. Examples include: 1) Exodus 3:1-3; Leviticus 14: 1-8; Jeremiah 8: 22, used in traditional healing; 2) Exodus 3: 5b; Job 33: 6a; Psalm 121: 8a, employed as religious slogans; 3) Leviticus 1-6, applied in traditional sacrifices and offerings; and 4) Psalm 113: 5-6; Genesis 2: 18, 22, employed as references for morality.

This project, which describes and analyses how and why the Old Testament is used by different people, Christian and traditionalist, in Malagasy religious contexts, is aimed at developing an interpretive model based on these three cases. More specifically, it seeks to show how the Old Testament can be interpreted and used in contemporary Madagascar/Africa.



Map: Madagascar with the names of the Malagasy ethnic groups (in capital and underlined).

Map drawn from:  
 Molet, L. 1979. *La conception du monde Surnaturel et de l'homme en Imerina*, Vol 1. Paris : L'Harmattan

## **KEYWORDS**

Old Testament texts, Malagasy Roman Catholic Church, Malagasy Lutheran Church, Madagascar, Christian religion, traditional religion, hermeneutics, *famadihana* (turning of the dead), *Razana* (ancestor), shrouds, tombs, *Raiamandreny* (parents, elders, religious and secular authorities), religio-cultural practices, revival movement, priestly garments, crown, traditio-practitioners, traditional healing, religious slogans, *sorona* (sacrifices), *fanatitra* (offerings), references for morals, 'closed book', 'open book', traditional historical-critical interpretation, legitimisation, inculturation, contextualisation, accommodation, popularisation.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND

#### 1.1.1 Madagascar: land, culture and religion

Madagascar is an island which lies 400 km off the southeastern coast of the continent of Africa. It is situated between the western part of the Indian Ocean, in the east, and the Mozambique Channel, in the west. Covering a total area of 587 041 sq km, which is about two and a half times the size of Great Britain, Madagascar is among the largest islands of the world. To be precise, it is the fourth largest after Greenland, New Guinea and Borneo (Mervyn 1995:1). Because of its size, some historians call it ‘the continent in miniature’ or ‘the little continent’ (Verin 1990: 5).

Madagascar is inhabited by the Malagasy people, which comprise 18 ethnic groups whose ancestors arrived from different points of the neighbouring world, such as from Africa in the west, Indonesia in the east, and Arabia in the north (Middleton 1999: 4). However, despite these ethnological differences a common language, Malagasy, is spoken throughout the island. Referring to linguistic arguments, Mervyn (1995: 10) argues that the Malagasy language was probably formed from the combination of Malayo-Polynesian, Bantu and Arabic languages.<sup>1</sup> Taking its geographical location and the mixed origin of its people into consideration, the Malagasy culture, to some extent, could be seen as a bridge and a crossroads between Africa and Asia (cf. Bloch 1986: 13).

As far as the religion is concerned, observers affirm that the Malagasy people are profoundly religious. Hübsch (1993: 506), for instance, argues that religion is of primary importance in the life of the Malagasy people, Christians as well as traditionalists. It dominates their thinking, shapes their culture as well as their way of life, and even influences their political organisation. This accords with the declaration made by the bishops of the Association of Members of Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa at the conclusion of their

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to Mervyn’s argument, I can remark that elements from European languages, especially from English and French, are also included in the Malagasy language. Examples of them are *boky* (book: English); *penina* (pen: English); *anjely* (angel: English); *polopitra* (pulpit: English); *tabilao* (tableau: French); *seza* (chaise: French); *divay* (du vin: French); *kahie* (cahier: French).

Plenary Business Meeting (in Nairobi in 1991), which emphasises that ‘Africans are religious people’ (Onuh 1992: 97).

According to Hübsch (1993: 506), Christianity is the dominant and most organised religion in Madagascar, being practised by nearly half of the population. Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism are also found, but are practised by a small minority only. As for the rest of the Malagasy people, they adhere to the Malagasy traditional religion. According to Bloch’s observation (1986: 27), however, no strict border exists between Christianity and traditional religion because, on the one hand, many Christians remain attached to the traditional belief, and on the other hand, traditionalists share some Christian experiences with their Christian relatives. In fact, it should be noted that many Malagasy Christians turn to the traditional religion in times of crisis, such as diseases, loss of cattle, fear of witchcraft and enemies, and rely upon it for practical solutions. One of the possible explanations of such a situation, according to Bloch (1986: 27), is that for some Malagasy people, becoming Christian just means ‘adding to existing beliefs and practices’.

With regard to traditional religion, it should be emphasised, as Afagbegee (2001: 60) does, that the perception exists that African people already possessed a religious belief of their own, worshipped a creator, and evidenced a high sense of morality long before the first missionaries set foot on African soil. Probably this is why some African people consider that to a certain extent European missionaries did not bring a new religion to Africa but rather brought a new understanding of the Supreme Being. This is also, I think, why Malagasy traditionalists consider that there are points of convergence or similarities between Christianity or, more precisely, between the Bible and the Malagasy traditional religion.

The Malagasy people, since time immemorial, have believed in a Supreme Being they call Zanahary, which literally means ‘the One who created’ (Hübsch 1993: 73, 77).<sup>2</sup> This is attested by Flacour, a French historian living in Madagascar during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, who writes that the Malagasy believe in one Super Being, creator of everything, to whom they give the name Zanahary; they worship him, revere him and talk about him with great respect (Molet 1979a: 412). This Supreme Being is not a tribal or regional god but a national one.

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<sup>2</sup> Zanahary is also called Andriamanitra (‘the fragrant King’) and Andriananahary (‘the creator King’). It is to be pointed out that Mbiti (1978: 42) has included Zanahary in his list of more than one hundred names of Supreme Beings attested in different parts of Africa. When the first European missionaries sent by the LMS (London Missionary Society) translated the Bible into the Malagasy language, they took the name Andriamanitra and used it for the God of the Bible, whereas the names Zanahary and Andriananahary are used in Protestant hymnbooks.

Almost all the Malagasy throughout the island believe in him and regard him as father and protector, providing all people with all things. However, they also accept him as an incorruptible judge who punishes evildoers and rewards those who fear him. Yet, the Malagasy traditionalists possess neither sacred books nor fixed dogmas on which they base their beliefs. Therefore, one could agree with Rahajarizafy (1970: 145) that Zanahary in the Malagasy traditional religion is not a Supreme Being who is theologically and theoretically known, but is rather one who is heartily and faithfully believed.

Since Zanahary is the creator of the sky and the world as well as of human beings, the Malagasy people recognise him as the lord of life who has dominion over all creatures (Dubois 1978: 48). As is the case in most African traditional religions, the deities live in the sky (Mbiti 1969: 97). In terms of this common concept, the Malagasy also believe that the realm of Zanahary is in the sky, from where he wisely controls everything on earth and provides all good things and blessings for human beings. However, the Malagasy traditionalists are not able to situate exactly where this sky is. The reason is that in their belief, the sky does not express a place but rather ideas such as infinity, perfection, authority and providence. Likewise, Zanahary, according to the Malagasy traditionalists' belief, is an invisible and immaterial Supreme Being. Consequently, there are in Madagascar neither statutes, nor drawings symbolising him. He is simply believed and obeyed in the hearts of the Malagasy people (Rahajarizafy 1970: 145).

The problem with the Malagasy's belief in Zanahary, according to Rahajarizafy (1970: 120-121), is the paradoxical aspect it displays. In theory, Zanahary sounds omnipresent in the traditionalists' lives, but, in practice, he appears to be very far away and almost inaccessible to simple human beings. As a result, the traditionalist followers generally approach him through intermediaries. Rahajarizafy (1970: 146) gives two of the reasons for this inaccessibility of the Supreme Being, as follows: firstly, because of the infinite distance separating the Malagasy traditionalists from him; secondly, because he is, in comparison with the sinfulness of human beings, holy and perfect. Therefore, the ancestors occupy the ontological position between Zanahary-Andriamanitra and the Malagasy traditionalists. The reason is that the ancestors are believed to speak a bilingual language, that of the human beings that they have left through physical death and that of Zanahary-Andriamanitra to whom they become nearer than when they were in their physical lives. They fulfil their

intermediary roles by conveying the human requests to Zanahary and relaying the response back (1970: 146).

Therefore, the Malagasy people turn to the ancestors and use the latter as intermediaries between them and Zanahary, which is why they profoundly venerate or almost worship the ancestors (Rahajarizafy 1970: 120-121). Because of this intermediary role played by the ancestors, they are sometimes theomorphically described as ‘gods on earth’, having the power to affect the fortunes of the living for good or evil (Jaovelo-Dzao 1985: 354). To make them favourable and cooperative in their intermediation, the Malagasy traditionalists approach them respectfully and worshipfully, by means of sacrifices and offerings, which generally consist of animals, varying in size between chickens and bulls.

Nevertheless, Estrade (1985: 75) emphasises that the Malagasy always invoke Zanahary before the ancestors, to show that he represents their final recourse and ultimate hope in all circumstances of life. As I have observed, they also make a clear distinction between Zanahary and the ancestors by addressing them in different terms: for instance, they exclusively reserve the verbs *manompo* (to worship), *mivavaka* (to pray) and *mino* (to believe) for Zanahary, whereas the verbs *miangavy* (to request) and *mangataka* (to ask for) are used when they address the ancestors. Still, the ancestors play an important role in the Malagasy culture, as the following examples show: ancestral lands, ancestral tombs, ancestral customs, ancestral taboos, ancestral houses, ancestral songs and dances, ancestral greetings, ancestral wisdom and so on.

### **1.1.2 The Old Testament in Madagascar**

Nearly two hundred years have passed since the first European missionaries came to Madagascar, and throughout the two centuries, Madagascar has experienced various examples of the encounter between Christianity and Malagasy traditional religion and culture. The present investigation will go into one particular aspect of this encounter, the relationship between the Old Testament and the Malagasy religio-cultural context.

Historically, missionaries sent by the London Missionary Society (LMS) who were the first to reach Madagascar brought the Bible to the Malagasy people in 1818, during the reign of King Radama I; i.e. 78 years before the French colonisation (Hübsch 1993: 204-205). According to Razafintsalama (1988: 02), Madagascar is one of the few African countries where the Bible was introduced with the only aim being to evangelise, educate and develop people and not to make the task of the colonists easier or to reinforce their colonial system.

The British missionaries learnt the local language as fast as they were able to and, on the request of the King, invented the Malagasy writing skills using the Roman script (Munthe 1969: 54).

In 1823, that is a few years after their arrival, these British missionaries undertook to translate the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, into the Malagasy language, starting with the books of Luke, Genesis, Matthew and Exodus. The translation was finished in 1835 (Ramino 1985: 73). They also, in the same year, wrote and published the first English-Malagasy dictionary (Mack 1986: 55). On the evidence of what is said above, the Bible was the first book written in the Malagasy language, thus being the first book used in Madagascar. The Malagasy Bible Society's annual report shows that the Bible as Word of God still makes a tremendous impact on the life of the Malagasy, and it is said to be the ultimate source of comfort to people every time they face difficult situations (Rakoto Marc 2002: 4).

As far as the Old Testament is concerned, one can say that ever since the introduction of the Bible in Madagascar, up until now, it has always played an important role in the life of the Malagasy people. In fact, Ramino (1985: 73-74) mentions that the Old Testament, with the New Testament, as the first book written in the Malagasy language, constitutes the historical basis of the Malagasy literature as well as the academic reference for linguistic matters. Furthermore, the Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, constituted the first material the earlier missionaries used, simultaneously, to spread the word of God and to teach the people how to read and write the Malagasy language.

There was a notable interaction between the Malagasy translation of the Old Testament and the Malagasy traditional religion and culture. The latter supplied the translation of the Old Testament with linguistic and cultural material. In return, however, the influence of the Old Testament eventually caused significant changes in traditional religion. One example of this change can be noticed in the belief in Zannahy. Before the introduction of the Bible in Madagascar, the Malagasy traditionalists' ideas of Zannahy were very vague. However, the Bible translation's identification of Andriamanitra (the fragrant King), the second name of Zannahy, with the God of the Bible has gradually changed this situation. According to the Old Testament, God is the Creator of everything and the Provider of human beings' needs, and Malagasy traditionalists now argue that this has made their belief in Zannahy more concrete. As they claim, they have discovered that Andriamanitra in the Bible and Zannahy in the traditional religion refer to the same God since they bear the same name (cf. Hübsch 1993: 507-508).

Therefore, the Old Testament has become a well-known book among traditionalists, and plays some role in their life. One can thus say that the Old Testament in Madagascar is regarded by many Malagasy as their common heritage. In other words, the Old Testament is appreciated and used in the religious and social lives of various groups of Malagasy. The investigation I have been carrying out during the past four years (2002-2006) among different categories of people, Christians and traditionalists, has confirmed the Malagasy people's predilection for the Old Testament. My investigation has also enabled me to discover that one of the reasons for this preference is the Malagasy's finding that their traditional culture is much closer to the cultures reflected in the Old Testament than to that reflected in the New Testament. One can say that this experience is common to African people. Holter (1998: 242) points out that Africans prefer reading the Old Testament to the New Testament owing to the similarities between Jewish and African culture. Mugambi (1999: 9) emphasises that the affinity existing between Africa and the Bible is more than casual and occasional.

### **1.1.3 The role of the Old Testament in other African contexts**

The Malagasy's uses of the Old Testament are not isolated cases. Similar situations are found throughout the continent of Africa where the Old Testament is used to interpret African religious practices and cultures. With regard to the role of the Old Testament in Africa, I consider that the use of Old Testament texts in the so-called African Initiated Churches (AICs) in South Africa and in Nigeria can serve as a good example. In South Africa the Old Testament plays a key role in the theology of the AICs. Van Zyl (1995: 425), for example, emphasises the holistic way of appropriating the Old Testament in Africa, arguing that 'in Africa theology is not thought out but danced out.' Giving examples, he remarks that,

[e]verywhere in South Africa, particularly in the Northern provinces, the Zionist bishop with his flock walking along the road on a Sunday, often meeting in the open, is a well-known sight. [...] When they meet in worship, they remove their shoes, like Moses did. They love to 'dance' in circles, like David did. African people go to Zionists to be prayed for and to be given holy water or be bathed (purified) in the river 'Jordan', like Naaman. Some of the bigger churches call their headquarters Zion City or Moria (1995: 428).

Van Zyl (1995: 436) therefore concludes: 'I believe that what we have in these Zionist services is an authentic reinterpretation and appropriation of Old Testament symbols and rituals.' Du Toit (1998), too, stresses the essential role played by the Old Testament in the

theology of the AICs. In his view:

This can be ascribed to many factors, especially the similarities in world-view, the Exodus tradition, the emphasis on the poor, and the fact that the Old Testament deals with so many aspects of life, like the social, agricultural, family and ritual aspects, all important to African religion (1998: 372).

As far as Nigerian AICs are concerned, Ademiluka (1995: 223) mentions the AICs' use of the Psalms. According to him:

[...] virtually all types of illnesses in Africa are curable with Psalms. These are used to prevent or to cure all kinds of body ailments and diseases as well as feminine and infantile problems. This is done by reading Psalms into the water or olive oil that is to be drunk, used for a bath or rubbed on the body (1995: 223).

And Ademiluka (1995: 225) concludes that the use of the Psalms in the African context is for the purpose of contextualisation, which is the attempt to make religion meaningful to every person in every generation.

Confirming this, Adamo (2001: 73) shows how the Bible can be used by Nigerian AICs for therapeutic and protective purposes. Adamo points out that the Nigerian AICs especially use the Old Testament for fostering the well-being of the people, including all that constitutes life, good health, shelter, food and prosperity, and *shalom* understood as completeness, wholeness and the totality of a good life. He also indicates that the Psalms are particularly popular in promoting matters of health and general welfare. Some examples showing the Nigerian AICs' employment of the Old Testament for therapeutic purposes are the use of Psalm 51, Genesis 15: 1-5; 21: 1-8; and 1 Samuel 1:9-20 for the treatment of barrenness; the citing of Psalms 34, 59, 60 for safe delivery in childbirth; and the use of Psalms 100, 102, and 109 for epilepsy (cf. Adamo 2001: 55-61). For the purposes of protection and defence, Adamo notes that 'they use the whole Bible as potent words and charms to combat evil forces and to protect them against such forces of evil' (2001: 73).

In addition to the above arguments, Mwaura (1999: 165) observes that the Old Testament is of central importance to the AICs because 'it constitutes the basis for doctrine and expression, speaking to the existential realities of the communities'. He also points out that the authority of the Old Testament for these churches is undisputed since, on the one hand, it is regarded as the primary witness of God's revelation and, on the other hand, its cultural milieu is consistent with that of the African people.

#### 1.1.4 Terminology

The way the Old Testament is being used in Madagascar can be described in terms of ‘inculturation’, ‘contextualisation’ and ‘accommodation’. The term ‘inculturation’, which is mostly used by the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church (MRCC), especially related to the *famadihana* (turning of the dead; cf. below, chapter two), is defined by Shorter (1988: 10) as ‘the ongoing dialogue between faith and culture or cultures. More fully, it is the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures.’ For Pobee (1992: 34) inculturation, whose counterpart in cultural anthropology is enculturation, describes the process of acquiring the cultural traditions of a society. As he explains, the process of enculturation displays three stages: translation during the initial stages, then assimilation and finally the transformation of, or the action of the reorientation of, the local culture. Pobee points out that when ‘inculturation’ is introduced in missiological circles, it describes the process of the integration of the faith and life of the Church into a given culture. According to Mugambi (1999: 10), religion as a social phenomenon can function only in the context of a culture, and ‘any abstraction of a religion from the cultural context in which it is manifested will distort its essential features’.

Echoing these definitions, Rakotoarisoa (1998: 359) stresses that inculturation within the MRCC is seen as a logical consequence of the Incarnation that involves transforming and renewing both people and their cultures. In Ukpong’s view (2000b: 14), the Church’s objective in carrying out inculturation is to make Christianity relevant to African religio-cultural contexts so that it will no longer be looked upon as a foreign religion expressed in foreign symbols and idioms. Emphasising the importance of inculturation, Afagbegee (2001) declares that

[...] Mission [Christian message] loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it addresses [it is addressed], if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life (2001: 65).

The term ‘contextualisation’, which was timidly applied by Malagasy Lutheran theologians, has an almost similar meaning and purpose to that of inculturation. The word contextualisation was invented in the early 1970s and it became a popular term adopted in a variety of theological models (Bosch 1991: 420-421). For Pobee (1992: 38) the word ‘contextualisation’, which expresses the interpretation of subject and object, ‘recognises the

significance of this time and this place, whenever it may be; it combines [shows] the attempt to get inside that context [biblical context] as well as this context [African context]'. He points out that contextualisation is a term that catches the spirit of biblical scholarship because of its need for the historical and critical study of biblical texts. As for Magessa (1997a: 25), he defines contextualisation as an approach to reading the Bible by 'taking cognizance of the message contained in the Bible and linking this message to the contemporary needs and aspirations of people in their context.' Going further, West (2000: 595) states that contextualisation or contextual study is not only cognizance of context but also commitment to a particular context, for instance the context of the poor and marginalised.

Stressing this point, Bosch (1991: 430) argues that contextualisation is a way of affirming that God has turned towards the world. Therefore, to be in full accord with God's attitude, he reminds the reader, 'we need an experimental theology in which an ongoing dialogue is taking place between text and context, a theology which, in the nature of the case, remains provisional and hypothetical.' For Mamuli (2001: 1), who emphasises the purpose of contextualisation, 'contextualisation seeks to relate the meaning and implication of Christian faith to the total context of a culture at a given moment in time.' To underline the importance of contextualisation, Mashao (2003: 129) posits that 'in the process of Africanising Christianity in Africa, it [contextualisation] remains a key component.' Taking these definitions and arguments into account, Holter (2000: 63) advisedly states that studies of the text as well as studies of the encounter between text and contemporary context are necessary but we cannot contextualise unless we first establish the nature of a text.

Concerning the term 'accommodation', Daneel (1989: 37) considers that, according to the Roman Catholic Church, accommodation constitutes a 'synthesis' between the indigenous and the Christian faith or, in other words, a 'bridge' between Christianity and the local cultures it encounters. He also observes that the Catholics sometimes use 'accommodation' as a synonym for 'adaptation' and 'assimilation.' Bosch (1991: 448-449), more critically, argues that first, accommodation never included modifying the 'prefabricated' Western theology. Secondly, it is a concession [by the Roman Catholic Church] that Third-World Christians will be allowed to use some elements of their culture in order to give expression to their new faith. Thirdly, only those cultural elements which were manifestly 'neutral' and naturally good, that is, not 'contaminated' by pagan religious values, could be employed (1991: 448-449).

In addition to these arguments, Pobee (1992: 31) indicates that German liberal theologians used the term 'accommodation' in the eighteenth century to describe the

exposition of the mode of divine communication through the Bible. According to his explanation, their objective was to accommodate or to apply the timeless and unchangeable tenets of the Scripture as well as aspects of the divine revelation to human understanding, by clothing these in transitory forms. In Pobee's view, both accommodation and adaptation express rather the idea of an extrinsic contact between the biblical message and a given culture. However, according to him (1992: 32) Pope Clement XI, in 1715, and Pope Benedict XIV, in 1742, forbade the use of the term 'accommodation' because they were worried about 'the danger of traditional superstitions lingering on in the minds of converts and others in society.' The Roman Catholic Church also abandoned the use of the term 'adaptation', which is synonymous with 'accommodation.'

As explained above, the two terms 'inculturation' and 'contextualisation' are mostly used in Madagascar by the MRCC and the MLC, respectively. Therefore, I will utilise the term 'inculturation' in Chapter Two, which will present the first case study dealing with the MRCC's use of Old Testament texts in the *famadihana* (turning of the dead). The term 'contextualisation' will be employed in Chapter Three, which will describe the second case study concerning the MLC's use of Old Testament texts to create Nenilava's robe and crown. Concerning Chapter Four, which will discuss traditio-practitioners' application of Old Testament texts in their religious practices, an appropriate terminology, as far as I know, has not yet been coined for this third case study. Therefore, following colleagues' suggestions, in this case I will use in this chapter the term 'accommodation' since the Roman Catholic Church, as mentioned above, no longer utilises it.

## 1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT, HYPOTHESIS AND PURPOSE

The impression that a close relationship exists between the religions of ancient Israel and traditional Africa has been noticed in African scholarship over the years. An early exponent of this view was K A Dickson, who argued that the relationship goes beyond isolated parallels; it is, rather, a common atmosphere characterised by the pervasive nature of religion (1973:36). More recently, J N K Mugambi (1999:7) has argued that '[t]here is a puzzling but exciting affinity between the African religious heritage and the way of life which the OT [Old Testament] presupposes and takes for granted.' I concur, and I consider that part of this excitement, but also puzzlement, has to do with the unique ways in which the Bible functions in local and even indigenous religious contexts in Africa.

In spite of this, one still notices quite huge gaps in an understanding of the unique ways in which the Bible is used in local Christian and traditional religious contexts in Africa. First, certain ethnic and cultural groups have largely been overlooked when studies of the use of the Bible in Africa were undertaken. A prime example is the study of the use of the Old Testament in a Malagasy context. Although Malagasy theologians acknowledge the existence of this phenomenon, it has up till now hardly received any attention.

Second, investigations into the inculturation of the Christian faith in African contexts usually focus on how aspects of African cultures can enrich Africans' interpretation of the Old Testament, but the flipside is often overlooked, namely whether the use of the Old Testament can enrich traditional African religious practices. It should be emphasised that the role played by the Old Testament in these religious practices is of great importance and that it deserves to be accorded particular attention and interest. In fact, the study of this role will enable us to know and understand to what extent the Old Testament can transform or influence these African religious practices and whether it will affect the attitudes, towards the Christian faith, of those who practise traditional religion.

The present study is an attempt to narrow the gaps in our understanding of the unique ways in which the Old Testament functions within three particular religious contexts in Madagascar: (i) in the Roman Catholic practice of the traditional famadihana rituals, (ii) in the Lutheran Church's depicting of the revival leader Nenilava as an Old Testament high priest, and (iii) in certain traditionalist circles. These three cases will be analysed in the light of the working hypothesis that their use of the Old Testament serves the purposes of legitimisation and inculturation.

In Madagascar, especially in the highlands, people consider the Old Testament as a favourite book. Therefore, in addition to quite conventional uses in Church services and Church contexts, people also apply the Old Testament in various aspects of everyday life. For example, they might learn verses from the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes by heart and quote them either to enhance their speeches or to make everyone aware of the good behaviour the community requires. To see people using the Old Testament in various circumstances of their daily lives is therefore regarded as natural in Madagascar.

However, my interest was aroused when I noticed, some years ago, that the Old Testament is also used in more specific religio-cultural contexts. This is a phenomenon to which Malagasy theologians seem to pay little attention. Still, it can be observed both inside and outside mainstream church structures. The cases studies which illustrate this are:

- The Malagasy Roman Catholic Church (MRCC)'s use of Old Testament texts during the *famadihana* (turning of the dead). In the MRCC's practice of the *famadihana*, certain Old Testament texts play an important role, which will eventually be analysed in this thesis. The MRCC's interpretation of these texts will be investigated and compared with a historical critical analysis of the same texts.

- The Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC)'s application of Old Testament texts in making the robe and crown of the revival leader Nenilava. The role of these texts will also be analysed later in this thesis. The MLC's interpretation of the texts used in this practice will similarly be investigated and compared with a historical critical analysis of the same texts.

- Traditionalists' use of Old Testament texts in their religious and cultural practices. This role will likewise be examined later in this study. Malagasy traditionalists' interpretation of such texts will similarly be investigated and compared with a historical critical analysis of the same texts.

My purpose in this thesis is to investigate the function of the Old Testament in these three religious contexts. The investigation will be accomplished through a systematic analysis of how the Old Testament is used in such contexts, why it is used, and what the implications of this use are. In addition, I will also ask what the consequences of these uses are for the relevance, the interpretation and academic teaching of the Old Testament in Madagascar/Africa.

## 1.3 METHODOLOGY

### 1.3.1 Qualitative research and other methods

Carrying out my fieldwork, I mostly conducted qualitative research interviews that provided me with material and information collected from respondents or stemming from 'inside perspectives.' In order to analyse this material, I make use of current literature in the disciplines of cultural anthropology and biblical hermeneutics, which provide information originating from 'outside perspectives.' Since the thesis deals with Old Testament texts, I will also apply certain elements of traditional historical criticism.

In Le Roux's (1999) view qualitative research 'refers to research that focuses on qualities of human behaviour, as well as the holistic nature of social behaviour.' She also defines qualitative research as research that produces descriptive data. The researcher is therefore required to collect people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour (1999: 3). This is complementary with Patton's point of view (1984: 196), which emphasises

that the researcher interviews people, observers and participants, and describes feelings, thoughts, as well as behaviours, that we cannot directly observe. The researcher then needs to ask people about these because he/she cannot perceive directly how they have organised the world, nor the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world (1984: 196). Accordingly, qualitative research or qualitative interviewing within the field of qualitative research involves interaction between the researcher and respondents so that the researcher can explore phenomena as they emerge during observations, and data are collected discreetly but systematically (Le Roux 1999: 5).

Emphasising the importance of qualitative methodology, Le Roux (1999: 3-4) points out that qualitative methodology is more than a set of data gathering techniques. Referring to Rist (in Taylor and Bogdan 1984: 5-8), she mentions the following features of qualitative methodology:

- 'Qualitative research is inductive. The researcher develops concepts, insights and understanding from patterns in data'
- 'The qualitative researcher looks at settings and people holistically...'
- 'researchers are sensitive to their effects on the people they study.'
- 'researchers try to experience reality as others experience it.'
- 'The researcher does not seek "truth" or "morality" but rather a detailed understanding of others' perspectives.'
- 'Qualitative methods are humanistic.'
- 'The researcher obtains first-hand knowledge of social life filtered through concepts, operational definitions and rating scales.'
- 'all settings and people are worthy of study.'
- 'Qualitative research is a craft. The researcher is encouraged to create his or her own methodology.'

To conduct interviews successfully involves at least three important factors, such as certain knowledge of the respondents, an interview guide, and the recording of the data. To possess some knowledge of respondents is a great asset to the researcher, as it enables him/her to gather information from their world-view that stems from 'inside perspectives'. The interview guide, which consists of a list of questions or issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview, should be prepared in order to make sure that basically the same information is obtained from a number of people by covering the same material (Patton 1984: 200; see also Le Roux 1999: 6). It should be emphasised, however, that the interview guide should allow respondents to speak freely instead of dominating or restricting them in their answers (Le Roux 1999: 6). Recording the data involves recording most of the interviews on a tape and (or) video recorder, transcribing them later and lightly editing the transcriptions

obtained. This enables the interviewer to write down his/her own comments (Le Roux 1999: 7).

As far as the interviews I have conducted are concerned, I used the standard open-ended interview, which consists of asking respondents with the same questions that have been carefully worded and arranged in advance (cf. Patton 1984: 197). But, I also applied the informal conversational interview (cf. Patton 1984: 197) when I saw that the interviewee (s) does/do not feel comfortable with the standard open-ended interview. The questionnaire that I have prepared in the Malagasy language and used in my interview guide is translated into English and listed in the ADDENDUM. It should also be mentioned here that the information I have collected from my interviewees is evidenced by some photographs which are presented after the ADDENDUM.

According to Le Roux's experience and system (1999), each transcript of an interview as well as the video tapes should be 'specifically numbered according to the number given to the specific interview or tape during the field work'. In her reference system, she specifies that 'D' usually stands for the transcribed document, 'V' for a specific video tape, and 'F' indicates interviews conducted by a field worker. Le Roux also uses the numbers 1, 2, 3, etc. following 'D', 'V' or 'F', to indicate a following video or tape. Thereafter, the letter 'A' or 'B' indicates that the same interview lasted longer than one tape or side of a tape (1999: 7).

I will make use of Le Roux's reference system because of its practicality, which helps the researcher to refer to and to number his/her interviews without confusion. Therefore, I have numbered my interviews as follows: concerning interviews conducted with religious leaders, I use DCL 1, etc. to refer to a Christian religious leader and DTL 1 etc. to indicate a traditionalist religious leader. 'D' indicates the transcribed document; 'C' and 'L' show that the interviewee is a Christian religious leader, whereas 'T' and 'L' refer to a traditionalist religious leader. The numbers 1, 2, 3 etc. following DCL and DTL indicate the numbers assigned to the interviewees. Concerning interviews conducted with followers of religions, I use DCF 1, etc. to refer to a Christian follower and DTF 1, etc. to indicate a traditionalist follower. 'D' as in the above system indicates the transcribed document; 'C' and 'F' show that the interviewee is a Christian follower, whereas 'T' and 'F' refer to a traditionalist follower. The numbers 1, 2, 3, etc. following DCF and DTF indicate the numbers assigned to the interviewees.

As remarked above, I also make use of cultural anthropology and biblical hermeneutics as well as of certain elements of the historical critical approaches.

Anthropologists, both Western and Malagasy, have already investigated the Malagasy religio-cultural contexts mentioned above. Their studies as well as their approaches therefore assisted me to analyse these three case studies. Besides, the biblical hermeneutic approach is indispensable for examining the encounter or interaction between Malagasy religio-cultural contexts and the Old Testament texts being used in them. At the same time, it aids me to discover the nature of such an interaction and to establish what each side receives and gives. This also enables me to employ African hermeneutics, which supply this thesis with material drawn from African literature and from studying the use of the Old Testament in African religio-cultural contexts.

These two approaches provide me with information stemming from observers' assumptions, which is information from 'outside perspectives'. As for historical criticism, it assists me to investigate and analyse the historical context of the Old Testament texts that are now used or applied in Malagasy religio-cultural contexts.

### **1.3.2 Structure of the thesis**

*Chapter Two* presents the first case study, the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church (MRCC)'s use of Old Testament texts to interpret the *famadihana* (turning of the dead). This custom, which has traditionally constituted a predominant funeral rite among the Merina and Betsileo ethnic groups, expresses the traditional Malagasy religion and culture in their strongest form. Ravelojaona (1947: 146) argues that the *famadihana*, which is regarded as the *zava-dehibe* (important affair) in the life of people, has been practised in the highlands of Madagascar since time immemorial. In general, it consists of exhuming the corpses, wrapping them in new shrouds, and replacing them in the ancestral tomb (Bloch 1971: 145).

According to Molet (1979a), three types of *famadihana* exist: the transfer *famadihana*, the inauguration *famadihana*, and the prestige *famadihana*. The transfer *famadihana* consists of the repatriation of bodies from distant temporary burial places to the ancestral tomb or the incorporation of bodies into the ancestral tomb if they were temporarily buried near it. The inauguration *famadihana* refers to ceremonies and rites which a family or a group of families performs to inaugurate a new tomb they have been erecting. As for the prestige *famadihana*, it consists of taking bodies out of the tomb, renewing their shrouds, and replacing them in the tomb (1979a: 279-281). As a Merina native, I have observed that the *famadihana* involves great expenditure because the organisers are obliged to slaughter oxen that serve as sacrifices to the ancestors, provide a huge meal for hundreds of guests, buy new shrouds, and pay

diviners to assist them. Referring to Bloch's explanation (1971), the *famadihana*, whatever its type, is performed for the three following main purposes:

- to show the relationship linking the living with the ancestors;
- to demonstrate respect and veneration for the ancestors whom the Malagasy continue to consider as *Raiamandreny* (parents);
- and to make the ancestors favourable and cooperative in their role of acting as intermediaries between the living and Zanahary (1971: 145).

Razafintsalama (1988: 25) explains that, like other Malagasy Christian Churches, the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church (MRCC) initially adopted a puritanical attitude, which led it to eradicate theologically and spiritually all traces of what the Malagasy people term *fomban-drazana* (ancestral traditions). However, the Catholics have nowadays altered their attitude towards these ancestral traditions: not do only they respect their religious and moral values but they also adopt and practise them, such as for example the *famadihana*.

*Chapter Three* deals with the second case study, which describes the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC)'s use of Old Testament texts in the making of Nenilava's robe and crown. Nenilava, that is 'Tall mother', was the founder and charismatic leader of the revival movement of Ankaramalaza,<sup>3</sup> which constitutes one of the three great revival movements within the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC).<sup>4</sup> Her real name is Volahavana but people called her Nenilava (Tall mother) because she was a tall woman. She was borne in 1918 of non-Christian parents. According to Tsivoery's account (2001), her father was a famous healer and diviner, and was at the same time considered by the people as their king, though he was only the chief of the village. Tsivoery reports that, since her childhood, Nenilava had been sceptical about her father's religion and about the divination he practised. At the age of 10, she began to see visions and hear a voice calling her name. Sometimes this troubled her to such an extent that her father thought evil spirits possessed her. Therefore, the father used divination to discover what kind of spirits they were and how to drive them out. However, the divination revealed to him that it was *Andriamanitra Lehibe* (the Great God), who was dwelling in his daughter. The divination also made it known to him that Volahavana was the queen whereas he was the slave (2001: 181-197).

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<sup>3</sup> Ankaramalaza is a small village where Nenilava was baptised and founded the revival movement, which was later on called 'the revival movement of Ankaramalaza'. It is located in the southeast coast of Madagascar. It became the main centre of this movement.

<sup>4</sup> The two other revival movements within the MLC are those of Soatanana and Farihimena.

Tsivoery (2001) reports that, in 1935, Nenilava's father gave her in marriage to a Lutheran catechist, a widower, against her will. She was still a non-Christian at that time and knew almost nothing about Christianity and the Bible. Therefore, her husband taught her the basis of the Christian faith and she was baptised after a few weeks, under the name Germaine Volahavana. In 1941, Jesus is said to have appeared to Volahavana and to have revealed to her that he was the one that she had seen in her visions and who had called her by her name. He also told her that she would be taken up into heaven. This prophecy was fulfilled some days later. It was also in heaven that Jesus in person taught Nenilava to read and preach the Bible, and to speak twelve world languages.<sup>5</sup> When Jesus saw that Nenilava had been sufficiently trained, he sent her back to the world to proclaim his message about repentance and forgiveness, and to drive out the evil spirits that cause many people to suffer mentally (Tsivoery 2001: 181-197). He also promised to confirm her consecration publicly and gave her special instructions about the robe and the crown she was to wear on that occasion. Escorted by *mpiandry* (shepherds), pastors, and other Christians, Nenilava left her small village, Ankaramalaza, and undertook a long missionary journey across Madagascar and abroad to carry out what Jesus had commanded her. She had performed diverse miraculous acts and her preaching was so acute that people regarded her as a prophetess (Tsivoery 2001: 181-197).

In 1983, the MLC as well as the revival movement of Ankaramalaza decided to confirm Nenilava's consecration and at the same time to show her as priestess and prophetess (Rabarihoela 1999: 15). This involved special garments such as a robe and a crown, both constructed according to the Old Testament models. The robe was made according to the priestly garments described in Exodus 28; and the crown, which was aimed at symbolising Nenilava's prophethood, was related to Deuteronomy 28 (1999: 9).

*Chapter Four* discusses the third case study, that of the Malagasy traditionalists' use of Old Testament texts in various practices and rituals. As remarked earlier, Christianity, 180 years after its introduction, has reached almost half of the population of Madagascar. This demonstrates that the Bible has made a tremendous impact on the life of the Malagasy people. However, it also reveals that, statistically speaking, the traditional religion has lost about half of its followers.

Consequently, the Malagasy traditionalists, especially the traditio-practitioners who

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<sup>5</sup> Some witnesses attest that Nenilava only used these languages when she spoke in tongues.

are responsible for keeping up the traditional religion and culture, regard the Bible as a formidable enemy. Therefore, they try by every possible means to prevent the power and influence of the Bible from increasing and to slow down the progress of evangelisation. The motto expressing their purpose is ‘The customs of our ancestors are to be followed; the charms are to be brought out, the idols set up and the hymns of adoration to our forefathers sung’ (Bloch 1971: 28).

However, the Bible continues to be more and more widely distributed and Christianity, as a result, irresistibly continues to spread. Some traditio-practitioners conclude that the Bible is unbeatable and invulnerable, and therefore they abandon their enmity towards the Bible and adopt a new attitude, seeking to cause it to become a faithful and helpful ally. They thus appropriate the Bible and use it. Not least is the Old Testament taken into use in the traditional religious and cultural practices for which these traditio-practitioners are responsible. One example comprises their utilisation of such texts as ‘Who is like the Lord our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?’ (Ps 113: 5-6) and ‘Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wounds of my people?’ (Jr 8: 22). Another example is their writing of Old Testament texts on the gates or on the walls of their shrines, such as ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground’ (Ex 3: 5b) and ‘God will watch over your coming and going’ (Ps 121: 8a). Malagasy traditio-practitioners also take proverbs and words of wisdom from the Old Testament and mingle them with the advice and guidance they give to those who consult them.

In *Chapter Five*, the conclusion of the thesis, I will discuss the use of Old Testament texts in the Malagasy context and the relevance of the Old Testament in Madagascar. I will also propose certain implications of the use of Old Testament texts in African contexts for the interpretation and the teaching of the Old Testament in Africa. Some aspects for further investigation will close the chapter.

### **1.3.3 Sources and limitations**

Since the central interest of this thesis encompasses the encounter and interaction between the Old Testament and the Malagasy context, the Bible, specifically the Old Testament, constitutes its main and primary source. For the English Bible, I use the New International Version (NIV).

Apart from the Bible, both oral and written sources provide material and information

for the thesis. The oral sources largely result from the fieldwork I have carried out among Christians (religious leaders and lay people) and traditionalists (traditio-practitioners and followers) from the Merina and Betsileo people who live in the highlands of Madagascar. These oral sources constitute the basic information about the Malagasy religio-cultural context in terms of which Old Testament texts are interpreted. As far as the written sources are concerned, I make use of traditional scholarly material, such as biblical dictionaries and commentaries which enable me to analyse the Old Testament texts that are employed in Malagasy religio-cultural contexts. I also make use of anthropological works related to Malagasy traditional religion and culture. In addition to these sources, books, journals and articles discussing and studying African hermeneutics have provided valuable information for the thesis.

As I have said earlier I am a Merina native, but I am presently working and living among the Betsileo people who occupy, with the Merina, the central highlands of Madagascar. Therefore, I should specify that my investigation will be geographically limited to these two ethnic groups. The reader should also remember that this is a thesis within the field of biblical studies, even though I make use of cultural anthropological approaches. Likewise, although I deal with biblical texts, this thesis should be perceived not as an exegetical work but as a contribution to Malagasy/African hermeneutics.

#### 1.4 CONCLUSION

To conclude this chapter, I would like to say that Madagascar, inhabited by people to whom religion and culture are of great value, is an instance of 'good soil' where the Old Testament can grow and produce a crop, 'multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times'. The particular nature of this 'good soil' is, however, that it is found not only within the Church but also outside it. In other words, the Old Testament is used both inside and outside mainstream Christianity, in various Malagasy religio-cultural contexts. The present thesis, by means of the following chapters, is therefore intended to explore and study this Malagasy way of employing the Old Testament. Such a study, I hope, will provide a small but necessary contribution to the interpretation of the Old Testament in Africa, and even to the use of the Old Testament to interpret Africa.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CASE STUDY ONE: THE *FAMADIHANA* (THE TURNING OF THE DEAD) IN THE MALAGASY ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will investigate the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church (MRCC)'s use of certain Old Testament texts in the *famadihana* (the turning of the dead). The main questions to be posed here are: How and why does the MRCC use Old Testament texts during the ritual of the *famadihana*?

The *famadihana* has already been introduced and defined in the preceding chapter. Yet, since it constitutes the context on which this case is based, it is necessary to provide more information about it. What I aim to do in this chapter is, therefore, to describe how the *famadihana* is practised in the Malagasy context and how it is performed in the MRCC. However, the focal point of the chapter is the investigation in which I will attempt to discover and bring out the reasons why the MRCC uses Old Testament texts during the *famadihana*. To what extent is the *famadihana* used by the MRCC to inculturate her faith and to legitimise the incorporation of the practice of the *famadihana* into the Church? In addition, what implications can be drawn from this use of Old Testament texts for the academic teaching of the Old Testament in Madagascar? These questions will be investigated in the present chapter by critically analysing the way the MRCC applies these texts.

Examples of Old Testament texts used by the MRCC in the *famadihana* include Genesis 49: 29-50: 13 (Jacob's death and burial), Exodus 13: 19 (the transfer of Joseph's bones from Egypt to Canaan) and Exodus 20: 12 (the Fourth Commandment). I will describe how the MRCC interprets and adapts these texts to explain the *famadihana*. I will also investigate the reasons why this Church uses these Old Testament texts in connection with the *famadihana*.

With regard to terminology, I will use the Malagasy word *razana* to render the concept of the ancestor. Most Malagasy people today used to term all the dead *razana*. However, *razana* is the specific term for a body after the flesh has completely decayed. In other words, the name *razana* is applied to a body at least two years after death, which is generally the most suitable time for the family to perform its first *famadihana*. In addition, the term *razana*, according to the Malagasy traditional belief, refers to the ancestor as still being an active

member of the family. Therefore, I consider that the word *razana* better expresses the Malagasy world-view.

## 2.2 CONTEXT

### 2.2.1 The *razana* (ancestor) in the Malagasy world-view

In general, the Malagasy people believe in the immortality of the spirit and the continuity of life beyond this physical existence. This belief occupied an important place in the Malagasy traditional religion long before the Christian faith was introduced to Madagascar. King Andrianampoinimerina's last words expressing this conviction can be translated as follows:<sup>6</sup>

I am nearing the end of my life for Zanahary will soon take me back to him; you will bury my body but my spirit as well as my mind will dwell in you [people] and Damalahy (Rahajarizafy 1970: 99; cf Callet 1918: 97-98).<sup>7</sup>

Still, Vig ([1892] 2001: 31) observes that in spite of their belief in the immortality of the spirit the Malagasy traditionalists have no notion of the resurrection of the dead.<sup>8</sup>

According to this belief in the continuity of life, the Malagasy people claim that human beings can physically die, but do not thus disappear. Hence the deceased cease to exist physically in this visible world, but their immortal spirits continue to live in an invisible world (Dubois 1998: 80-81). They become *razana* (ancestors), but at the same time, they continue to be incorporated into the family life; as people say, they shall still be with us, 'those who have gone home' (Ratrema 1985: 95).<sup>9</sup> In other words, the family bond linking the living with the dead is not broken by death. For Ela (1977: 37) such a belief in 'making the presence of the departed actual is the primordial sign illuminating the basic African thought: "The dead are

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<sup>6</sup> Andrianampoinimerina was a King who ruled over the Merina people from 1780 to 1810. He was said to be the wisest of the Merina kings, thus regarded as the father of the Malagasy philosophers. One example showing his wisdom, according to the story to which Merina people, especially parents and elders, refer until today, is his method of convincing his people of the bad consequences of the alcoholic drinks to the health. The story says, the king asked his servants to bring a strong bull and to make it drink two litres of local alcohol. After some hours, he ordered his servants to kill the bull and asked the representatives of his people to check its liver, which was seriously damaged by the alcohol.

<sup>7</sup> Damalahy was Andrianampoinimerina's son, who bore the name Radama I when he became King.

<sup>8</sup> L. Vig was a Norwegian missionary working in Madagascar from 1875 to 1902. His book, which was translated into French and published in 2001 under the title *Les conceptions religieuses des anciens Malgaches*, had already been published in 1892, in Norwegian.

<sup>9</sup> 'Those who have gone home' (*ireo lasa nody*) is the popular expression the Malagasy use to describe the departed. This shows that the human being is just passing by in this visible world; his or her permanent dwelling is in heaven or in the invisible world.

not dead”’. Ramarojaona (DTF 1), an informant from Antsirabe, argues that this incorruptible relationship between the living and the *razana* involves mutual obligations. On the one hand, the living must take care of the *razana* by erecting worthy tombs for them, observing the ancestral customs, and especially by organising *famadihana* to show respect and veneration for them. If they fail in their duties, the *razana* blame them for their irresponsibility and may punish them. On the other hand, the *razana* are expected to bless the living in providing them with good health, prosperity, fertility and protection. If they do not accomplish these duties, the living mock them as follows: ‘if the *razana* are not able to bless people, wake them up to dig out sweet potatoes’ (DTF 1). It is therefore noteworthy that the *razana* occupy the central position in the Malagasy world-view. The customs vary but the key status of the *razana* is dominant throughout the island. The *famadihana* is probably the traditional rite which best expresses the relationship and interaction between the visible and invisible worlds or, more precisely, between the living and the *razana* (Rasolonjatovo 2003: 30).

The following sections will describe how the *famadihana* is practised in the Malagasy traditional context, on the one hand, and in the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church (MRCC), on the other. The presentation will indicate what the Catholics reject and what they retain as far as the rituals and the ceremonies of the *famadihana* are concerned. It will also allow one to know what possible new elements the MRCC brings to the *famadihana*.

### **2.2.2 The *famadihana* in the Malagasy traditional context**

By definition, the Malagasy word *famadihana* expresses the action of ‘turning over’. Therefore, the *famadihana* is a traditional religio-cultural rite, which involves turning over or re-exhuming the *razana* and renewing their shrouds, which people generally call *lamba mena* (red cloths).<sup>10</sup> It is the Merina and Betsileo ethnic groups who mainly practise this ritual.<sup>11</sup> Generally, the *famadihana* takes place two or three years after the death, i.e., after the flesh has completely decayed, and then is periodically performed every five, or seven, or even nine

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<sup>10</sup> In Malagasy traditional religion, the colour ‘red’ expresses the sacredness and the power of the super-beings, Zanahary and the *razana*. The adjective ‘red’ therefore refers to the importance and symbolic value of the shrouds rather than their appearance (cf Bloch 1971: 145).

<sup>11</sup> According to Razakamady (DCF 2), a native Betsileo informant living in Antananarivo, it is only the people from the northern part of the Betsileo region, who are the Merina’s nearest neighbours, who practise the *famadihana*. But, in this study, I use the term ‘Betsileo’ to refer to all of these people.

years, according to the family's concurrence or ability.<sup>12</sup> According to Molet's investigation (1979b: 278), members of these groups believe that the *razana* will become tired of lying down on one side for a long time. Likewise, they might feel cold if their shrouds are damaged. Consequently, they need to be turned over and rewrapped in new shrouds.

The period when the *famadihana* originated is difficult to determine. Nevertheless, Ravelojaona (1947: 146) suggests that the *famadihana* possibly began being practised among the Merina more than a hundred and fifty years ago (counting from the time he wrote his book). If one considers this suggestion, one can suppose that the Merina started to practise the *famadihana* before or during the reign of King Andrianampoinimerina which, as already mentioned, lasted from 1780 to 1810. This is possible because it was King Andrianampoinimerina, according to some oral traditions, who taught the Merina to build family tombs, in which all their dead should be buried. He is also supposed to have established the custom of returning, to the family or ancestral tombs, bodies that had been buried far from their native villages.

As mentioned above, Molet (1979b: 279-281) identifies, in general, three types of *famadihana*: the transfer *famadihana*, the inauguration *famadihana*, and the prestige *famadihana*.

#### 2.2.2.1 Transfer '*famadihana*'

This type of *famadihana* specifically consists of transferring or repatriating bodies from temporary burial places (cf. Photo 2) to the family or ancestral tomb (Molet 1979b: 278; cf. Photos 1 and 3).<sup>13</sup> As already explained, the *razana* are considered as still part of the family. Consequently, the Merina and the Betsileo ethnic groups perform the transfer *famadihana* as a sacred duty towards their departed relatives that have been temporarily interred in distant burial places (cf. Photos 4).

Rakotozafy (DCF 1), an informant from Ambohimandroso, describes the transfer *famadihana* as follows. When a family, gathered by an elder, has agreed to transfer a relative's body from a temporary burial place to the ancestral tomb, a diviner is consulted to

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<sup>12</sup> It should also be explained that, according to the Malagasy traditional belief, the figures 3, 7, 9 and 11 are regarded as sacred numbers, which express protection and fullness or accomplishment.

<sup>13</sup> According to Malagasy belief, the ancestral tombs serve as the last and eternal residences of the ancestors. For this reason, they must be built strongly (in stone) and better than ordinary houses, and they should be painted and decorated. This generally involves a lot of time, energy and, especially, great expense.

indicate the most favourable day to perform the ritual.<sup>14</sup> Two days before the indicated date, the family representatives, led by the elder in person or another person appointed by the family, are sent to the temporary burial place. Once they have arrived there, they exhume the body, carefully clean the bones and wrap them in a new shroud. Afterwards, they respectfully place the re-wrapped body on the roof of a car, among bunches of beautiful flowers and the national flag, and carry it home.<sup>15</sup> Rakotozafy notices that before leaving the place, the elder calls the spirit of the deceased to return from its wanderings. At the same time, a piece of the hump of an ox and fragrant leaves are burnt in the place where the body has been exhumed. This practice is aimed at drawing the spirit to its 'eight bones' (DCF 1; see also Ravelojaona 1947: 147).<sup>16</sup>

Rakotozafy (DCF 1) explains that when the group carrying the body arrives in the village, all the people present (inspired by music) dance, sing and shout for joy to welcome the new *razana*. A tent is then erected in the family's courtyard, into which the *razana* is placed on a trestle or on a table for two or three days before being ceremoniously placed in the ancestral tomb.<sup>17</sup> Rakotozafy notes that these few days during which the *razana* is in the village are days of festival with good and abundant meals as well as alcoholic drinks, dance, music and songs.<sup>18</sup>

According to the custom, the family must slaughter one or two fat oxen that are, on the one hand, offered as a sacrifice to the *razana*, and on the other, given as a convivial meal, accompanied with rice, to the guests (see also Molet 1979b: 279).<sup>19</sup> Ramarojaona (DTF 1), an informant from Antsirabe, reports that the diviner is requested to indicate both the colour of

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<sup>14</sup> The diviner's assistance is required in all types of *famadihana*. The Merina and the Betsileo believe that terrible and fatalistic incidents, like sudden death or grave illness, may occur if the *famadihana* is performed on a day considered as bad or harmful.

<sup>15</sup> In Madagascar, the national flag is customarily placed as a token of a funeral procession on the car that serves to transport the body. When people see such a procession passing by, they take off their hats and bend forwards to show respect and veneration for the *razana*.

<sup>16</sup> 'Eight bones' (*taolam-balo*) is the metaphor that the Malagasy use to designate the body when the flesh has completely decayed. According to the Malagasy concept, the bones are regarded as the essential and sacred part of the *razana*. Randriamanantena (DTL 1), an informant from Antananarivo, explains that they play a doubly important role: they serve as the material base of the *razana*, but, at the same time, they also serve to convey the *razana*'s power over the living.

<sup>17</sup> Ravelojaona (1947: 148) argues that these two or three days enable the members of the family and the new *razana* to establish and to consolidate their relationship.

<sup>18</sup> It is believed, in the Malagasy traditional religious customs, that most ancestral spirits like alcoholic drinks. It is even customary to spray the *razana* with strong rum made from sugar-cane juice.

<sup>19</sup> In his analysis, Elli (1993: 98) explains that the ox, in Madagascar, constitutes the essential sacrificial victim for religio-cultural ceremonies.

the oxen to be bought and the place where they should be slaughtered. He also indicated that as the time indicated by the diviner to place the *razana* in the tomb approaches, the festival atmosphere becomes more and more frenzied. Moreover, the abundance of alcoholic drinks makes the ambience delirious.

To close the ceremony, the elder gratefully thanks everybody, on behalf of the family, for having come to pay tribute to the *razana* and to honour the living. He also gives thanks to *Zanahary* for having blessed the family and given them the occasion for this ‘transfer *famadihana*’. Afterwards, the elder issues some strong men with the order to pick the *razana* up and to carry him/her in procession seven times round the tomb. The family, escorted by most of the guests, follows the procession while singing, dancing, clapping hands, and shouting. Sometimes, family members during the procession take the *razana*, put him/her onto their shoulders and dance with him/her. When the procession is completed, family representatives respectfully place the *razana* in the ancestral tomb.<sup>20</sup>

#### 2.2.2.2 Inauguration ‘*famadihana*’

In Molet’s opinion (1979b: 278) this second type of *famadihana* is more or less similar to the transfer *famadihana*. It consists of moving a certain number of *razana* from an old tomb to a new one. Molet notes that the inauguration *famadihana* generally occurs when the family tomb is full. However, Randriamanana (DCL 1), an informant from Antanifotsy, mentions that the erection of a new tomb could also be the result of a vow made by a member of the family, or the consequence of quarrels and disagreements between members of the family. Rajoelina (1989: 61) observes that this type of *famadihana*, as well as the two other types, generally takes place during the months from June to September, which is the period of harvest during which people are supposed to have sufficient money.

When the new tomb is ready, the family, according to the custom, has to inaugurate it by a *famadihana*. A diviner is therefore consulted to determine the most suitable day to organise this ‘inauguration *famadihana*’, to indicate both the colour of the oxen to be

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<sup>20</sup> This custom to carry the ancestors in procession seven times round the tomb may remind us of the biblical story of the ‘invasion of Jericho’ (Josh 6: 16). But Randriamanantena (DTL 1), an informant from the east of Antananarivo, points out that this procession is aimed, on the one hand, at making the *razana* familiar with the new place, and that, on the other hand, it is a tactical way to set loose spiteful spirits that could cause trouble for the new ones. As for the figure ‘seven’, Randriamanantena explains that it is a sacred number often used by the Malagasy in various religio-cultural rites. In his opinion, it expresses the number of the heavens that symbolises the accomplishment of the world and the fullness of the time.

slaughtered and the shrouds to be bought (Bloch 1971: 151). Molet (1979b: 278) records that the inauguration of a new tomb always involves the *razana* from whom the family or some of its members directly descend. Often those that have already been turned over several times are used, because they are believed to be the most sacred.

With regard to the ceremonies, Andrianony (DCF 6) notes that they are almost identical to those observed in the transfer *famadihana*. Everything is under the control of the elder and the diviner. The *razana* that serve to inaugurate the new tomb are taken out of the old tomb and placed under a tent in the family's courtyard after having been carefully wrapped in new silk shrouds (cf. Photo 6). Fat oxen are slaughtered and a huge meal consisting of meat and rice is prepared to feed the crowd of guests. The ceremonies generally take two or three days, according to the family's resources. Groups of musicians are also engaged to delight both the living and the *razana*, on the one hand, and to display the magnificence of the ceremonies, on the other. As usual, alcoholic drinks are generously put at everybody's disposal. To exhibit their happiness, especially during the night, all the people present dance, shout for joy and sing, accompanied by music (DCF 6).

Ramahandry (DTF 2), an informant from Ambohibary, explains that when the time indicated by the diviner has come, the elder issues young men with the order to carry the *razana* to the tomb. The members of the family, as well as all the guests, who keep dancing and singing, follow them. A family representative carrying the national flag precedes the procession. Concerning the procession itself, Bloch (1971: 155) reports that the diviner arranges frequent halts during which the crowd makes high-pitched sounds, which are the recognised way of calling the spirits of the *razana* to join them.

Ramahandry (DTF 2) also explains that on the arrival at the tomb, the elder, escorted by family representatives, stands on top of the tomb and speaks to the *razana*, congratulating them on the new 'house' (tomb) in which they will lie down in peace. He also expresses the wish that all the *razana* will grow in sacredness and power so that they can abundantly provide their living children and relatives with blessings, protection, prosperity and fertility. Afterwards, on behalf of the family he thanks all the guests who have arrived to venerate the *razana* and honour the living. Then, he gives the men the order to carry the *razana* in procession seven times round the tomb while dancing with them, shouting and making the music as loud as possible. As soon as the seventh circuit is finished, the *razana* are immediately introduced to the tomb and placed on their respective beds of stone (DTF 2). While the men are closing the tomb, women pounce on the mats on which the *razana* were

wrapped during the ceremonies and struggle with each other to get hold of them. At least among the Merina, the possession of these mats is greatly valued; it is believed that sleeping on them increases fertility (Thierry 1961: 138).

### 2.2.2.3 Prestige '*famadihana*'

This type of *famadihana* is the most frequently practised among the Merina and Betsileo ethnic groups. Contrary to the first two types of *famadihana*, which are performed occasionally, the prestige *famadihana* takes place periodically every three or five, or even seven years according to arrangements between the organisers. In general, it consists of taking the *razana* out of tombs and, as in the two first types, wrapping them in new shrouds and replacing them in the tombs.

Vig ([1892] 2001) mentions that when the period of the prestige *famadihana* is approaching, people always find several reasons for organising it. Firstly, they claim that it is the *razana* themselves who appear to some of them in dreams, asking for new shrouds and recommending that they organise prestige *famadihana*. Secondly, this type of *famadihana* can be performed when one or several members of the family are gravely ill, and the healer declares that the cure involves the intervention of the *razana*. Thirdly, it is arranged in order to supply the sacrifices and offerings that a family uses to reconcile itself with the *razana*. Fourthly, people generally organise a prestige *famadihana* with the aim of showing respect and gratitude to the *razana*, who are regarded as sources of blessing, happiness and success to their faithful living families ([1892] 2001: 89).

The prestige *famadihana* involves much time and great expense. However, the Merina and the Betsileo trust that the energy, time and fortune spent in honouring the *razana* are never lost. They believe that whoever takes care of the *razana* benefits exclusively from their blessing and can expect to succeed in their enterprises (Gentil 1956: 22).

One can understand from the preceding observations that the prestige *famadihana* offers an occasion for a huge feast, to which hundreds of guests are invited. Randimbisoa (DTF 3), an informant from Itaosy-Antananarivo, remarks that such an enormous ceremony should be planned at least one year before the date indicated by the diviner for the actual celebration.

Rafalimanantsoa (DCF 4), an informant from Ambatolampy, describes the prestige *famadihana* as follows: The ceremonies and feasting begin two or three days before the indicated date. As usual, all the family, the guests as well as the whole village, spend these

days in dancing, singing, shouting and drinking. To encourage them, musicians are requested to play without interruption. The day before the given date, the elder, escorted by some family representatives, visits the tomb at sunset and calls upon the *razana* three times while facing the northeast.<sup>21</sup> This practice is intended to inform them that they are going to be taken out of the tomb the next morning and will be rewrapped in new shrouds. When the calling is finished the elder pours a bottle of rum into the northeastern corner of the tomb as an offering to the *razana* (DCF 4).

Continuing his description, Rafalimanantsoa (DCF 4) specifies that early on the day of the *famadihana*, two or three oxen are slaughtered and a huge meal consisting of meat and rice is prepared for hundreds of guests. The meal and rejoicing continue until the elder announces the departure to the tomb. After the traditional speech given by the elder, the *razana* are taken out of the tomb and put on mats to be rewrapped (cf. Photos 5 and 7). Before the *razana* are replaced in the tomb, members of the family as well as other people give them gifts like sweets, tobacco or coins, while asking them for blessings, fertility and protection. Before being replaced in the tomb, all the rewrapped *razana* are hoisted onto the shoulders of young members of the family who dance with them (cf. Photos 8 and 9) and carry them in procession seven times around the tomb (DCF 4).

#### 2.2.2.4 The meaning behind the rituals of the 'famadihana'

The *famadihana* constitutes an important religio-cultural rite among the Merina and Betsileo ethnic groups. Observers who do not possess sufficient knowledge of the meaning attributed to it cannot claim to understand why the *famadihana* is always performed with so much ritual and so many ceremonies. What follows here is, therefore, an attempt to discuss the significance underlying the rituals of the *famadihana* and its relationship to the Malagasy world-view.

Concerning the first type of *famadihana*, namely the transfer *famadihana*, it is performed with the aim of ensuring that the *razana* will be transferred to a place where they will find true rest and peace. Rajoelina (1989: 60) argues that almost all Malagasy people believe that the *razana* experience real peace only when their 'eight bones' (*taolam-balo*) are

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<sup>21</sup> The Merina and the Betsileo believe that the ancestral spirits are scattered in the vicinity of the tomb but that when they are called from the northeast of the tomb, they return. The Malagasy people regard the northeastern place as sacred because it is supposed to be the most favourable place to communicate with the Supreme Being, Zarahary, and his auxiliaries, the *razana*.

ritually and ceremoniously interred in the ancestral tombs. In this respect, he notes that the *razana* suffer from homesickness and are forced to wander around if their 'eight bones' remain in temporary tombs.

In addition to Rajoelina's argument, Molet (1979b: 278) points out that the transfer *famadihana* also helps the deceased to become *razana*. According to him, bodies abandoned in temporary tombs are not counted among the *razana* who are to be venerated and invoked. Therefore, it is the sacred duty of the family to take them home and place them in the ancestral tomb, according to the customary rituals and ceremonies (1979b: 278). Likewise, Randriamanantena (DTL 1), an informant from Antananarivo, emphasises that the transfer *famadihana* is performed in order to prevent members of the family from being scattered or lost. In other words, it is aimed at preserving even beyond the grave the family union, which is clearly expressed by the much quoted Malagasy saying '*velona iray trano, maty iray fasana*' (living in the same house, dead in the same tomb).

Concerning the second type of *famadihana*, namely the inauguration *famadihana*, it is generally organised to show publicly that, by the help of the *razana*, the family who has erected a new tomb is perfectly able to complete it properly. The inaugural rituals and ceremonies in this type of *famadihana* are thus performed in honour of the *razana* who will lie in peace in the new tomb. Therefore, this type of *famadihana*, according to Rafaravoahangy (DCF 3), an informant from Antananarivo, is aimed at helping the *razana* to appreciate their new dwelling and feel comfortable in it. As she explains, it is during the procession seven times round the tomb and the maximisation of the volume of the music and sounds that the *razana* are supposed to explore their new dwelling and take possession of it.

With regard to the third type of *famadihana*, namely the prestige *famadihana*, Molet (1979b: 281) argues that it is specifically aimed at provoking the invisible *razana*'s recognition in order to gain their blessing and protection. It also establishes, in his opinion, the reputation of the organisers and reinforces their moral authority in the community. In other words, the ceremonies are aimed at enhancing both the prestige of the *razana* and the organisers' reputation. Hence this third type is specifically termed a prestige *famadihana* (Molet 1979b: 281).

In addition to these general lines, interpreters emphasise a number of different aspects. Razafintsalama (2002: 33), for example, terms the *famadihana* a 'rite of divinisation' because, in his opinion, its essential purpose is to ensure and to make easy the integration of the dead into the sacred and invisible realm of the divine *razana*. For the same reason, Estrade (1996:

121) calls it a 'rite of elevation', since the purpose of the rituals and ceremonies of the *famadihana* is to elevate the dead to the rank of *razana*. In Bloch's view (1971: 152), the *famadihana* is a 'cult of blessing' since it is especially performed with the purpose of asking the *razana* for their blessing, which generally includes fertility, health, prosperity and a long life. He also stipulates that the major role of the *famadihana* is to keep and consolidate the interpersonal links between the living and the *razana* and, by extension, between different living people. But, whatever definitions and meanings are attributed to the *famadihana*, it is unanimously agreed that the fundamental reason for its practice is the veneration of *razana* as such (Benolo 2001: 11).

Viewed from another perspective, the *famadihana* is held to rebury the dead, in order to finalise death and to transform the dead into a sacred *razana* whom the living can invoke (Thierry 1961: 163). The *famadihana* can also be viewed in terms of a sociological perspective, since the Merina and the Betsileo regard the *razana* as their roots that enable them to define themselves in time and space and to situate themselves in a history as well as within a well-defined human group (Elli 1993: 154).

As already mentioned, the *famadihana* is not only practised by non-Christians but also by Christians, especially the Malagasy Roman Catholic Christians. It is therefore necessary to make certain observations in this regard.

### **2.2.3 The Malagasy Roman Catholic Church**

The roots of the Roman Catholic Church in Madagascar go back to 1861, when King Radama II officially recognised its establishment in Antananarivo.<sup>22</sup> Two French missionaries, Fathers Webber and Jouan from the Society of Jesus, arrived in Antananarivo to apply for the King's authorisation to teach the Catholic faith to the Merina ethnic group. After the Reformed and Lutheran Churches, the MRCC was then the third Church to be established in Madagascar. It grew so rapidly that, only a few years after this royal recognition, four parishes had been established in Antananarivo (Hübsch 1993: 259).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> King Radama II ruled over the Merina from 1860 to 1863. He succeeded Queen Ranavalona I (1828-1860). This Queen violently persecuted Christians over a long period because she did not appreciate the introduction of Christianity, which involved the repudiation of the ancestral religion and customs. Furthermore, she thought that the actions of the missionaries had become too political in nature.

<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that, since 1837, the Roman Catholic Church had already considered Madagascar as part of the apostolic prefecture of the island of Reunion (cf. Giambrone 2000: 41).

Hübsch (1993: 265) notes that a few years after his arrival, Father Webber wrote a number of books about the lives of certain saints as well as the Catholic catechism, in Malagasy. In order to have these works printed and distributed, the first Catholic printing press in Madagascar was installed in 1863. These books helped the priests to train 'catechumens' fast and efficiently. As a result, the Catholic Church celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August and the 1<sup>st</sup> of November of that same year the baptism of its first converts. Among them was Victoire Rasoamanarivo, the prime minister's daughter-in-law (Hübsch 1993: 265).<sup>24</sup> After these first baptisms, the Catholic community spread throughout the Merina and Betsileo territories (Giambrone 2000: 42). Noiret (DCL 2), an informant from Fianarantsoa, mentions that when the Catholic Church was established in Antananarivo, many Protestant Christians converted to Catholicism. According to him, such a massive conversion to Catholicism was caused by at least two reasons, the first being that many people had been shocked by the brutal destruction of the *sampy* (idols and fetishes) ordered by Queen Ranaivalona II, the successor of King Radama II, who had converted to the Protestant faith. The second reason is that some people did not appreciate the prime minister's efforts to convert every Malagasy to Protestantism.

In 1883, when the first war between France and Madagascar broke out, the Malagasy government expelled French citizens from the country (cf. Hübsch 2000: 6). The Catholic missionaries were therefore compelled to leave the island, leaving behind them a few Malagasy religious leaders, such as Brother Raphaël Rafiringa and a few novices. At that time the Roman Catholic Church consisted of about 23 500 baptised members, of whom 19 000 were pupils and students and 350 teachers (Hübsch 2000: 6). The Catholic missionaries returned after the second Franco-Malagasy war (1894-1895), which ended in the establishment of the French colonial regime in Madagascar (Giambrone 2000: 42). They led and administered the Catholic Church during this period of colonisation.

When Madagascar gained independence from France in 1960, the administration of the Catholic Church was entrusted to Malagasy leaders.<sup>25</sup> Giambrone (2000: 43) points out that the accession to power by these Malagasy Catholic leaders coincided with the opening of the Second Vatican Council, which also caused notable changes within the MRCC, such as

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<sup>24</sup> Victoire Rasoamanarivo (1849-1894) was beatified on the 30<sup>th</sup> of April 1989 by Pope John Paul II in Antananarivo (cf Hübsch 2000: 6).

<sup>25</sup> Hübsch (1993: 386) mentions that the first Malagasy Archbishop was consecrated in 1960. However, the first Malagasy Catholic bishop had already been consecrated in 1939.

the publishing of a Catholic Bible translation and the attempt to ‘Malagasize’ the worship, including the mass and other liturgies.

From the independence of Madagascar until now, a Malagasy clergyman has led the Catholic Church. The main challenge they face is, according to Rajaona (DCL 8), an informant from Antananarivo, that of organising evangelisation which is rooted in the life and culture of the Malagasy people. In Hübsch’s (1993: 506) view the MRCC continues to spread throughout the country. In his estimation, it is the largest Church in Madagascar, for among the 45% of the Malagasy people who confess the Christian faith the Catholics represent the large majority.

#### **2.2.4 The *famadihana* in the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church**

On an individual level, almost everyone who lives in the central highlands of Madagascar practises the *famadihana*. However, as far as the churches are concerned, only the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church (MRCC) recognises and incorporates it. Noiret (DCL 2), an informant from Fianarantsoa, points out that the *famadihana* was permitted to be practised in the MRCC some years after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), which urged the Catholics to inculturate their faith.

Noiret (DCL 2) emphasises that, according to the Second Vatican Council, the Church should not neglect the multiple links that exist between the gospel and the culture. Therefore, the church should make use of the resources of the diverse cultures to spread its teaching and message. This implies, he notes, that the church is to enter into dialogue with diverse cultures in order to renew and purify them, and should use them to make the Catholic faith relevant to the Christians’ daily lives. One result is that the MRCC performs the *famadihana* (DCL 2).

An example of the *famadihana* performed by the Catholic Church was the transfer of some bishops’ bodies (23<sup>rd</sup> October - 1<sup>st</sup> November 1999) from the missionaries’ tombs to compartments erected in the chapel outside the Cathedral of Antananarivo (Ravelonantoandro & Hübsch 2000: 3-4). On the same occasion, other bishops’ bodies buried in front of the altar of the cathedral were also transferred to the chapel.<sup>26</sup> The Catholic organisers themselves,

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<sup>26</sup> Sister Raharimalala (DCL 3) explains that the Catholics usually bury bishops in front of the altar of the Cathedral. The tomb is then trampled down at the time of the ceremonies celebrated in the Cathedral. This is forbidden in the Malagasy culture, as the *razana*, that are regarded as sacred, are not to be trampled. Therefore, to avoid committing such an error the diocese of Antananarivo erected outside the Cathedral a chapel in which 15 compartments that serve as tombs for bishops are set up.

without consulting a diviner, indicated the date of the *famadihana*. Cardinal Razafindratandra, who is the current head of the MRCC, playing the role of the *Raiamandreny* (elder), presided at the ceremonies.<sup>27</sup> Many Catholic Christians representing parishes and districts arrived every day to attend the ceremonies. As in traditional *famadihana*, they sang (Christian folk songs) and danced, enlivened by music. Alcoholic drinks were totally absent. In addition, the Eucharist was celebrated every evening. At the end of the ceremonies, all the guests were invited to share a convivial meal. On 1<sup>st</sup> November, which is All Saints' Day in the Roman Catholic Church calendar, the *razana*, after the 'eight bones' had been cleaned, were wrapped in new shrouds and placed in their respective tomb or compartment (cf. Photos 10 and 11). The Cardinal ended the ceremonies by praising God and thanking all the guests. He then declared that this *famadihana* was a fitting occasion for communion, prayers and reflection on the Christian meaning of this religio-cultural practice (Ravelonantoandro & Hübsch 2000: 3-4).

Expressing her opinion concerning the exemplary *famadihana* described above, Sister Raharimalala (DCL 3), an informant from Antananarivo, points out that the MRCC, in general, retains the traditional method of performing the *famadihana*. What are rejected, she says, are practices that are considered incompatible with the Christian faith, such as:

- the recourse to the traditional divination
- the calling upon the *razana*
- the carrying of the *razana* seven times round the tomb
- the belief in the fertility attached to the funeral mats
- the unlimited expenditure of money, and
- the abuse of alcoholic drinks.

Providing some other details regarding the *famadihana* in the MRCC, Rakotomanga (DCL 4), an informant from Ambositra, notes that Catholic Christians no longer turn to diviners, but they often consult the priests, asking them to determine the date on which they could organise their *famadihana*. Likewise, there are Christians who ask priests to bless the new shrouds before they are used to wrap the *razana*. He also mentions that when priests are invited to ceremonies of *famadihana*, they are often requested to say masses, to bless the family as well as the guests and the *razana*, and to spray the latter with sacred water before they are replaced in the tombs (DCL 4).

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<sup>27</sup> 'Raiamandreny' is the Malagasy term to call the parents, the elders, the religious and secular authorities, as well as the *razana*.

As Razafintsalama (1988: 17-20) emphasises, the MRCC has made considerable efforts to root its theology in ancestral values. Consequently, its concept of the *razana* gained a new theological dimension, as it states that God, who is the Father of all humankind, is the source of the *razana*'s fatherhood. Viewed in terms of this theological perspective, the *razana* are regarded as *Raiamandreny* (parents), as sources of life and light, as factors of social integration, as masters of wisdom, and as sources of grace and protection (1988: 17-20).

### 2.3 THE MALAGASY ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH'S USE OF OLD TESTAMENT TEXTS IN THE *FAMADIHANA*

In the Catholic version of the *famadihana*, certain Old Testament texts play some role, and I will now attempt to investigate the MRCC's objectives in using these texts. They refer specifically to the account of Jacob's death and burial (Gn 49: 29 - 50: 13); the transfer of Joseph's bones from Egypt to Canaan (Ex 13: 19); and the respect for parents which is prescribed by the Fourth Commandment (Ex 20: 12). These are the most important texts, although it should be acknowledged that the MRCC also employs other Old Testament texts in the *famadihana*.

As far as I know, this particular application of such texts in the *famadihana* by the MRCC has not yet been critically analysed. What I present here is based on the teaching which Cardinal Razafindratandra gave on the occasion of the *famadihana* or transfer of some bishops' bodies in 1999. His teaching was recorded on tape and then broadcast by 'Radio Don Bosco', a Catholic radio station based in Antananarivo. When I conducted an interview with Cardinal Razafindratandra regarding his interpretation of the *famadihana*, he stressed that the practice of the Christian *famadihana* has a biblical foundation. A few months after my interviews, I received from him a cassette containing his teaching (Razafindratandra 1999). Supporting the cardinal's argument, Rakotomanga (DCL 4), an informant from Ambositra, considers that the fundamental principle on which the *famadihana* is based is almost similar to the ancient Israelite customs and the beliefs regarding the dead and the ancestors described in these Old Testament texts.

I therefore wish to specify that the main source I am making use of here is Cardinal Razafindratandra's teaching, as recorded on the cassette he sent me. I will combine this with information I gathered from interviews conducted with him as well as with other Catholic theologians and lay people. In addition, I will also make use of the Catholic liturgy of *famadihana*, entitled '*Famadihana kristiana*' (Christian *famadihana*), in which these texts are

inserted in prayers and invocations (Rajaona 1976). Obviously, other documents such as journals and periodicals are available. But, having investigated them, it seems that they simply reflect the cardinal's teaching.

### 2.3.1 Genesis 49: 29 - 50: 13

49: 29 Then he gave them these instructions: I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, 30 the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field. 31 There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah. 32 The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites. 33 When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

50: 1 Joseph threw himself upon his father, wept over him, and kissed him. 2 Then Joseph commanded the physicians in his service to embalm his father Israel. So the physicians embalmed him, 3 taking a full forty days, for that was the time required for embalming. And the Egyptians mourned for him seventy days. 4 When the days of mourning had passed, Joseph said to Pharaoh's court, If I have found favour in your eyes, speak to Pharaoh for me. Tell him, 5 My father made me swear an oath and said, I am about to die; bury me in the tomb I dug for myself in the land of Canaan. Now let me go up and bury my father; then I will return. 6 Pharaoh said, Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear to do. 7 So Joseph went up to bury his father. All Pharaoh's officials accompanied him -the dignitaries of his court and all the dignitaries of Egypt- 8 besides all the members of Joseph's household and his brothers and those belonging to his father's household. Only their children and their flocks and herds were left in Goshen. 9 Chariots and horsemen also went up with him. It was a very large company. 10 When they reached the threshing floor of Atad, near the Jordan, they lamented loudly and bitterly; and there Joseph observed a seven-day period of mourning for his father. 11 When the Canaanites who lived there saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, the Egyptians are holding a solemn ceremony of mourning. That is why that place near the Jordan is called Abel Mizraim. 12 So Jacob's sons did as he had commanded them: 13 they carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre, which Abraham had bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field. (NIV)

To introduce his teaching concerning the MRCC's use of Genesis 49: 29 – 50: 13 in the *famadihana*, Cardinal Razafindratandra (1999) offers a short explanation of this passage, as follows. The passage describes Jacob's last will, his death and his burial. According to these texts, the patriarch Jacob, dying in his bed, charges his sons to carry his body out of Egypt and bury him with his fathers in the cave of Machpelah in Canaan. In order to make sure that his sons understand why this cave is so important, he reminds them of how it was acquired, as follows: Jacob's grandfather Abraham had purchased the cave together with the field of

Machpelah, which surrounds it, from Ephron the Hittite. This purchase, which was made in accordance with the Hittite customs, is meticulously narrated in Genesis 23. Jacob emphasises that Abraham bought this cave so as to possess a burial place for his wife Sarah (Razafindratandra 1999).

Cardinal Razafindratandra (1999) uses the text of Genesis 49: 29 – 50: 13 as a biblical foundation on which he bases the practice of the *famadihana* in the MRCC. Comparing the *famadihana* with the burial of Jacob, he states that the two ancestral customs and rites are almost identical. He also argues that noticeable similarities exist between the Hebrew and Malagasy attitudes towards the dead. According to him, these can be especially observed in the following matters:

- the placing of the dead in the ancestral tomb
- the belief in the ‘unique life’ bonding the dead and the living
- the role played by the ancestors towards the living
- the duties of the living towards the ancestors (Razafindratandra 1999: cassette).

Cardinal Razafindratandra (DCL 11) points out that it was a common custom of the people in the ancient Near East to possess family or ancestral tombs. He then explains that the interment or the placing of the dead in these ancestral tombs was regarded not only as a matter of great importance but also as a sacred duty. This is, in his opinion, the reason why the patriarch Abraham, following this custom, bought the cave of Machpelah (Gn 23) and transformed it into a family tomb. Later on, it served as an ancestral tomb for his descendants (DCL 11).

The cardinal (DCL 11) also explains that in ancient Israel, or, more precisely, in the patriarchal period, the placing of the dead in the family or ancestral tomb showed that the departed was a legitimate heir/heirress of the blessing and promise that God had given to the ancestors. In addition to Razafindratandra’s explanation, Sister Raharimalala (DCL 3), an informant from Antananarivo, argues that, in ancient Israel, a dead person who was properly buried with the ancestors, in the ancestral tomb, was regarded as blessed and his/her death was even accepted as a good death. On the other hand, she points out, a person who died far away from the ancestral tomb and whose body was not placed among his/her ancestors, was not only considered to be lost but also cursed.

Rakotomanga (DCL 4), an informant from Ambositra, mentions another reason why the placing of the dead in the family or ancestral tomb was so important in the patriarchal

period. Referring to the carrying of Jacob's body from Egypt to Canaan as well as to his burial in the cave of Machpelah as an example, he suggests that to bury the dead with his/her ancestors for the Israelites would signify giving him/her the opportunity to return to the source from where he/she had come. Rakotomanga then argues that such a return to the source was certainly believed to assure the dead a true rest and peace. Accordingly, when a dying person was promised that he/she would be interred in the family or ancestral tomb, he/she could die in peace. Rakotomanga points out that in the case of Jacob, when he was assured of the burial of his body in the family tomb with his ancestors, according to his last will, he gathered up his feet into his deathbed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people (Gn 49:33). According to Rakotomanga's interpretation, this means that Jacob died in peace after his sons had promised to bury him with his forebears (DCL 4).

As Razafindratandra (1999) states, in his teaching, the first point indicating the possible similarity between Israelite and the Merina and Betsileo customs is the necessity of ancestral tombs. In fact, he emphasises that, as in the patriarchal period, it is very important to the Malagasy people, especially to the Merina and Betsileo, to possess such tombs. He remarks that according to these two ethnic groups' customs, every dead person must be properly buried in his/her ancestral tomb. And it is this custom of burying the dead in an ancestral tomb which forms the historical background of the *famadihana*. The cardinal also notes that the tombs should be built on the ground of the ancestors, bordering the dwelling houses, because they represent the true ancestral land (1999). Giving his opinion regarding the importance of the ancestral tomb, Rajaona (DCL 5), an informant from Antananarivo, argues that it changes the understanding of death. In fact, because of the ancestral tomb, death is seen not only as the inevitable and natural conclusion of life, but also as an ecstatic experience of fulfilment that reunites the living with their departed relatives.

Referring to Razafindratandra's teaching, Ralibera (DCL 5), an informant from Antananarivo, emphasises that, as in the patriarchal period, each of the Merina and Betsileo has it as his/her objective to be buried in the ancestral tombs with his/her ancestors. To be buried far from the ancestral tomb or to be abandoned in a temporary burial place is thus always regarded as a great misfortune. Therefore, for Ralibera (DCL 5) in both the patriarchal and the Malagasy traditions, the ancestral tomb occupies an important place. Apart from being the last dwelling place, into which everyone must be gathered, it constitutes the central point

which links not only all members of the family but also all generations.<sup>28</sup> This is why, according to him, the Malagasy, like the ancient Hebrew, say ‘he/she was gathered to his people [ancestors]’ (Hebrew, cf. Gn 25: 8; 35: 29; 49; 33) or ‘he/she has gone home [to his/her ancestors]’ (Malagasy), when someone dies. Ralibera notes, however, that a person who has been cursed by his family or banished from the community is not allowed to be buried in the ancestral tomb.

The second point of similarity between the ancient Hebrew custom and the *famadihana*, according to Razafindratandra’s teaching (1999), is the belief in the ‘unique life’ bonding the dead and the living.<sup>29</sup> He explains that, according to the ancient Hebrew and Malagasy beliefs, this unique life is a gift from God to the ancestors, which the latter transmit to their descendants from generation to generation. The cardinal underlines that this ‘unique life’ is indestructible. It represents the vital and generative force, which makes the families or the members of a lineage, or a tribe descending from the same ancestors, fruitful and united. In other words, it is the fundamental principle which generates and consolidates the Malagasy kinship. It is also the dynamic factor which makes the communion and interdependence between the living and the dead possible (Razafindratandra 1999).

Stressing Razafindratandra’s argument, Bonaventure (DCL 6),<sup>30</sup> an informant from Antananarivo, emphasises that, among both the ancient Israelites and the Malagasy, this unique life constitutes the indissoluble link between the ancestors and their descendants. This link is fundamentally expressed, for the Malagasy, in the following saying: *velona iray trano, maty iray fasana* (living in the same house, dead in the same tomb). Bonaventure therefore considers that it is in order to maintain this ‘unique life’, which provides harmony, order and mystical union between the celestial beings and humankind, that the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church (MRCC) practises the *famadihana*.

The third point of similarity between the ancient Israelite custom and the *famadihana*, according to Razafindratandra (1999) resides in the roles played by the ancestors towards the living. The most important of these roles has to do with blessing. Razafindratandra

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<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that, according to Merina and Betsileo customs, when a relative’s body, for a special reason, has to be buried far from the fatherland, the family usually erects near the ancestral tomb a statue representing the departed. Such a statue, which is called a ‘living stone’, is the symbol showing that though the departed was buried far away he/she is counted as part of the ancestors that the family invokes and venerates.

<sup>29</sup> Cardinal Razafindratandra does not refer to any biblical text concerning this ‘unique life’.

<sup>30</sup> Bonaventure is a Catholic priest, but he was trained as a shepherd in the Lutheran revival movement. He is now one of the leaders of the Department for revival movements in the MRCC.

emphasises that both the ancient Hebrew and the Malagasy consider the ancestors as sources of blessing. Explaining further, he states that the origin of the blessing is obviously God; but he notes that God gave it to the ancestors who became its depositors. Therefore, the blessing is transmitted from generation to generation, as it was inherited from the ancestors (1999).

As Razafindratandra (1999) mentions, it is for this reason that the living first invoke the ancestors when they ask for blessing and protection. This is, he argues, why the Hebrews always invoked the names of the patriarchs, their remote ancestors, when they prayed for blessing and protection. Likewise, this is, according to him, the reason why the Malagasy always ask for or give blessings in the name of God and the ancestors. Raharison (DCF 7), an informant from Antananarivo, mentions that foreign observers, who do not command an adequate knowledge of the Malagasy belief and culture, often regard this amalgamation of God and the ancestors as one of the manifestations of syncretism in Madagascar. However, he explains that, in reality, this is the Malagasy way of showing that God is the origin and provider of everything, whereas the ancestors are the depositors and transmitters of his grace and gifts to human beings.

A fourth point of similarity between the ancient Israelite custom and the *famadihana* is mentioned by Bonaventure (DCL 6) as being related to the duties that the living have to perform regarding their ancestors. In other words, the living should, as good and blessed descendants, take care of the ancestors. This largely consists of two essential activities: providing the dead with proper funerals and keeping them in one's memory. To substantiate his argument, he refers to Genesis 50: 7-13, which describes how the children of Israel took care of Jacob's body and buried it respectfully.

For Cardinal Razafindratandra (DCL 11) the best way of performing a suitable funeral is to wrap the dead in good and new shrouds, to prepare a convivial meal and feed relatives and friends who come to pay tribute and respect to them, and then to bury them ceremoniously in the ancestral tombs. He recognises that, obviously, the body of Jacob was not wrapped but embalmed. He explains, however, that this embalming, which was an Egyptian custom, was a necessary measure that Jacob's sons were obliged to take because it enabled them to keep their father's body preserved from decay until it was buried in the cave of Machpelah in Canaan, which was very far from Egypt. Therefore the cardinal argues that, in the case of Jacob's burial, it was the embalming which took the place of the shrouds. As far as the convivial meal is concerned, there is no mention of it in Genesis 50: 1-13, but he supposes that Joseph, benefiting from his high position as prime minister of Egypt, had

probably prepared it according to the Egyptian custom. Stressing the cardinal's argument, Ralibera (DCL 5) points out that the funeral rite described in Genesis 50: 1-11 was performed to pay tribute to Jacob's body and especially to his burial in the ancestral tomb, in the cave of Machpelah, and that it helped his sons and descendants to keep him in memory forever.

As far as the funeral rites among the Merina and Betsileo ethnic groups are concerned, Cardinal Razafindratandra (DCL 11) indicates that the most important aspect relates to the wrapping of the dead in shrouds made from silk. This kind of shroud is generally expensive but people, believing that it is the most suitable one, prefer to use it without regard to cost. The reason is, in his opinion, that the shroud of silk not only serves to wrap the dead, but also symbolises his/her sacredness and venerability as *razana*.<sup>31</sup>

Commenting on the convivial meal, Bonaventure (DCL 6) remarks that the Merina and the Betsileo do not consider the funeral rite as having been properly performed, or the dead as having been rightly honoured without it. It generally consists of rice and meat, which are prepared by the family to be shared as a communion meal among all the guests who come to attend the burial or the *famadihana* and to pay tribute to the dead or the ancestors. Bonaventure stresses that the burial, which essentially consists of wrapping the dead and placing him/her in the ancestral tomb, is the most significant event of the funeral rite and, at the same time, its conclusion.

Razafindratandra (DCL 11) points out that, according to the Merina and Betsileo customs, the *famadihana* is part of the funeral rites. He mentions that observers even call it the 'second funeral' or 'second burial'. Accordingly, the *famadihana* is, in his opinion, an important and necessary rite, which enables these two ethnic groups to take care of their dead or, in other terms, to accomplish their duties towards their *razana*. To be explicit, the cardinal observes that it enables the Merina and Betsileo periodically to provide their *razana* with new shrouds, to honour them with a worthy meal which they joyfully share with relatives and friends, and to celebrate the unique life which, at the same time, links them to their ancestors and to one another. The *famadihana* also, he says, helps the Merina and the Betsileo to keep their *razana* permanently in mind (DCL 11).

As mentioned earlier, the passage on Jacob's death and burial is not the only text used by the Catholics in the *famadihana*. They also employ the narrative about the transfer of

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<sup>31</sup> The cardinal notes, however, that some people nowadays are starting to use a kind of synthetic white cloth they call *lamba tavoahangy* (literal translation: bottle cloth), which seems to be less expensive and more durable than the silk shroud.

Joseph's bones from Egypt to Canaan (Ex 13: 19). What I attempt to do in the following section is, therefore, to show how and why this text concerning Joseph's bones is utilised by the MRCC in the *famadihana*.

### 2.3.2 Exodus 13: 19

Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He had said, 'God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place.' (NIV)

This text is explained by Cardinal Razafindratandra (1999) as follows: In order to provide the reason why he had to take the bones of Joseph with him, Moses refers to Joseph who, before his death (Genesis 50: 25), had predicted that God, who would not forsake the children of Israel, would surely visit them and come to their aid. Joseph assured his brothers that they would eventually return to the land promised by God to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Thus, he made his brothers swear an oath that they would carry his bones from Egypt and bury them in Canaan when this prediction was fulfilled. In other words, to demonstrate his assurance that God would surely come to the aid of the children of Israel, Joseph postponed his burial to the day they would be established as heirs to the land of Canaan. The cardinal mentions that, as recorded in Joshua 24: 32, the children of Israel buried Joseph's bones in Shechem, in a piece of land, which Jacob had purchased from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem (Razafindratandra 1999).

In Razafindratandra's opinion (DCL 11), this carrying of Joseph's bones from Egypt to Canaan is commonly understood as the transfer of his bones. He considers that it is quite equivalent to the Merina and Betsileo customs discussed above. The cardinal explicitly notes that almost all Merina and Betsileo aspire, as Joseph did, to be buried in the land of their ancestors, or more precisely, in their ancestral tombs. He stresses the point made earlier, that the community regards deceased people who are abandoned in temporary burial places or in foreign countries as lost or even as cursed. Consequently, the Merina and Betsileo customs and sacred duties require them to repatriate or transfer their relatives' bodies to ancestral tombs, as with Joseph's bones. And as Razafindratandra states, it is this custom which was, to some extent, the origin of the *famadihana*, especially the transfer *famadihana* that these two ethnic groups have practised for many years. He then emphasises that it is the passage about

the transfer of Joseph's bones which specifically shows the similarity between both the Israelite custom and the *famadihana* (DCL 11).

In addition to Razafindratandra's argument, Randriamamonjy (DCL 9), an informant from Antsirabe, observes that Joseph was not buried in Egypt though he was the highest official or the prime minister of this country. His body was simply embalmed according to the Egyptian custom (Gn 50: 26), placed in a coffin and was carefully and respectfully conserved from generation to generation by the children of Israel. This is, he points out, why the biblical narrator records that Moses did not need to exhume or disinter the bones of Joseph but merely took them with him. Randriamamonjy (DCL 9) specifies, however, that the place where these bones of Joseph were conserved, for hundreds of years, can be considered to be a temporary burial place from which they had been taken and carried, to be definitively buried in the ancestral land of the Israelites in Canaan.

According to Cardinal Razafindratandra (1999), the ancient Israelites and the Malagasy people share the same great respect for the bones of the dead. One good example in the Old Testament, he considers, is that where the children of Israel paid particular respect to the bones of Joseph. Referring to what is recorded in Genesis 50: 26, he points out that it was Joseph's whole body that was conserved by means of the embalmment. However, when Joseph requested the children of Israel to carry up his remains and to bury them in Canaan, he referred to his bones rather than to his body (Gen 50: 25). This specific mention of the bones is also observed in Exodus 13: 19 when the biblical narrator says: 'Moses took the bones of Joseph' instead of 'Moses took the body of Joseph'. The cardinal emphasises that, similarly, it is the Merina and Betsileo's common custom to show particular consideration and respect for the bones rather than for the bodies, which is why they specially refer to the bones or 'eight bones' in the *famadihana*.

Referring to the above observation, Cardinal Razafindratandra (1999) adds that the bones of the dead can be thought to have the same symbolism and meaning in both sets of peoples: the ancient Israelites and the two particular Malagasy ethnic groups. Sharing the cardinal's view, Randriamamonjy (DCL 9) explains that these symbolism and meaning might reflect the conviction that the bones, as the framework of the body, constitute its essential and relatively permanent element. In other words, the bones are to a certain extent considered the primordial elements of the being. Therefore, they are regarded as a symbol of firmness, force and virtue.

In addition, Ralibera (DCL 5), an informant from Antananarivo, argues that the children of Israel and almost all Malagasy, like other people in the Ancient Near East, share the belief that the bones, after the flesh has completely decayed, serve as a material base for the spirit, which is considered to be immortal. This is probably, he supposes, one of the reasons why the Israelites as well as the Malagasy are not allowed to be cremated when they died. It is also, he claims, one possible explanation of the Israelites' custom, when their tombs were full, of gathering their ancestors' bones and keeping them in special coffins which they deposited in places that had been specially fitted out in the corners of the tombs (DCL 5).<sup>32</sup>

According to Razafindratandra (1999), it is in order to take care of and to conserve their ancestors' bones that Merina and Betsileo Catholic Christians practise the *famadihana*. This is the principal reason why the ceremony is performed not only occasionally, when bodies have to be transferred to the ancestral tombs or when new tombs are inaugurated, but also periodically. Hence the re-wrapping of the *razana* in new shrouds is regarded as the central rite in the *famadihana* (1999).

The last important Old Testament text used by the MRCC in the *famadihana* that will be discussed here is Exodus 20: 12, in which the Fourth Commandment is prescribed. As in the preceding sections, Cardinal Razafindratandra's teaching as well as information gained from interviewing him, and Catholic leaders' opinions and arguments, will constitute the basic sources.

### 2.3.3 Exodus 20: 12

Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. (NIV)

Cardinal Razafindratandra (1999) declares that one of the reasons why the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church (MRCC) practises the *famadihana* is to fulfil what God orders in the Fourth Commandment. He points out that the Fourth Commandment is the only commandment in the Decalogue that contains a promise regarding obedience and implies a warning for disobedience. Furthermore, he indicates that this commandment is also the only one that is formulated positively. In the cardinal's opinion, the content and form of the Fourth Commandment were particularly intended to emphasise what the Israelites should do towards

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<sup>32</sup> Ralibera (DCL 5) maintains that he obtained this information from biblical archaeological sources. However, he did not refer to any specific book or document.

their fathers and mothers. In it, God promises that if the Israelites observe and obey this commandment according to his will, they will be blessed in the land of Canaan, and they will live peacefully and prosperously. On the other hand, the implied warning behind the positive form of this commandment states that all Israelites who disobeyed were to be exterminated (1999).

As Razafindratandra (DCL 11) states, the Fourth Commandment occupies a significant transitional position in the Decalogue owing to the fact that it occurs between the commandments ordering proper worship and respect for Yahweh, and those concerning one's neighbours. Rakotomanga (DCL 4), an informant from Ambositra, supporting the cardinal's argument, adds that the Fourth Commandment is also regarded as first among the commandments in terms of the instruction given concerning how human beings are to live among themselves.

According to Rasoarivony (DCL 10), an informant from Antananarivo, the particular position the Fourth Commandment occupies in the Decalogue shows the important place and role of parents; hence, also indicating how they are to be respected and obeyed.<sup>33</sup> In other words, this commandment reinforces parental authority, to which every Israelite must submit respectfully and unconditionally. What follows are, in her opinion, a number of adequate reasons explaining why this filial respect and obedience are enjoined on the children of Israel:

- the parents must be respected and obeyed because they are sources of life, guaranteeing the continuity of the generations
- they are the founders and custodians of tradition and culture, including the religion, which they faithfully transmit to their offspring
- they are God's representatives on earth or in the human society (DCL 10).

In addition to Rasoarivony's opinion, Rasata (DCL 7), an informant from Antananarivo, emphasises that filial respect is very important as it guarantees the equilibrium of society and of order in a nation. In order to strengthen his argument, he points out that in societies or countries where the Fourth Commandment is no longer obeyed according to God's will, the moral life of people goes into decline. Still, Rasata makes all parents aware that even though this commandment is given to reinforce their authority towards their children, God does not allow them to overstep it.

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<sup>33</sup> It should be mentioned that the Catholics refer to both the living and the living-dead when they speak of parents.

According to Cardinal Razafindratandra (1999), since the Israelites received the Fourth Commandment from the Decalogue, the Malagasy people have it written in their hearts, and they obey it as a moral principle that regulates their behaviours and rules their social relations. He explicitly emphasises that the Malagasy had already respected and venerated their parents long before the Christian faith was professed in Madagascar. Bonaventure (DCL 6), an informant from Antananarivo, even remarks that, in the Malagasy society, the Fourth Commandment seems to be more obeyed among traditionalists than it is among Christians. The Malagasy traditionalists, for instance, never challenge their parents' authority or contradict them openly, while most Christian parents complain about the lack of respect and the disobedience of their children. Nevertheless, Bonaventure agrees with Cardinal Razafindratandra that, as in Israelite society, the Malagasy, Christians and traditionalists all regard this commandment as one of the fundamental principles that guarantee the stability and order of the nation (DCL 6).

Razafindratandra (DCL 11) then points out that both the Israelites and the Malagasy believe that the title and role of their parents cannot be annihilated by death. Consequently, they continue to address dead parents or even their remote ancestors as 'father' and 'mother'. Taking an example from the Bible, the cardinal mentions that the Hebrew people called Jacob their father as if he was still alive (Dt 26: 5); likewise, the Jewish people who were contemporaneous with Jesus continued to call Abraham their 'father' (Mt 3: 9; Jn 8: 53). As for the Malagasy, most of them, including Christians, continue to ask their dead parents or ancestors for blessing and protection, as though the latter are still able to perform their parental duties (DCL 11).

Therefore, Razafindratandra (DCL 11) argues that in order to obey the Fourth Commandment the Malagasy people show respect, have high esteem for and venerate their living and dead parents. The manner of showing such esteem for parents, which represents a precious moral value in Madagascar, varies with ethnic groups and customs. According to him, in the customs of the Merina and Betsileo, the best and most suitable way of performing the Fourth Commandment towards one's dead parents is the *famadihana* (1999).

Randriamanana (DCL 1) , an informant from Antanifotsy, acknowledges that, effectively, the *famadihana* provides dead parents with special care, such as restoring their dwellings (tombs), gathering their 'eight bones' and wrapping them in new shrouds. Moreover, everything in the *famadihana*, such as the family gathering, the convivial meal and rejoicing, is performed in their honour.

However, Razafindratandra (DCL 11) states explicitly that the MRCC does not understand respect for dead parents as adoration or worship. Rather, he emphasises, there is neither necromancy nor ancestor worship in the MRCC. The Catholics just share the general Malagasy belief and recognition that the state of being a parent continues beyond death. The cardinal then argues that what the Catholics essentially do in the *famadihana* is to show affection towards their dead parents and to pray for their eternal rest and peace.

Rajaona (DCL 8), an informant from Antananarivo, reveals that, in general, most of the traditionalist Merina and Betsileo organise the *famadihana* with the aim of communicating with the dead and worshipping them in exchange for their blessing and protection, according to the traditional custom. Therefore, he emphasises that the Catholics have decided to practise the *famadihana* in order to teach people how to perform it in a Christian way; i.e., how to show veneration and respect for dead parents without worshipping them.

#### **2.3.4 The function of the use of Old Testament texts in the *famadihana***

Having observed how the MRCC interprets and uses Old Testament texts in the *famadihana* I have perceived that this approach can be reflected on in terms of two distinct functions: liturgical and theological. The former is evident in the MRCC's insertion of Old Testament texts into their liturgy of the *famadihana*. As far as the latter is concerned, it is displayed by the MRCC's aim of legitimising the *famadihana* and inculturating her faith.

##### *2.3.4.1 The liturgical function*

As mentioned in the introduction to this section (cf 2.3), the Old Testament texts concerning Jacob's death and burial (Gn 49: 29- 50: 13), the transfer of Joseph's bones (Ex 13: 19) and the Fourth Commandment (Ex 20: 12) are inserted in the Catholic liturgy of *famadihana*, entitled '*Famadihana kristiana*' (Christian *famadihana*, cf. Rajaona 1976). According to this liturgy, they are used in the *famadihana* in three ways: they are read, preached, and said in prayers.

As mentioned earlier, MRCC's interpreters specify that the essential events in the rituals of the *famadihana* are the wrapping of the *razana* in new shrouds and the replacing of them in the tomb (cf 2.3.1). The Catholic liturgy of *famadihana* (cf. Rajaona 1976: 4) indicates that it is between these two events that Christian worship, which is aimed at thanking God, blessing the *razana* and the living, and consolidating the faith and hope of all

the participants, generally takes place. Rajaona (DCL 8) emphasises that this Catholic liturgy of *famadihana* shows clearly the fundamental difference between the traditional and Christian *famadihana*. In the traditional *famadihana*, it is, he explains, the *razana* regarded as a super being who blesses the living, whereas in the Christian *famadihana*, it is the living through the priest as God's representative who blesses the *razana*.

Rajaona (DCL 8) himself describes the worship that he has led on the occasion of a prestige *famadihana*: When men appointed by the elder started to take the *razana* which were to be re-wrapped out of the tomb, Rajaona urged the audience to sing Catholic folk songs related to God as Father of human beings, to Jesus as the saviour of the world and to parents as sources of life.<sup>34</sup> After the *razana* were re-wrapped, women sat on the ground and put them on their knees, for about twenty or thirty minutes, before they were replaced in the tomb. It is during this period that Rajaona conducted the service according to the Catholic liturgy of *famadihana*.

As Rajaona (DCL 8) explains, the worship in this liturgy generally consists of invoking the name of God, praising him in hymns, reading biblical texts, preaching, praying, and blessing the *razana* by spraying them with sacred water. He specifies that the texts to be read and preached, which are taken from both the Old and New Testament, are already planned for in this liturgy. Some Old Testament texts between which the reader can choose are as follows: Genesis 25: 7-10; 49: 29-33; Job 19: 23-27; Isaiah 25: 6-9; Daniel 12: 1-3. As for the New Testament texts to be read, examples of them include the following: John 15: 12-17; 17: 24-26; 1 Corinthians 15: 20-26; Romans 14: 7-9 and Revelation 21: 1-7. Regarding the texts to be preached on, the preacher is free to use any one of these. However, the most strongly recommended in this liturgy are Genesis 50: 1-13; Exodus 13: 17-19 and 20: 12 (cf. Rajaona 1976).

According to Rajaona (DCL 8), the main themes that should be brought out in preaching on these recommended texts during such rituals are respectively:

- Genesis 50: 1-13: it is, according to the example given by the children of Israel, the sacred duty of the living to take care of the dead or the ancestors by wrapping them suitably and burying them properly in the ancestral tomb (cf. Rajaona 1976: 16);

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<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that many Christians from other denominations as well as traditionalists know most of these Catholic folk-songs almost by heart.

- Exodus 13: 17-19: the transfer of bodies or ‘eight bones’ from temporary burial places to family or ancestral tombs is biblically well-founded (cf. 1976: 24).
- Exodus 20: 12: the *famadihana* in the MRCC is essentially performed to fulfil what God orders in the Fourth Commandment, in terms of responsibility towards parents (cf. 1976: 15).

Rajaona (DCL 8) stresses that the purpose of the MRCC in scheduling these particular Old Testament texts to be read and preached on during these rituals is to emphasise that the *famadihana* it practises is not only based on ancestral customs and values, but also on a solid biblical foundation. Rajaona declares that he ended the worship that he was requested to conduct by declaring that the MRCC and her followers perform the *famadihana* in accordance with God’s will, who is the heavenly Father of both the dead and the living.

As previously stated, the same texts, namely Jacob’s death and burial, the transfer of Joseph’s bones and the Fourth Commandment are also inserted in prayers in the Catholic liturgy of *famadihana*. The purpose is, as Rajaona (DCL 8) notes, to stress what has been emphasised in the reading and preaching mentioned above. Examples of these prayers are presented in their original Malagasy version and in English as follows:

*Jacob’s death and burial*  
In Malagasy

*‘Tompo Andriamanitray ô, tahio izao famadihana izao izay anasoavanay ny razanay malala toy ny nataon’ny Zanak’Isiraely tamin’i Jakoba tamin’ny nahafatesany, araka ny voalazan’ny Baiboly. Tompo ô, tahaka ny nakasitrahanao ny nikarakarana ny fatin’i Jakoba dia mba ankasitraho koa ny fikarakaranay amim-pitiavana ireto razanay ireto. Mangataka aminao àry izahay mba homenao azy ireto ny fitsaharana sy fahasambarana mandrakizay any amin’ilay Kanana vaovao any an-danitra’ (Rajaona 1976: 28).*

[O God our Lord, bless this *famadihana* that we perform in order to take care of our beloved ancestors like the children of Israel had done to Jacob at his death, as the Bible says. O Lord, you who have taken pleasure in the care that was given to Jacob’s body; we hope that you are pleased with the care we give to our ancestors, too. We ask you then to give them eternal peace and happiness in the New Canaan, in heaven (my translation)].

*The transfer of Joseph's bones*  
In Malagasy

*'Andriamanitra Tompo ô, tsy ny Malagasy ihany no manao famadihana fa ny Isiraely olonao ihany koa tamin'ny nampodiany ny taolam-balon'i Josefa avy tany Egipta sy nandevenany azy tao amin'ny fasan-drazany. Mangataka aminao ary izahay Tompo ô, tahio izao taolam-balon'ny havanay izao izay nampodianay an-tanindrazana avy lavitra mba ho voafono lamba tsara sy voapetraka ato amin'ny fasan-drazanay. Mangataka aminao koa izahay: arovy izahay mba tsy hisy hahasaraka anay aminao sy amin'ny razanay' (Rajaona 1976: 29).*

[O Lord God, the Malagasy are not the only people who practise the *famadihana*; the Israelites, your people, performed it too when they repatriated the bones of Joseph from Egypt and buried them in their ancestral land. Therefore, we ask you Lord to bless these bones of our relatives that we have carried home from far-away places so that they can be properly wrapped and buried in our ancestral tomb. We also ask you to protect us in order that nothing can separate us from you and from our ancestors (my translation)].

*The Fourth Commandment*  
In Malagasy

*'Andriamanitra ô, didinao ny hanajanay raiamandreny. Ho fankatoavana izany no anaovanay izao famadihana izao. Tsara fo ianao ka iantrao ireto raiamandreninay fonosinay ireto ary ampiantranoy any aminao izy. Izahay taranany kosa ampio mba hifankatia. Dia tahio izahay mba ho today soamantsara any an-danitrao hiarampaly amin'ireto raiamandreninay any amin'ny fiainana mandrakizay' (Rajaona 1976:38).*

[O God, you have commanded that we must respect our fathers and mothers. It is in order to fulfil that commandment that we perform this *famadihana*. You are merciful, so have mercy on these parents that we have been wrapping and receive them to your heavenly home. As for us who are their offspring, help us to love each other. Bless us so that we can come to your heaven and rejoice with our parents in everlasting life (my translation)].

Examples showing the liturgical function of the MRCC's use of Old Testament texts in the *famadihana* have been described and discussed. I now propose to investigate the theological function of such texts. It should be noted that the presentation I will give here will be based essentially on Cardinal Razafindratandra's teaching and on oral information provided by him, which I will combine with other Malagasy Roman Catholic leaders' arguments and opinions.

### 2.3.4.2 *The theological function*

#### (a) Legitimation

In my opinion, one of the MRCC's purposes in using Old Testament texts in the *famadihana* is to legitimise this traditional custom. This is confirmed by conversations I have had with Catholic leaders, as well as information I have gathered from non-Catholic interviewees. As will be discussed below, such a legitimisation assists the Catholics simultaneously to stop the *famadihana* from competing with the Christian religion, and to defend it both from attacks by other denominations, and from disapproval of it by modernists.

The reader should remember that the *famadihana* is the most important Merina and Betsileo traditional religio-cultural rite, which is based fundamentally on their strong belief in the protection and blessing of the ancestors. Its practice, therefore, shows the dependence of these two ethnic groups on the ancestors as intermediaries, from whom they expect everything they need for their daily lives. But, in return for their ancestors' providence, they owe them a debt of gratitude and reverence. They redeem this by practising the *famadihana*.

The *famadihana* is, therefore, the Merina and Betsileo way of maintaining and consolidating the relationship and interaction between the ancestors and the living. It also displays the faithfulness and attachment of these two ethnic groups to their ancestors. And it is this attachment, generally regarded by observers as a cult of the ancestors, which, together with the belief in the god Zanahary, constitutes the basis of the Malagasy traditional religion, as well as of the culture.

This religious role of the *famadihana* has traditionally made it the main rival of the Christian religion. Obviously, some observers remark that, in the daily life of the Merina and Betsileo, the Christian religion and the *famadihana* as an expression of the traditional religion coexist and seldom contradict each other. According to Bloch (1986: 40), for instance, 'in the countryside, no conflict was seen between Christianity and most of the non-Christian beliefs and practices'. On the other hand, many Christian religious leaders, Protestant as well as a few Catholics, affirm from their experiences that a strong rivalry exists between the Christian religion and the *famadihana*. Sister Raharimalala (DCL 3), an informant from Antananarivo, for example, declares that they are opposed to each other, in perpetual conflict with each other, and are ultimately irreconcilable.

Agreeing with Sister Raharimalala, Rakotomanga (DCL 4), an informant from Ambositra, emphasises that the *famadihana* has always competed with the Christian religion. According to him, this competition is an everyday fact that the Merina and Betsileo cannot

deny. For instance, he reports that, in his area, many churches, especially the Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed, are half empty or almost empty during the period of the *famadihana*, which lasts for four months (from June to September). The reason is that almost all people, including the Christians, are busy taking care of their ancestors. As Rakotomanga comments, this seriously affects both the Church's financial life and the Christians' spiritual life, since the organisation of the *famadihana* generally involves not only a lot of time and great expense but also communication with the ancestors (DCL 4).

Therefore, to stop the *famadihana* from competing with the Christian religion, the MRCC makes an effort to legitimise it by making use of Old Testament texts, as mentioned earlier. This legitimisation mainly consists of giving the *famadihana* a new religious and cultural dimension, where God is the focus, rather than the ancestors. In this way, the MRCC is convinced that the old concepts that have made this practice incompatible with the Christian religion will eventually disappear. Thus, Catholic theologians can argue for similarities between the *famadihana* and the customs regarding the dead that had been practised in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. They are also allowed to state, as Razafindratandra (DCL 11) did, that elements of the Good News are already hidden in the *famadihana*, and that the job of the Church, by the help of theologians and liturgists, is to bring them to light.

The above arguments accord with Estrade's point of view (1996: 154), which emphasises that when the *famadihana* is biblically legitimised, it altogether ceases to compete with the Christian religion. In other words, it is no longer a factor preventing the Christian faith from flourishing properly; rather, it becomes a useful evangelistic tool that sheds the light of truth, making the evangelisation authentic and relevant (1996: 154).

As mentioned above, the MRCC also legitimises the *famadihana* by means of Old Testament texts in order to defend this custom from attacks by other denominations, especially from the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC), the Malagasy Reformed Church (MRC) and various Independent churches. These churches officially denounce the practice of the *famadihana*. As Rabemanahaka (DCL 12), an informant from Antananarivo, explains, they regard it as:

- part of the old traditional religion;
- hence any acceptance of it would, according to their evaluations, involve syncretism;
- accordingly, they particularly condemn the *famadihana* as nothing but a cult of the ancestors which is completely opposed to the will of God expressed in the scriptures,

specifically the First Commandment, which constitutes the basis of the Ten Commandments recorded in Exodus 20: 1-17.

The MLC, for instance, states in its constitution (Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy 2001: 96) that the *famadihana*, whatever its type, contains idolatries and other practices which oppose the Holy Scriptures. Consequently, it is the duty of all religious leaders to make Christians aware of this and to recommend that they should renounce the *famadihana*. The constitution even urges Lutheran Christians to abandon the ancestral tombs and build their own in order to avoid the *famadihana* (2001: 113).

Accordingly, as Rabemanahaka (DCL 12) points out, it should be understood that, theoretically, the *famadihana* is prohibited in the Protestant churches because it diverts the faith of Christians from the truth of God to the deceitfulness of the ancestors. Therefore, the churches should make every effort to abolish it. Nevertheless, he notes that in practice, the *famadihana* seems to be more or less tolerated since the majority of the Protestant Christians continue to perform it. Rakotomalala (DCL 13), an informant from the north of Antsirabe, for example, reveals that Lutheran Christians can practise the *famadihana* provided that all those practices opposing God's will or which are not in accordance with the Scriptures, such as recourse to divination, invocation of the ancestors and abuse of alcoholic drinks are avoided. As he points out, if it happens that these requirements are not fulfilled, Lutherans are threatened with excommunication.

The most strongly expressed opposition to the *famadihana* stems from the revival movements that have emerged from the Malagasy Protestant churches, that is, the Lutheran and Reformed churches. The shepherds who mainly constitute the revival movement department of these churches unanimously condemn the *famadihana* as:

- a cult of the ancestors
- a cult of darkness
- a demonic cult.

Giving the reason for such a condemnation, Andrianarijaona (DCL 14), an informant from Antananarivo, declares that the *famadihana* is a dangerous trap for the faith of Christians, because it is a deceitful practice by means of which Satan leads people to perdition. Therefore, the shepherds as well as the members of the revival movement are enjoined to renounce all ancestral customs totally and to be buried in single tombs to avoid the *famadihana*. As far as this practice specifically is concerned, they must devote all their energies to combat it and then it will be completely abolished. They should also convince

their families, relatives and followers to stop performing it by making them aware of the danger that it represents to the faith of Christians (DCL 14).

It should be noted that Catholic Christians who have been trained as shepherds in the Lutheran Church, while remaining attached to the Catholic faith, have founded the revival movement department in the MRCC. According to Bonaventure (DCL 6), an informant from Antananarivo, most of these Catholic shepherds make a great effort to spread the revival movement within the MRCC. But, at the same time, some of them firmly oppose the *famadihana* and other ancestral traditions which they consider to be incompatible with the Christian faith.

Therefore, it is the *famadihana* strongly criticised and attacked by Christians that the MRCC attempts to legitimise by means of Old Testament texts. The Catholic theologians know very well that Malagasy Christians, whatever their denominations, feel a deep and great respect for the Bible. Therefore, in using Old Testament texts as biblical foundation of the *famadihana*, they expect that it will be accepted or at least tolerated.

In general, the Catholics seem to be convinced that their attempt to legitimise the *famadihana* has produced the intended result. Confirming this, Rajaona (DCL 8), an informant from Antananarivo, argues that Protestant Christians, including some pastors with whom he have discussed the matter, have begun to reconsider their position towards the *famadihana*, after the MRCC started to make use of Old Testament texts in it and celebrated it as a Christian manifestation. He has even noticed that several Lutheran and Reformed pastors participate in and perform the *famadihana* with their Catholic relatives. As they have explained to Rajaona (DCL 8), they condemn the excess and the invocations to the ancestors, but, on the other hand, they admit that the *famadihana* is a family gathering during which the social dimension is so important that it would be impossible to withdraw completely from the event.

It was also argued above that the MRCC has begun to use Old Testament texts to legitimise the *famadihana* against the disapproval of modernists. The term 'modernists' is here used to indicate Malagasy people who no longer believe in traditional ideas and concepts. Rakotosamimanana (DCF 11), an informant from Antananarivo, is one of them. He claims that modernists trust only in science and technology as a means by which they create their future.

These modernists are composed mainly of young intellectuals most of whom have been trained abroad. They are very pessimistic about the ancestral customs, especially the

*famadihana*. In their opinion, it constitutes one of the main factors that prevent the Merina and Betsileo from progressing. More explicitly, Rakotosamimanana (DCF 11) emphasises that the *famadihana*, which is an old rite belonging to the past and which is essentially aimed at satisfying the supposed desires of the ancestors, causes the Merinas' and Betsileos' progress to be cyclical rather than linear. Consequently, it must be abolished one way or another so that people can learn to live in the modern world.

As far as the cost is concerned, Rakotosamimanana (DCF 11) contends that the *famadihana* is the main cause of ruin among the Merina and Betsileo. The reason is, as he points out, that it involves excessive expense which in a few days squanders a family's annual budget, or more, on meals, drinks, shrouds and other whims. Hence, the *famadihana* is, for the modernists, a danger to the people's economic life, which is a further reason to say that this custom must disappear (DCF 11).

It seems therefore that it is, to some extent, to defend the *famadihana* from the disapproval of these modernists that the MRCC uses Old Testament texts in it. In other words, the Catholics use the Old Testament to update and legitimise the practice of the *famadihana*. This purpose is implicitly confirmed by the argument put forward by Ralibera (DCL 5), an informant from Antananarivo. In fact, he argues that since the Bible is universally believed to be the holy and living Word of God, it is unchangeably applicable to all generations in all times. Accordingly, every religious practice, either traditional or modern, which has been purified by means of it and founded on its truth, never goes out of date because the Bible makes it appropriate for everyone in all periods and customs (DCL 5).

With regard to the expense, Ralibera (DCL 5) does not agree with the modernists who condemn the *famadihana* as a ruinous traditional practice. He explains that the use of Old Testament texts that serve as a foundation of the *famadihana* has shifted its celebration from that of a traditional and ancestral rite to a Christian manifestation. As a result, Ralibera notes that most Catholic Christians today show a remarkable moderation in celebrating the *famadihana*. In his opinion, the Word of God, which has purified and legitimised the *famadihana*, has made the organisers aware of the absurdity of all excess. Besides, he points out that the MRCC keeps teaching and advising all of her followers to wisely control both their expenses and behaviours when they organise and perform the *famadihana* (DCL 5).

To conclude this discussion, it is to be mentioned that one of the consequences of the MRCC's use of Old Testament texts to legitimise the *famadihana* is the winning of converts. Obviously, no Catholic leaders, with whom I have discussed the situation, said openly that

they use biblical texts or Old Testament texts with the aim of winning converts. Nevertheless, they revealed that the openness of the MRCC to diverse cultures has resulted in increasing the number not only of the Malagasy who sympathise with its objective, but also of converts who convincingly and faithfully follow the Catholic faith.

Supporting this point, Rajaona (DCL 8), an informant from Antananarivo, mentions that the MRCC makes an effort to become a multicultural Church so that its faith is relevant and accessible to all people, coming from different cultural contexts. This Catholic method of winning converts to some extent appears to be successful, since Estrade (1996: 151) reports that among the Malagasy people who practise the Christian religion in Madagascar, Catholics are in the majority.

In addition, testimonies by interviewees who have converted from different denominations and from traditionalism to Catholicism confirm the MRCC's success in the gaining of converts, which is, to some extent, attributed to their use of the Old Testament in the *famadihana*. Ramasy (DCF 8), an informant from Antsirabe, who moved over from the Reformed Church, for example, declares that it is in particular the religious tolerance he has seen in the MRCC which convinced him, as well as his family, to follow the Catholic faith. In his opinion, the Reformed Church is very intolerant in comparison to the MRCC. For instance, he says that this intolerance is evident in the prohibition of the *famadihana*, whereas the Catholics not only accept it, but also practise it and use the Word of God to make it relevant to the faith of Christians.

Razafisoa (DCF 9), an informant from Antsirabe, was a member of the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC) before she converted, with her family and some relatives, to Catholicism. She claims that she feels more at home in the Catholic Church than in the Lutheran. The reason is, according to her, that the Catholic Church is to date the only Christian Church which takes the *famadihana* into consideration, by making it a Christian practice by means of the word of God, namely the Old Testament, and by using it as potential material to 'Malagasise' its worship. Evoking what she experienced in the MLC, she notices that the Lutherans neither recognise nor respect the Malagasy culture; they content themselves with retaining what they inherited from foreign missionaries.

As for Andriantsalama (DCF 10), an informant from Ambohibary, he was a zealous traditionalist before he as well as his family became fervent followers of the Catholic religion. Giving the reason for his conversion, he explains that he decided to become Catholic when he found that the MRCC acknowledges the ancestral values contained in the Malagasy religio-

cultural practices, especially in the *famadihana*, and uses them to enhance its members' faith. He admits that, obviously, the Catholics, in their effort to Christianise the *famadihana*, remove old practices they regard as not adaptable to Christianity and insert in their places Christian foundations and practices.<sup>35</sup> But Andriantsalama points out that whatever the innovations they introduce to the *famadihana*, the Catholics always demonstrate their tendency to safeguard and preserve the ancestral values it contains. Andriantsalama, therefore, did not hide his satisfaction at being a member of such a Christian Church in which its evangelisation and teaching are rooted in refined ancestral values.

(b) Inculturation

As mentioned earlier, the MRCC also uses Old Testaments texts in the *famadihana* to inculturate her faith. According to Aubert's definition (1986: 12), inculturation constitutes 'the dynamic and mutual relation between a local Church and its proper culture'. Malagasy Catholic scholars argue that inculturation constitutes an indispensable or even unavoidable key to successful evangelisation. In Rasolonjatovo's view (2004: 37), for instance, if evangelisation is aimed at strengthening faith, then inculturation's objective is to make this faith authentic. As he explains, the authentic faith is a faith which becomes culture by means of inculturation and which is fully received, thoroughly thought through and faithfully lived.

Elli (1993: 144) argues that the evangelistic message really reaches people and can be accepted as relevant only when it is inserted into the culture. Therefore, to evangelise, in his opinion, fundamentally consists of evangelising cultures. This is, in his opinion, what the term inculturation, which indicates the encounter of the Bible with cultures, seeks to express. Elli then underlines the fact that individuals have to be evangelised within their own cultures and not within cultures that are foreign to them.

Such arguments require us to explain how the MRCC understands inculturation. According to Noiret (DCL 2), an informant from Fianarantsoa, inculturation is a term and process that has nothing to do with syncretism. It rather involves Christians breaking with all old traditions and customs which contradict the word of God or distort its meaning, he argues. He states that inculturation is, therefore, a measure of desyncretisation that is equivalent to showing repentance or turning away from everything which invalidates God's message.

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<sup>35</sup> The old customs that Andriantsalama (DCF 10) refers to are the same as those listed by Rakotomanga (DCL 4) in the preceding sub-section (cf 2.3.4.1).

Ralibera (DCL 5), an informant from Antananarivo, considers that one approach taken by the MRCC is to perceive inculturation as a consequence of the incarnation. He explains that by becoming human, God has identified himself with human culture. Culture is therefore, he says, part of the human nature adopted by God, the Son. Therefore, Ralibera argues that the most fundamental reason for inculturation is the incarnation of the Son of God. In other words, in the same way as the Son of God incarnated himself within the Jewish cultural background, so should the Church become incarnate in every people and cultural background, without being identified with any culture. That means, he explains, the Church must implant itself among the peoples to whom it is sent to offer the mystery of salvation and share their social and cultural life. This is, as Ralibera emphasises, because the Church is the prolongation in time and space of the incarnation of the Word of God (DCL 5).

For Estrade (1996: 150) inculturation is an efficient way of inserting the evangelical yeast not only into individuals but also into cultures, as these represent the essence of being human. According to him, evangelisation that is not able to reach both the heart of the individual and his/her culture does not make sense because it is a purely superficial process. In his opinion, Christ is not paralysed in theories; He is to be encountered in daily life. Accordingly, it is in the innermost depth of this encounter that we could find answers and solutions to our existential problems.

According to Rakotomanga (DCL 4), an informant from Ambositra, inculturation is, to some extent, an attempt at adapting Christianity to local customs and cultures. It is, he notes, a matter of transmitting the Christian message by those aspects, which are mostly in harmony with people's aspirations. In more concrete terms, Rakotomanga indicates that 'doing inculturation' is nothing other than proceeding to a selective resumption of some local rites and customs, with the fundamental aim of giving Christianity a Malagasy face and of making God's message more accessible to the Malagasy people.

Summarising the MRCC's way of understanding inculturation, the cardinal (DCL 11) emphasises that inculturation is a process of discovering in the traditional religions and cultures those aspects that could be incorporated into Christianity. He uses the term 'cultural innovation' to describe this process more technically, declaring that inculturation is, accordingly, an efficient and indispensable process which guarantees the force and effectiveness of Christian evangelisation. The reason is that an inculturated evangelisation always takes into consideration the actual people to whom it addresses, uses their language,

preserves their culture while giving it a Christian foundation by means of the word of God, answers the questions they ask daily, and has an impact on their concrete life (DCL 11).

Likewise, Razafindratandra (DCL 11) emphasises that inculturation makes Christians feel at home in their proper culture. It especially causes the Christian message to be something lived, not only learned; a matter of behaviour, not only of theory; a belief that is not only professed but also serves as the anchor and motivating force of life. Therefore, pointing out the indispensability of inculturation, the cardinal declares that without it the Good News will remain foreign to the people. Inculturation is thus, as he stresses, an exigency of evangelisation which is indispensable (DCL 11).

In the light of the above, one can state that the MRCC understands inculturation as a process or an effort to integrate the Christian experience of a local Church and insert the biblical message into the Malagasy culture. According to Randriamamonjy (DCL 9), an informant from Antsirabe, such an effort is aimed at bringing out more vividly the operative and transformative force of God's Word in this culture, so that the fertile seed of the faith can germinate, develop and fructify according to the potentiality and its peculiar character. He, therefore, argues that the MRCC regards the Malagasy traditional belief-system and its cultural values as suitable material for the proclamation of the Christian message or as preparation for God's message. However, Randriamamonjy (DCL 9) recognises that the Malagasy cultures contain not only potential elements that are fertile in enhancing and consolidating the faith of Christians but also negative aspects that act as obstacles to it. He specifies that some are even considered harmful to human existence.

Therefore, Catholics recognise that all cultures need to be purified. Randriamamonjy (DCL 9) explains that, on the one hand, the Catholic method of purifying culture generally consists of separating customs and principles considered to be compatible with the Christian faith from those regarded as opposing it. But, on the other hand, it also consists of inserting Christian practices in the culture which has been separated from undesired elements (DCL 9).

Rakotomanga (DCL 4), an informant from Ambositra, remarks that the MRCC considers the *famadihana* as an important religio-cultural practice which contains traditional values such as respect for parents and the dead, kinship and solidarity. Still, it is necessary to separate it from old customs such as the practice of divination, belief in the funeral mats' ability to promote fertility, the cult of the ancestors, unnecessary expenses and abuse of alcoholic drinks. In Rakotomanga's view, once the *famadihana* is purified from these old and harmful practices, it can be used as potential and suitable material for transmitting the

Christian message. This is why, in his opinion, the Malagasy Catholic theologians use biblical texts in the *famadihana*, or, more precisely, make a considerable effort to base the reason for its practice on a biblical foundation, and also why they have established a specific liturgy of *famadihana* into which they have inserted biblical texts, among which are the Old Testament texts quoted earlier (DCL 4).

Therefore, it is to be stressed that inculturation here demonstrates the significance of the MRCC's use of Old Testament texts in these rituals, since its primordial task is to make God's message applicable to a culture so that it can operate within this culture. In other words, the MRCC uses Old Testament texts in the *famadihana* to inculturate the evangelistic message so that the Malagasy to whom it is addressed can feel at home within their own culture.

## 2.4 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE RELEVANT TEXTS IN RELATION TO THE MALAGASY ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH'S USE OF THESE TEXTS

The MRCC's use of Old Testament texts in the *famadihana* has been described in the preceding section. I shall now offer a critical analysis of these texts: Genesis 49: 29-50: 13, Exodus 13: 19 and Exodus 20: 12. My purpose is to compare the interpretation of these texts in the Catholic *famadihana* with a more historical critical interpretation of the same texts. I am not going to perform an in-depth exegetical analysis of the texts, but I will survey some elements of an historical critical approach.

To achieve the purpose of this section, my investigation will proceed from the previous discussion, which shows how the above quoted texts are used by the MRCC in the *famadihana*. This will then be related to more traditional exegetical interpretations of these texts.

### 2.4.1 Genesis 49: 29 - 50: 13

49: 29 Then he gave them these instructions: 'I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, 30 the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field. 31 There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah. 32 The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites.' 33 When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

50: 1 Joseph threw himself upon his father, wept over him, and kissed him. 2 Then Joseph commanded the physicians in his service to embalm his father Israel. So the physicians embalmed him, 3 taking a full forty days, for that was the time required for embalming. And the Egyptians mourned for him seventy days. 4 When the days of mourning had passed, Joseph said to Pharaoh's court, 'If I have found favour in your eyes, speak to Pharaoh for me. Tell him, 5 'My father made me swear an oath and said, "I am about to die; bury me in the tomb I dug for myself in the land of Canaan." Now let me go up and bury my father; then I will return.'" 6 Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear to do." 7 So Joseph went up to bury his father. All Pharaoh's officials accompanied him -the dignitaries of his court and all the dignitaries of Egypt- 8 besides all the members of Joseph's household and his brothers and those belonging to his father's household. Only their children and their flocks and herds were left in Goshen. 9 Chariots and horsemen also went up with him. It was a very large company. 10 When they reached the threshing floor of Atad, near the Jordan, they lamented loudly and bitterly; and there Joseph observed a seven-day period of mourning for his father. 11 When the Canaanites who lived there saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, 'The Egyptians are holding a solemn ceremony of mourning'. That is why that place near the Jordan is called Abel Mizraim. 12 So Jacob's sons did as he had commanded them: 13 they carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre, which Abraham had bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field. (NIV)

Genesis 49: 29 - 50: 1-13, which narrates Jacob's death and burial, is used by the MRCC as one of the biblical foundations of the *famadihana* (cf. 2.3.1). It is argued that ancient Israelite customs regarding the dead and the *famadihana* are basically similar. These similarities essentially reside, according to the MRCC, in the necessity of burying the dead in the ancestral tomb, the belief in the unique life bonding the dead and the living, and the roles that the dead and the living mutually play.

According to Cardinal Razafindratandra (cf. 2.3.1), the custom of having ancestral tombs is common to both ancient Israel and traditional Madagascar, specifically among the Merina and Betsileo. As it was customary in the early Israelite period to use caves for burial places, Abraham transformed the cave of Machpelah into a buryingplace or a family tomb in which his wife Sarah, himself, Isaac and Rebecca, as well as Leah were buried (Gn 49: 31).<sup>36</sup>

As recorded in Genesis 49: 29-30, Jacob, expressing his last will on his deathbed, commanded his sons to bury him with his ancestors in this cave that Abraham had purchased, with the field surrounding it, from Ephron the Hittite, in accordance with the Hittite custom

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<sup>36</sup> As Noth (1966: 170) explains, in a hilly country like Canaan or Palestine, natural caves provided convenient burial places. Therefore, most of the later forms of burial sites in this land developed from caves.

(Gn 23).<sup>37</sup> The verb to command (חָוַע), which is frequently rendered as ‘to lay charge (upon)’, ‘to give charge (to)’, ‘to charge’, and ‘to order’ (Brown 2000: 845), is generally used for an instruction or charge given by a divine or a superior authority which people have to obey unconditionally. Jacob is, therefore, shown here as a father who, even while dying, exerts an indisputable authority over his sons. According to the narrative, Jacob’s command had already been given to Joseph previously (cf. Gn 47: 29-31), in which he made Joseph swear that he would carry Jacob’s body out of Egypt and bury it in the tomb of his ancestors. It seems that the Priestly writers specifically stress Jacob’s insistence that he must be buried in the cave of Machpelah. On the one hand, Brown points out that this is logical, for the reason that Jacob had lived in Egypt as merely a stranger. On the other, he argues that the essential reason for this insistence is probably that the cave with the field of Machpelah represented the only piece of land in Canaan which legally belonged to Israel at that stage (2000: 845).

Accordingly, the cave (חַר [מ]) of Machpelah is regarded as a sign symbolising Jacob’s inheritance and the mark of his faith in the future fulfilment of the divine promise, rather than as a mere family sepulchre (Herbert 1962: 57, 157). In other words, this cave was, for Jacob and his family, the only guarantee of the Promised Land vis-à-vis the other people living in the country of Canaan (Michaeli 1960: 145). Bloch-Smith (1992b: 111) emphasises this argument in pointing out that the burial in the ancestral tomb, in ancient Israelite, ‘served as a physical marker of the family claim to the land. In fact, in buying it together with the field of Machpelah, Abraham as well as his descendants became the owners of a piece of the land of Canaan, the only part he ever possessed. It may thus be said that in burying Jacob in the cave of Machpelah, Joseph and his brothers not only obeyed their father’s last will and command but also shared his hope and faith in this divine promise.

It should be pointed out that Jacob’s words, reported by Joseph to Pharaoh in Genesis 50:5, that are rendered as follows: ‘...in the tomb I dug (חַרְכָּ) for myself in the land of Canaan’ (NIV), produce a problem of interpretation: these words do not reproduce textually what Jacob really said to Joseph in Genesis 47: 30. Joseph seems to mean that his father has possessed his own tomb, which was not located in the field of Machpelah but in another

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<sup>37</sup> The cave of Machpelah is believed to be in the Haram el-Kahlil at Hebron, surrounded by a wall built in Herod’s time. It had served as a Herodian sanctuary, but it was transformed into a Church at the time of the Crusades, then into a mosque in the nineteenth century. It seems that the site is still venerated (cf. Hazan 1970: 182).

place. To clarify this, Godet (1985: 355) suggests that the verb *ḥrk* (to dig) should be interpreted as ‘to arrange’ or ‘to improve’. In this case, as he says, one could understand that Jacob did not dig a new cave but just improved the one he had inherited from his grandfather Abraham. According to Godet’s explanation, Joseph had deliberately distorted Jacob’s words for diplomatic reasons. Speaking to Egyptians, he accommodated his report to their way of thinking, according to which all great people in Egypt should have their own tombs instead of contenting themselves with inherited ones. But the difficulty is resolved when the narrator clearly specifies, in Genesis 50: 13, that Jacob was carried to the land of Canaan and buried in the cave of Machpelah. It is also to be noted that in recounting Jacob’s desire to Pharaoh, Joseph did not mention Jacob’s statement ‘do not bury me in Egypt’ (Gn 47: 29). The reason is that such a recommendation could easily be taken as an anti-Egyptian sentiment (Turner 2000: 205).

With regard to Jacob’s death (*ṭwm*) and burial (*ḥdbq*) that are recorded in Genesis 49: 29-50: 13, one sees that it is described in great detail. What should be first noted is the mention in Genesis 49:33 that when Jacob had breathed his last he was gathered (*@ṣa*) to his people (*~ [*). As Bloch-Smith (1992b: 110) explains, the expression ‘to be gathered to one’s kin/ancestors/people’, which is a formula found exclusively in the so-called P source, generally evokes the image of deceased reunited with family members in the ancestral tomb. This formula had already been used with Abraham (Gn 25: 8), Ishmael (Gn 25: 17) and Isaac (Gn 35: 29). Considering this explanation, one can suggest that Jacob whose burial took place a few months after his death was considered to be reunited with his deceased family immediately after he had breathed his last. But, Bloch-Smith also mentions that the term ‘ancestors’ in the formula sometimes changes into ‘grave’ (cf. 2 Ki 22: 20), which means that in the Old Testament, the ‘ancestors’ are equated with the ‘grave’. Therefore, being gathered to the ancestors was tantamount to burial.

It is also to be noted that Jacob’s burial, which suggests considerable knowledge of Egyptian customs, was an affair of state or a public ceremony conducted with national pomp that neither Jacob himself nor Joseph had expected (Candlish 1979: 787). When Jacob died, it is said that Joseph is the only one whose grief and mourning over the death of his father is reported, while his brothers are certainly experiencing grief equal to his. The fact that Joseph alone threw himself upon his father may be intended as a fulfilment of an earlier word to Jacob by God that it would be Joseph who would close the eyes of his father (Gn 46: 4). Such

honour is thus reserved beforehand to the survivor acknowledged to have been closest to the departed (Hamilton 1995: 691). Joseph's first concern, after having expressed his grief and love, is to fulfil his father's command (cf Gn 49: 33 – 50: 1). In the first place, he gave orders for Egyptian physicians (healers), who were at his service, to embalm (יָבִימֵם) his father.

Embalming a body, which is the preparation of the body for the burial, was characteristically an Egyptian practice; thus foreign to Israel.<sup>38</sup> Hamilton (1995: 692) specifies that in the medical literature of Egypt, the verb 'embalm' may be used to describe wrapping the mummy in bandages. As Godet (1985: 354) argues, embalming was not only a medical practice but also a religious rite. He explains that the Egyptians believed in a permanent and continuous relationship between the body and the spirit beyond death. Thus, the body that was conserved by means of embalming would serve as a material base for the spirit. Still, it was applied to Jacob not only because he was the Egyptian prime minister's father but also because the fact that his body was to be conveyed to the family grave in Canaan necessitated it being conserved intact (Herbert 1962: 158).

As recorded in Genesis 50: 2-3, the embalming process of Jacob's body required considerable time, for it took a full forty days. Following this period set aside, the narrator specifies that a seventy-day period of mourning (חֲמִשָּׁנִים) for Jacob was held, in which Egyptians, including the court of Egypt, participated (Gn 50: 3). Referring to the first-century Roman historian Diodorus (Histories 1. 72), Hamilton (1995: 692) specifies that the period of mourning in Egypt for a king was seventy-two days. Accordingly, Jacob was mourned in a manner customary to Pharaoh himself. He argues that the seventy days of mourning for Jacob mentioned in Genesis 50: 3 might probably have a connection with Jacob's seventy descendants (Gn 46: 27). The reason why the Egyptians paid such great honour and respect to Jacob's body was probably that he was the father of their highest minister (Aalders 1981: 291). In other words, this royal mourning for two-and-a-half months for Jacob must be mandated by Pharaoh as an expression of his respect for the father of the son who saved his empire from starvation (Hamilton 1995: 692).

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<sup>38</sup> The embalming or mummification is supposed to have been common in ancient Egypt and was continued into the earlier Christian era. It was especially performed to preserve the body intact. The operation generally consisted of removing, first, the liquid, about 75% of the body weight, and subsequently the organs, through an incision in the left side, with the exception of the heart and the kidneys. Afterwards, the body was treated with natron (carbonate of soda) for 40 days. Then the body was wrapped with endless yards of linen strips soaked in resin (Vos 1985: 107-108).

Concerning the way of mourning for Jacob, it is narrated in Genesis 50: 10 that the Israelites, as well as the Egyptians who escorted them, mourned with a great and very sad lamentation. Herbert (1962: 158) argues, however, that although the Israelites mourned the death of those they loved, they were forbidden to indulge in extravagant sorrow. On the other hand, Candlish (1979: 792) emphasises that, according to the old eastern usage, the mourning, which was generally heavy and grievous, was 'loud' and 'clamorous'. Agreeing with Candlish, Hamilton (1995: 697) points out that the mourning in ancient Israel, especially the  $\text{לְבָא}$  (cf. Gn 27: 41), which, according to his explanation, expresses the son's mourning for his father, was often compared to the lamentation of the jackals and the mourning of the ostriches (cf. Mi 1: 8cd).

So it was in the mummified condition, mentioned above, that Jacob's body was taken to be buried in Canaan by his family, led by Joseph. They were escorted by a large company including distinguished Egyptian representatives and a military detachment comprised of chariots and horsemen (Gn 50: 7-9). In Aalders' opinion (1981: 293), such an immense funeral procession was expressly mounted to show that Jacob was brought to his last resting place with great honour and respect.

The journey ended when the funeral procession arrived at a place called the 'threshing-floor of Atad' or Goren-ha-atad, which is said to be on the east side of the Jordan (Gn 50: 10). According to Hamilton (1995: 697), the mention of this place in Transjordan or East Jordan means that the funeral procession did not take the normal route from Egypt to Canaan, but took a detour and travelled around the Dead Sea and up the east side of Jordan. Candlish (1979: 792) suggests that this roundabout journey was rendered necessary by the risk of collision with the roving and unfriendly tribes of the desert.

It is recorded in Genesis 50: 10 that a seven-day period of mourning ( $\text{לְבָא}$ ), which was indicated in the Old Testament as the normal period for mourning (see 1 Sm 31: 13 par. 1 Chr 10: 12; 2 Sm 11: 27; Job 2: 13),<sup>39</sup> was observed in this place. Hamilton (1995: 697) suggests that the funeral party's mourning must have included actions as well as words, for it was something the local inhabitants, the Canaanites, saw and heard. In addition to lamenting

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<sup>39</sup> It is to be noted that the thirty days of mourning for Aaron (Nm 20: 29) and Moses (Dt 34: 8) were exceptional. Hamilton (1995: 696) notes that the seven days of mourning, according to the Israelite custom, may be compared with the seven days of birth preceding circumcision (Gn 17: 12), the seven days of marriage (Gn 29: 27), and the seven days of consecration of the priests (Lv 8:33). He points out that all of these seem to refer to what today would be called 'rites of passage'.

so loudly and bitterly, as the narrator reports, the mourners, in his opinion, were supposed to tear their clothes and to fast. As mentioned in Genesis 50: 11, the Canaanites who lived there were deeply impressed by this mourning ritual and said: ‘this is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians’. Consequently, the place was named *Abe-Mizraim* (~*yr̄cm lba*), which means ‘place of the Egyptians’ or ‘mourning of the Egyptians’. Turner (2000: 205) points out that this Canaanites’ comment as well as the new name they gave the place demonstrates how Egyptianised the children of Israel were: they were undistinguishable from the Egyptians.

After this seven-day period of mourning, Jacob’s family crossed the Jordan to bury his remains in Canaan, in the cave of Machpelah, according to his last will and command. There is no longer any mention of the large company of Egyptians that escorted them. According to Aalders’ suggestion (1981: 294), the narrator seems to specify that the Egyptians did not go up to Canaan with the Israelites. He argues that Joseph would ask them to return home in order to maintain the family privacy and to show that the final rite strictly concerned the family only. However, he also supposes that there may have been a political reason which prevented the Egyptians from trespassing on the land of Canaan.

Having observed the solemnity of the mourning and the immensity of the funeral procession, one expects that Joseph and his brothers would bury Jacob as ceremoniously as possible. But the narrator does not record at all how the ritual and ceremonies of the burial in the cave of Machpelah took place. It is simply mentioned that his sons carried Jacob’s body into the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of Machpelah (Gn 50: 13). Nevertheless, one can presume that when Jacob’s family came to Canaan, or more precisely to the cave of Machpelah, they observed a short period of mourning that was in keeping with the Canaanite customs (Aalders 1981: 293). Such a supposition leads one to assume that the ceremonies and ritual performed by Jacob’s sons during his burial in the cave of Machpelah might have been similar to the Canaanite and Egyptian customs. Moreover, Bloch-Smith (1992a: 785) reveals that, in the patriarchal period, it is impossible to distinguish Israelite from Canaanite burials.

It is to be said that Jacob’s sons, in burying his father in the cave of Machpelah, in the land of Canaan, had fulfilled his last will, and at the same time, provided him with a proper and worthy burial. In fact, proper burial in the Old Testament, as Bloch-Smith (1992b: 110) argues, required interment in a *r̄bq* (burial place; Gn 23: 4; Ex 14: 11; Is 22: 16) or a *hrwbq* (grave; Gn 35: 20; Dt 34: 6; Is 14: 20). Bloch-Smith also explains that, according to the Old Testament, proper burial was accorded to all who served Yahweh. Therefore, most

individuals were probably buried in a family tomb, whereas sinners were cursed with denial of burial or exhumation (Dt 28: 25-26; 1 Ki 13: 22; 14: 10-11; Jr 16: 4), and certain sexual crimes were punishable by burning the individuals involved (Gn 38: 24; Lv 20: 14, 21: 9).

To close this discussion concerning Jacob's death and the burial of his body in his family tomb, in the land of Canaan, I would like to refer to Gese's statement (1981: 37), which points out that 'Life in the land first becomes possible through a grave; through a grave the group put down roots in the land. The grave is the material origin and the final refuge'.

In comparing the analysis of Genesis 49: 29-50: 13 given above to the MRCC's interpretation of the same text presented in 2.3.1, one can discern similarities and dissimilarities. According to the MRCC's interpreters, the similarities are especially observable in the placing of the dead in the ancestral tomb, the belief in the 'unique life' bonding the dead and the living, the role played by the ancestors towards the living and the mutual duties which exist between the living and the ancestors (cf. 2.3.1).

Concerning the custom of placing the dead in the ancestral or family tomb, I concur that to a certain sense it is common to both peoples: the ancient Israelites and the Malagasy. In fact, the burial of Jacob in the cave of Machpelah, which was transformed by Abraham into a family tomb for his descendants (Gn 50: 12-13), can be considered to parallel the Malagasy custom which consists of placing in the ancestral tomb all persons descending from the same ancestors. It is therefore accurate that a certain similarity can be seen between the *famadihana* and the burial of Jacob as far as the action of placing the dead in the family tomb is concerned.

But, regarding the reason for this custom, I must note that there are obvious dissimilarities, which make the *famadihana* and Jacob's burial quite different. Firstly, it is to be emphasised that the burial of Jacob in the cave of Machpelah is connected with Yahweh's covenant and his promising the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants. In other words, Jacob's burial in his family tomb, which is far away from Egypt where he temporarily lived, is the visible sign showing his belief and trust in Yahweh, who had called him (Gn 12: 1-3) and made a covenant with him (Gn 15: 1-21). One may conclude from the narrative that Jacob commanded his sons to bury him in Canaan because he firmly believed that Yahweh would fulfil what he had promised to Abraham and his descendants. Secondly, Jacob was buried in the cave of Machpelah in order that his body should be placed among his departed

family, according to his commandment (cf Gn 49: 29-31) not according to any ancestral custom.

On the other hand, the *famadihana* or the placing of the dead in the ancestral tomb that has been described in 2.2.2 is connected with the ancestors, not with God/Zanahary. In fact, the Merina and Betsileo peoples perform the *famadihana* in order to show their fear of, as well as their belief and trust in, the ancestors, to fulfil the ancestors' will commanding them to take care of the dead. They also practise the *famadihana* with the aim of receiving the ancestors' blessings and protection as rewards for their faithfulness and devotion. Besides, the placing of the dead in the ancestral tomb is not a mere custom of laying a dead person among his/her departed family; it is, rather, part of the rituals aimed at helping the dead to become *razana* (cf Molet 1979b: 278). But, according to the traditional belief common to the Merina and Betsileo peoples, to become *razana* means that the dead gain a supernatural power and authority on which the living can rely for help.

With regard to the belief in the 'unique life' that the MRCC considers as a gift from God (Razafindratandra 1999), I can say that a slight similarity between the *famadihana* and Jacob's burial is undeniable. I agree with Cardinal Razafindratandra's argument emphasising that this 'unique life' is accepted by both peoples, the ancient Israelites as well as the Malagasy, as being a vital and generative force, constituting an indestructible link bonding the members of a lineage or a tribe descending from the same ancestors (see 2.3.1).

However, dissimilarity becomes evident when the MRCC adds that the ancestors, who are, to a certain extent, regarded as the agents that God entrusted with this 'unique life', also possess the ability to provide it for their descendants. The Merina and the Betsileo, therefore, perform the *famadihana* in order to maintain their links with the ancestors who, in turn, cause them to benefit from the blessings and fruitfulness that flow from this 'unique life'. This belief in the ancestors' blessings is quite contrary to what the Old Testament says about Jacob. In fact, Genesis 49 clearly records that Jacob gathered his sons and blessed them before he died. Likewise, it was Isaac as a living person, not as a dead ancestor, who blessed his son Jacob (Gn 27: 26-29), which indicates that the blessing has nothing to do with a dead person or ancestor, since only a living person has the ability to give or to pronounce it.

As far as the funeral rites are concerned, the MRCC is to a certain extent right in pointing out that there is a similarity between the *famadihana* and Jacob's burial which resides in the fact that in both ancient Israel and traditional Madagascar, the funeral rites are aimed especially at paying tribute to the departed. This was the main reason why Jacob's

children performed not only a suitable ceremony of mourning but also a royal one, which was customary only as regarded the Pharaoh. Similarly, the Merina and Betsileo too, outside the mourning, take great care of their dead.

However, both funeral rites are fundamentally dissimilar in that the Malagasy essentially perform these funeral rites with the intention of gaining the favour of their ancestors in exchange. Therefore, the wrapping of the dead or the ancestors in shrouds has to be regularly performed every three, five, or seven years. Consequently, the funeral rites among the Malagasy illustrate not only their aim of paying tribute to their dead but also their belief in the ancestors' power.

In addition, Malagasy Catholic theologians argue that the huge meal that is customarily shared among all the guests during the ceremony of the *famadihana* is also part of the funeral rites. Still, it is not regarded as a mere meal but a ritual meal that has something to do with the Malagasy belief in the ancestors. Hence the eldest person representing the family has to provide the *razana* with his/her/their share, in placing a small amount of food in the northeastern corner of the house and in pouring drops of rum on the ground, before inviting the guests to enjoy the meal.

It should be pointed out that there is no mention of such a meal in the narrative of the burial of Jacob. Obviously, one can presume that the children of Israel might have shared a meal between them and their guests, but it is difficult to believe that a ritual significance was attached to it.

Lastly, it should be emphasised that Jacob's burial in his family tomb is also fundamentally dissimilar to the *famadihana* in the sense that it never generated religious and cultural rites comparable to the *famadihana*. Moreover, there is neither in the specific text concerning Jacob's death and burial, nor throughout the Old Testament, any mentioning of the children of Israel periodically taking Jacob's body out of the cave of Machpelah, rewrapping it in new shrouds and replacing it in the cave.

#### **2.4.2 Exodus 13:19**

Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He had said, 'God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place.' (NIV)

Exodus 13: 19 has been discussed in 2.3.2 as the second Old Testament text used by the MRCC in the *famadihana*. More specifically, the MRCC employs it to demonstrate that the carrying of Joseph's bones from Egypt to Canaan is similar to the transfer *famadihana* performed by the Merina and Betsileo (cf. 2.2.1.1). The MRCC claims that Joseph's bones were carried or transferred from the temporary place where they were kept in Egypt to Canaan for more or less the same reasons. Thus, basing their argument on similarities between the repatriating of Joseph's bones to Canaan and the transfer *famadihana* among the Merina and Betsileo, Catholics cite Exodus 13: 19 as the most suitable biblical foundation for the *famadihana*.

In reading Exodus 13: 19, one notices that the expression '...God will surely visit (ḏḡḡḡ ḏḡḡ) you...' quotes Joseph's words in Genesis 50: 25.<sup>40</sup> In this passage, and also in v. 24, Joseph predicts that God will surely visit the children of Israel and bring them out of Egypt to the land which he swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Being convinced that God will fulfil this promise, he did not ask the children of Israel to bring his body to Canaan at the time of his death as Jacob had done; he made them swear with an oath that they would carry his bones (~ḥ [ ] ) with them.<sup>41</sup> In other words, Joseph, in order to demonstrate that God would definitely come to the aid of the Israelites, postponed his burial to the day when they would be established as heirs in the Promised Land.

Genesis 50: 25 is quoted when Moses took Joseph's bones with him, in order to make sure that the children of Israel remember Joseph's injunction. By means of this quotation, the narrator reminds one that not only Moses but also all of the Israelites, freed by God from Egyptian bondage, are responsible for the carrying of Joseph's bones, as well as for their burial in the Promised Land.

As narrated in Genesis 50: 26, Joseph was not buried in Egypt. His body was embalmed (ḡḡḡḡ), placed in a coffin (! ḡḡḡ) and kept by the children of Israel from generation to generation until they left Egypt as free people. It is therefore worthy of note that the bones of Joseph were neither exhumed nor even taken out of the coffin to be rewrapped in new sheets. Moses simply took the coffin from the place where it was kept when the time for

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<sup>40</sup> According to Propp (1999: 476), the use of the divine name ~ḡḡḡ (God), as well as the quotation of Genesis 50: 25, attests that Exodus 13: 17-19 belongs to E (the Elohist narrative).

<sup>41</sup> It should be noted that since the text speaks of Joseph's 'bones' instead of his 'body', I use the word 'bones' in this section.

the children of Israel to go out of Egypt had come.<sup>42</sup> It is also to be noticed that Moses and the children of Israel carried to Canaan not only Joseph's bones but his entire body, i.e., his bones and flesh that had been preserved by mummification. Besides, the plural noun  $\sim\text{C} \text{ [}$  (bones) is often used as representing an entire person or the whole being (Brown 2000: 783). Accordingly, it should be understood that it was his mummified body that Joseph demanded should be taken back to Canaan.

Exodus 13: 19 is the only reference to Joseph's coffin, until his bones or his body are buried in Canaan (Jos 24: 32). Still, one should always bear in mind that this coffin was the inseparable companion of the Israelites during their wilderness trek. One should also recall that, besides Joseph's coffin, the children of Israel also transported the ark of the covenant of Yahweh, a chest of acacia wood, which symbolised his divine presence among his people (Ex 25: 10-22). Therefore, the children of Israel carried two chests: the first contained the covenant of the Lord and the second the bones of Joseph.

The carrying of Joseph's bones from Egypt to Canaan was not only a fulfilling of the oath his brothers swore to Joseph, but also an acknowledgement of the fulfilment of God's promise to the Israelites, recalled by Joseph, that he would surely visit ( $\text{d}\text{q}\text{p}\text{y} \text{ d}\text{q}\text{p}$ ) them. Viewed from this perspective, the carrying of Joseph's bones is regarded as constituting an encouragement of the Israelites' faith and hope that God, who had brought them out of Egypt, would fulfil the other part of his promise in bringing them to Canaan, the Promised Land.

According to Michaeli (1974: 124), the narrator specifically mentions Joseph's bones in order to establish a link between the patriarchal and Exodus stories. In terms of this perspective, God's visit and deliverance, as related in Exodus, are situated in the continuation of the traditions of Genesis.

Erdman (1986: 124) states that the story of Joseph's bones is a parable of faith. He elaborates as follows: as a great prince and prime minister, Joseph would enjoy the privilege

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<sup>42</sup>  $\text{!wda}$  (coffin) here means a 'mummy-chest' (Brown 2000: 75). According to Reed (1962: 475), coffins were not common among the Hebrews. He suggests that the coffin mentioned in Genesis 50: 26 was probably a portable box or chest that may have been shaped in the likeness of a human being and was ornately decorated, as was often the case in Egypt. Giving more explanation, Bloch-Smith (1992b: 186) specifies that four handles on each side rendered the coffin portable and the sixteen handles at the back arranged in two rows might have functioned as legs or supports.

of being ceremoniously buried in a luxurious tomb in Egypt, the land in which he had lived in splendour and glory. But instead of requesting this, he made the children of Israel swear an oath that they would carry his bones out of Egypt to be buried in the Promised Land, because Joseph looked across the intervening centuries to the fulfilment of God's words. One can therefore argue that the fact that the children of Israel carried these bones on their way home indicated the firm belief that God would bring them at last to Canaan (1986: 124). Similarly, Propp (1999: 489) points out that the Israelites preserved and repatriated Joseph's bones as a token of faith.

However, scholars contradict each other when they try to discuss the issue of possible ancestor veneration or ancestor worship in ancient Israel. Herbert (1962: 57), for example, considers that 'ancient Israel was remarkably free from ancestor worship or cult of the dead'. He adds that 'no special sanctity appears to have been attached to the tomb of Machpelah so far as is known'. For Hazan (1970: 170), however, the cave or the site of Machpelah appears to have been venerated from ancient times until now. Sharing Herbert's opinion, Gaster (1962: 787) states that the teachers and prophets of Israel discounted necromancy and occult speculation. As for Chiu (1984: 221), he notes that 'there are indications of ancestor worship in the Old Testament times but there was no ancestor worship in Israel'. He also emphasises that the children of Israel did not worship their dead; they just honoured them in a religious spirit. One can say that these arguments accord with the Deuteronomistic legal material which contains clear prohibitions of all customs and rituals related to cults of the dead (cf. Dt 14: 1 and 18: 9-12).

Nevertheless, other scholars support the notion that ancestor worship existed in ancient Israel. Lewis (1992: 240), for instance, argues that all forms of ancestor worship were resolutely condemned only when Yahwism became normative in ancient Israel. Previously, the ancient Israelites, who did not yet possess their own culture, might have shared solidarity with the cultures then prevailing in the Ancient Near East. Moreover, Lewis (1992: 242) suggests that the ongoing Yahwistic battle against the practice of necromancy and other rituals associated with the dead implies that ancestor worship was probably practised in certain segments of the Israelite society or in some forms of popular religion. Agreeing with Lewis, Bloch-Smith (1992b: 111) points out that the Old Testament records the burial locations of distinguished ancestors or principal players in Israel's theological history, such as judges, prophets and kings, who were thought to possess after death special powers and to maintain intimate contact with Yahweh as they had during their lifetimes. Propp (1999: 489),

offering his opinion about the carrying of Joseph's bones from Egypt to Canaan, agrees with Lewis that this action could be understood as an acknowledgement of a duty towards the ancestors.

In comparing the analysis of Ex 13: 19 given above to the MRCC's interpretation of the same text (see 2.3.2), one can discern one similarity and one dissimilarity. As pointed out by Cardinal Razafindratandra, the passage concerning the transfer of Joseph's bones specifically illustrates the similarity between the Israelite custom and the *famadihana*; in other words, the repatriation of Joseph's bones from Egypt to Canaan can be seen as paralleling the transfer *famadihana*. In a certain sense, I acknowledge that Cardinal Razafindratandra has a point in comparing two examples of transferring bodies or bones.

However, referring to the reasons for the transfer of Joseph's bones and the *famadihana*, one sees that they are quite different. It should be emphasised that the children of Israel preserved and carried Joseph's bones as a symbolic act displaying their trust in God's faithfulness as well as in their repatriation to the Promised Land. Besides, the transfer of Joseph's bones from Egypt to Canaan is an isolated case in the Old Testament, and it is difficult to see it as an example of ancestor veneration, or as a more general burial custom.

On the other hand, the transfer *famadihana* is connected with the veneration of the ancestors. To some extent it is practised with the aim of guaranteeing good conditions for them and of helping them to become *razana* that people can invoke and ask for special favours such as blessings, protection and prosperity.

Regarding ancestor veneration or worship, it is true that some scholars find traces of it in ancient Israel. None of them, however, says that it was acceptable. On the contrary, they specify that the prophets energetically opposed this practice and polemically condemned it. Therefore, it is difficult to argue, as the MRCC does, that the respect and veneration for the bones of the dead make the *famadihana* and the transfer of Joseph's bones similar.

### **2.4.3 Exodus 20:12**

Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. (NIV)

The third Old Testament text that the MRCC applies in the *famadihana* is the Fourth Commandment, recorded in Exodus 20: 12. As presented in 2.3.3, this passage is employed to

display similarities between the Old Testament and the *famadihana*.

Exodus 20: 12 contains the Fourth Commandment, which prescribes respect for parents, namely the father (בא) and the mother (~א).<sup>43</sup> But, this regulation was also applied to the elders and persons who were deemed to have been invested by God with authority, such as the secular and ecclesiastical rulers (Houtman 2000: 56). Contrary to what is to be observed in the other commandments, this commandment is followed by a reward for obedience. Hence it also implies a punishment for disobedience. Besides, one should notice that it is formulated in positive form. Yet, scholars suppose that the Fourth Commandment was originally written in negative form, like most of the others. They base this argument on Exodus 21: 17 and Deuteronomy 27: 16, in which the original, according to them, could read: ‘you shall not curse [dishonour] your father and your mother’ (Hyatt 1980: 213). As Childs (1974: 419) explains, the present positive formulation ‘honour your father and mother’ clearly reflects ‘an intention to expend the area covered by the commandment as widely as possible’. In addition to these arguments, I argue that the Fourth Commandment is formulated positively in order to emphasise more specifically what the Israelites must do towards their parents.

According to Childs (1974: 418), the choice of the verb ‘to honour’ (דבק) carries with it a range of connotations far broader than the verb ‘to obey’. Durham (1987: 291) explains that the verb דבק, used here in the imperative singular and rendered as ‘to honour, give weight to, glorify and esteem’, could be interpreted as giving a place of precedence to someone or taking someone seriously. Hyatt (1980: 213) suggests that ‘honour your father and mother’ was the original Fourth Commandment. In his opinion, the rest of the saying, ‘that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord God gave you’, was probably a late addition by the Deuteronomistic redactor. Hyatt also comments that the Fourth Commandment, which is placed between the commandments ordering proper worship and respect for Yahweh, and those concerning one’s neighbours, occupies a significant position in the Decalogue. According to Goldman (1956: 177), ‘it marked the transition from the first tablet (the God-ward tablet) to the second (the man-ward tablet)’. As he reports, ‘honouring the parents was, according to the Rabbis’ teaching, tantamount to honouring God because they were the servants of God for begetting children’.

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<sup>43</sup> The Fourth Commandment expresses the behaviour due to both parents by mentioning them individually because there is no word in biblical Hebrew for parents (Meyers 2005: 173).

Giving more explanation concerning the verb  $\text{d}b\text{k}$ , Houtman (1993: 406) points out that:

-  $\text{d}b\text{k}$  (niph'al) with Yahweh as subject (cf. e.g. Ex 14: 4, 17, 18) has the meaning of 'to gain glory for oneself/before, in the presence of'. Therefore, the verb in this case shows Yahweh as gaining weight for himself or as doing things that lead people to be impressed by his power, and that make them experience and acknowledge that he is a God 'of weight' who is not to be mocked at (cf. e.g. Lv 10: 3; Ezk 28:22; 36: 13).

-  $\text{d}b\text{k}$  (piel + accus. of the person; 'to honour someone' or 'to treat someone respectfully'), which is found in Exodus 20: 12 (cf. other examples 1 Sm 2: 29, 15: 30; 2 Sm 10: 3), has the meaning of 'to acknowledge that someone is a person of weight, importance.'

This explanation shows that the verb  $\text{d}b\text{k}$  is used both for Yahweh and parents. According to Houtman (2000: 57), it is the position of the Fourth Commandment in the Decalogue which has drawn the conclusion that in this commandment the parents are put on one line with God himself: they are the co-creators of their children. That means, he emphasises, 'the respect owed to Yahweh as creator must also be shown to them. Consequently, absence of respect for parents must be punished in the same way as the failure to honour Yahweh (see Ex 21: 17 and Lv 24: 15). Houtman's explanation accords with Childs' argument (1974: 418), which points out that the verb  $\text{d}b\text{k}$  in the Fourth Commandment is a term frequently used to describe the proper response to God akin to worship. To stress his argument, he refers to the parallel commandment in Leviticus 19: 3a which uses the verb 'to fear' ( $\text{a}r\text{y}$ ) or 'to give reverence to' that is reserved for God. Thus, Childs posits that 'the Fourth Commandment does touch on the relation of authority and order between God and his representatives [the parents] with the life established by the command'.

As far as the father ( $\text{b}a$ ) in the Old Testament is concerned, he occupied in society, especially in the family, a very important position because, as Ringgren (1974: 8-9) notes, the Old Testament world was predominantly a patriarchal world.<sup>44</sup> The father is, Ringgren adds,

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<sup>44</sup> In the Old Testament, the noun  $\text{b}a$  refers literally to a father or a 'begetter'. But it may also designate any man who occupies a position, or receives recognition, similar to that of a father. For example: the 'father' of a servant (Gn 45:8), a 'father to the poor' (Job 29: 16), and a 'father to

the master of the house and enjoys unlimited authority. He controls all members of his family as a potter controls his clay. Consequently, the children must be taught at the same time to honour their father and to fear him. Still, Ringgren also indicates that to Israel the father not only spells authority but also expresses the kinship that focuses the house around him, forming a united family in which wives, children, slaves and property are entirely merged. Accordingly, Ringgren argues that despite his unlimited authority, the Israelite father is not an isolated despot. He is, rather, a ‘centre from which strength and will emanate through the whole of the sphere which belongs to him and to which he belongs’ (1974: 8). In light of this explanation, one can understand that it was natural for the Israelite family to be called  $\text{בֵּית אָב}$  (the father’s house; Gn 12: 1).

But, as far as the Fourth Commandment is concerned, Yahweh requires that the mother ( $\sim\text{א}$ ) has to be equally honoured with the father. It is worthy of note that, in Leviticus 19: 3, the order of ‘father...mother’ is reversed. As mentioned above, the Old Testament world was predominantly patriarchal. Such a reverse, putting ‘mother’ before ‘father’ and emphasising the equal status of the mother, was therefore exceptional in Israel. To explain this, Goldman (1956: 179) opts for a social reason: he speculates that ‘a child is, normally, more attached to the mother because she is so much more patient with him/her and spends more time in speaking to him/her’. From this, one should understand that such a special recognition is accorded to the woman owing to her indispensable and important role as mother. This reminds us that  $\sim\text{א}$  (mother), which refers literally to the female parent, also refers to Eve, figuratively, as mother of all living beings (Gn 3: 20).

As regards the Fourth Commandment, Hyatt (1980: 213) points out that it enjoins the Israelites, children, young and adults, living in the same household, to obey and respect their respective parents. According to Houtman (2000: 50), this commandment was originally not about the obligation of (young) children to submit to parental authority, but was addressed to adult Israelite sons who in the patriarchal society were family heads. Emphasising this argument, Meyers (2005: 173) notes that in the context of the Decalogue, this precept was ‘part of community policy addressed to adults (as the adultery statement, and others, indicate)’.

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Pharaoh’ (Gn 45: 8). The noun ‘father’ is thus a title used for one in authority. In other passages,  $\text{בֵּית אָב}$  refers to a grandfather (Gn 28: 13 and 32: 9) or a remote ancestor ( $\text{בֵּית אָב}$ : father’s father; Gn 10: 21; 1 Kgs 15: 11; cf Ex 10: 6).

Scholars propose various but complementary reasons for the filial respect inculcated in the Israelite people. Goldman (1956: 177), for instance, considers that the Israelites were enjoined to respect their parents for the reason that the latter were ‘bearers of the tradition that attested both the existence of God and his revelation’. In other words, they were regarded as the link between heaven and human society. In Godet’s view (1985: 455), parental authority and filial respect comprise essential conditions for the stability of nations. In addition to these arguments, Zimmerly (1990: 154) suggests that the Fourth Commandment was given in order to assure the historical continuity of the generations, which parents guarantee by begetting children. As for Houtman (2000: 56), the Israelites were enjoined to honour their parents for the reason that the latter were regarded as God’s representatives. Giving some examples of the fulfilment of this commandment, he points out that when the Israelite aged parents had relinquished authority and were no longer able to look after themselves, their sons had to provide them with food, clothing and shelter, and after their death give them honourable burial (2000: 52).

As already mentioned, a promise regarding obedience and an implied warning regarding disobedience follow the Fourth Commandment. This promise and warning, which is unique in the Decalogue, clearly shows that disrespect to parents was considered to be a serious offence in the covenant community. The promise is distinctly stated: ‘that your days (~wy) may be long upon the land (hmda) which the Lord God gave you’. The land that is evoked here is the land of Canaan that Yahweh promised to Abraham as well as his offspring (Gn 12: 7; 15: 7). The Israelites were then required to understand that the land of Canaan had been given to them as an inheritance (hlxn) and possession (hzxa), and not as a conquest. Janzen (1992: 144) makes it clear that the noun ‘inheritance’ designates the land of Canaan as transferred to Israel by God without the right of reselling. In his opinion, the land was, at the same time, ‘the tangible token of God’s faithfulness, the concrete expression of the covenant relationship, and the goal of Israel’s wanderings’.

Consequently, the promise stated in the Fourth Commandment should be understood as follows: if the Israelites obey it according to Yahweh’s will, they will be blessed and protected in the Promised Land. In other words, they will possess the land, will prosper and live there in peace (Godet 1985: 413). On the other hand, whoever infringes this commandment is to be exterminated. In fact, it is decreed in other passages that he who strikes (or curses) his father or mother shall be put to death (Ex 21: 15, 17). Likewise, a

stubborn and rebellious son shall be stoned by the community (Dt 21: 18-21). As Janzen (1992: 147) observes, the land of Canaan, viewed in terms of this promise and the implied warning following the Fourth Commandment, became the 'touchstone for life or death'; 'it is given out of God's free grace, but retained by means of obedience'.

As recorded in the Bible, the Israelites applied the term 'father' not only to their living fathers but also to the dead ones, especially the three patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (cf. Gn 32: 10; Nm 27: 2-3; Is 51: 2). Consequently, one of the problems arising in discussing the Fourth Commandment is that of knowing whether the children of Israel were enjoined to honour either their living and dead parents or the living ones only. Scholars' arguments diverge in trying to solve these problems.

Godet's view (1985: 457), for instance, suggests that the Fourth Commandment concerns the living parents only. He emphasises that the commandment 'Honour your father and your mother', by way of requiring practical behaviour towards parents as well as those who preceded one in history, does not require one to 'revere' one's father and mother, insofar as reverence would be taken to signify the renunciation of all criticism of them. For him, 'to honour' someone means: to recognise his/her importance, to take him/her seriously and not to take him/her lightly. Thus, Lochman notes that the precept involves neither personality cult nor ancestor worship. Agreeing with Godet, Houtman (2000: 52) refers to Genesis 45: 10; 47: 12; 50: 21, Joshua 2: 13; 6: 23 and 1 Samuel 22: 3 as examples showing that in the Old Testament the Fourth Commandment was fulfilled towards living parents (and other members of the families) only. On the other hand, he emphasises that, according to Leviticus 19: 31; 20: 6, 27 and Deuteronomy 18: 11, the law prohibited the children of Israel from having contact with the dead. Therefore, Houtman stresses that care of parents that extends beyond death is not included in the duties the Old Testament requires of the Israelites.

On the other hand, Van der Toorn (1996: 207) supports the view that the Fourth Commandment was fulfilled by the early Israelites towards both their living and their dead parents. This fulfilment mainly consisted of concern for the survival of the name of the dead father, which was deeply rooted in the mind of the ancient Israelites. As Van der Toorn explains, if he had no male offspring the father was required to take the proper measures to ensure that the regular rites would be performed after his death. One of these measures was to set up a pillar commemorating one's dead father. To illustrate his explanation, he refers to the anecdote about Absalom who erected a pillar (עֲבֹדָה) called 'Absalom's memorial

monument' in the King's valley (cf. 2 Sam 18: 18). Van der Toorn specifies that the pillar was not to take the place of a son; it was rather the duty of the son to erect a pillar to his father, in commemoration of him after his death. Absalom, for lack of a son, took this task upon himself. As Bloch-Smith (1992b: 113) notes, this custom of perpetuating the name of men without sons 'to insure their post-mortem well being is a documented aspect of the Mesopotamian and Ugaritic death cults, and so has been sought in Israelite practice'.

In addition, Van der Toorn (1996: 208) explains that the duty of the Israelite son towards his dead father did not end with the erection of the pillar. Apart from this action, the son's role would also be 'to invoke the name of his father'. As Van der Toorn comments, such a practice, in which one of the core duties of the living was to invoke the ancestors, was known all over the Semitic world. He also makes it clear that the invocation of the dead was not limited to a verbal rite; it was also an 'invitation to eat and to drink'. Van der Toorn's comment accords with Bloch-Smith's (1992b: 113) argument which underline that visible burial markers are explicitly mentioned in the Old Testament for righteous individuals and men without offspring and that these memorial markers probably served as a locus for death cult activities.

In comparing the analysis of Exodus 20: 12 given above to the MRCC's interpretation of the same text (cf. 2.3.3), one can discern similarities and dissimilarities between the Fourth Commandment and the *famadihana*. The first and undeniable similarity resides in the fact that for people in both ancient Israel and traditional Madagascar, respect for one's parents is regarded as the most important of the commandments regulating human relationships. In other words, the said commandment constitutes in both societies one of the fundamental principles that guarantee the stability and order of the nation.

The second similarity is seen in the concept commonly accepted among the ancient Israelites and the Malagasy people that the names and titles of one's parents cannot be annihilated by death. The children of Israel, for example, continue to call Abraham their 'father' as if he is still living. Similarly, the Malagasy call their dead parents 'fathers' and 'mothers'. Therefore, I find the MRCC's argument for the similarity between the *famadihana* and the Fourth Commandment concerning the survival of the names and titles of dead parents to be quite acceptable because even the Lord called Abraham 'Jacob's father' (cf Gn 28: 13), though Abraham was already dead before Jacob was born. Scholars like Van der Toorn (1996: 207) similarly contend that a concern for the survival of the names of dead parents was deeply

rooted in the mind of the ancient Israelites. There is, thus, no danger in calling dead parents ‘fathers’ and ‘mothers’ if it is simply a matter of using a title.

The third similarity is displayed by the acknowledgement of the parents as God’s representatives. As pointed out in the above analysis of Exodus 20: 12, the children of Israel are enjoined to honour their parents because they represent God in exerting his authority and in assuring the historical continuity of the generations that they guarantee by begetting children. Similarly, the Malagasy who practise the *famadihana* regard their parents as Zanahary’s representatives or even ‘gods on earth’ for the reasons that they are sources of life and founders of the tradition, culture as well as the religion that they transmit faithfully to their children.

Concerning dissimilarities, they are essentially shown by the MRCC’s practice of the *famadihana* as a fulfilment of the Fourth Commandment towards dead parents, which arises some theological problems. The first problem is that there is no mention of dead parents in the commandment; it just enjoins the Israelites to honour their parents. Therefore, in my view, biblical scholars (Herbert 1962: 57, Gaster 1962: 787, Chiu 1984: 221 and Houtman 2000: 52) are to some extent right in emphasising that the Fourth Commandment was given to be fulfilled towards living parents only. Besides, the text of Deuteronomy 21: 18-21, which specifies the punishment that had to be inflicted on a stubborn and rebellious son who did not obey his father and mother and did not listen to them when they disciplined him, shows that this commandment refers to living parents. It is true that ancient Israelites, as mentioned in the above analysis, erected burial markers like pillars to memorialise the names of the deceased or dead parents, consulted the latter and fed them or offered sacrifices to them. But, biblical scholars like Bloch-Smith (1992b: 113) specify that these practices originated from the Mesopotamian customs regarding death cults. One can thus suggest that the performing of these practices as duties towards dead parents, in ancient Israel, was not a fulfilment of the Fourth Commandment but rather an imitation of foreign customs. However, Yahweh in Deuteronomy 18: 9 clearly recommended that when the Israelites come to the land he is giving them, they should not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Viewed from this perspective, it is, in my opinion, difficult to consider that the *famadihana*, which is aimed at taking care of and venerating the *razana*, can be performed as a fulfilment of the Fourth Commandment.

The second problem occurs when the MRCC includes the dead parents as God’s representatives to whom the Catholics fulfil the Fourth Commandment by means of the

*famadihana*. As noted in the above analysis, parents in the ancient Israel were regarded as the visible representatives of God on earth for the exerting of his authority. In other words, biblical scholars posit that the Fourth Commandment concerns the relation of authority and order between God and his representatives, the parents. Therefore, the question that arises is: Are dead parents able to continue to exert God's authority beyond death as they did in their life time?

The MRCC's inclusion of dead parents as God's representatives to some extent has something to do with the belief in the immortality of the soul. However, it should be emphasised that such an idea is nowhere found in the Old Testament, thus utterly contrary to the Israelite consciousness. According to the Old Testament, to be dead means to return to dust (Gn 3: 19), and when a person dies not only his/her body, but his/her soul also returns to a state of death and belongs to the nether-world. This world of the dead that the Old Testament calls *sheol* is regarded as an abode of darkness and destruction (Job 10: 21-22; Ps 88: 11; Pr 27: 20) without any order (Job 10: 22), a land of silence, of oblivion (Job 3: 13, 17, 18; Ps 94: 17; 115: 17) where God and man are no longer to be seen (Is 38: 11), God no longer praised or thanked (Ps 6: 5; 115: 17), his perfections no longer acknowledged (Ps 88: 10-13; Is 38: 18-19), his wonders not contemplated (Ps 88: 12). It is a place where the dead are unconscious, do no more work, take no account of anything, possess no knowledge nor wisdom, neither have any more a position in anything that is done under the sun (Ec 9: 5, 6, 10). Considering this Old Testament concept of the dead and death, the question that the MRCC has to answer is: How can dead parents represent God?

The third problem is arising from the MRCC's affirmation that the dead parents are able to play a significant role by providing their descendants with blessings and protection. The rituals of the *famadihana* are therefore performed as a means to this end. In this case, the titles 'fathers' and 'mothers' attributed to them are no longer merely titles because they are associated with a belief in the supernatural power of the dead.

Concerning Abraham, it should be made clear that he is called 'father' in the New Testament, not as the ancestor of the Israelites but as the father of all believers. In other words, his name and title as 'father' are immortalised in the memory of his countless faithful descendants because of his unshakeable faith in God (cf. Heb 11:11-12). Moreover, Abraham was not assigned (after his death) any responsibility for providing blessing and protection for his offspring. Referring to the story of Abraham's call recorded in Genesis 12: 1-3, God is the only provider of all blessings and protections. Therefore, it is to be emphasised that the fact

that the children of Israel called Abraham or other dead people their fathers has nothing to do with the 'turning of the bones'.

Malagasy Roman Catholic interpreters specify that the purpose of the MRCC in practising the *famadihana* is to teach people how to perform the Fourth Commandment towards the dead parents or the ancestors without worshipping them. I concur that this is quite a healthy purpose because, according to the observations of some church leaders, it is ancestor worship in its various forms which still creates an obstacle to the effectiveness of evangelisation in Madagascar. Therefore, if the MRCC is successful in teaching the Malagasy Christians how to practise the *famadihana* without the cult of the dead one could argue that the problem caused by the obstacle mentioned above could perhaps be solved.

However, reflecting on the large amount of money that the *famadihana* always involves, I enquire whether the cult of the dead has really disappeared from the Malagasy Roman Catholic *famadihana*. The reason is simply that the human being's heart is always where his/her wealth is. From my knowledge of the Malagasy's concept of wealth, money plays a vital role in the life of most people, because it is symbolically considered as the essence of life and it is money which makes one a man or a woman. Because of this role, money becomes for many Malagasy not only important but also somewhat sacred. Therefore, if they accept spending a lot of money on the *razana* the implication is that they regard the latter as more important and more sacred than money. I want to suggest that if the *famadihana* the MRCC practises still involves wealth, in whatever amount, it is not yet completely free from ancestor worship. Besides, I would also like to pose the question which of the two categories of parents, the living or the dead, is more respected by the Malagasy Catholic Christians. I am certain that among the Christians performing the *famadihana* their dead parents are respected more greatly than the living ones, because I have not yet seen a Malagasy slaughtering one or two bulls, as he/she does in the *famadihana*, in order to pay respect to his living parents. This provides all the more reason to argue that the ancestor cult is to a certain extent still prevailing in the MRCC's *famadihana* despite her efforts to abolish it.

Lastly, it should be said that the Malagasy Roman Catholic interpreters' arguments for their practice of the *famadihana* as a means to fulfil the Fourth Commandment are not altogether convincing. Throughout the Old Testament no reference is made to a religio-cultural rite similar to the *famadihana*. On the contrary, it is to be emphasised that the

Israelites are prohibited from having contact or communication with the dead, which God regarded as an abomination (cf. Deut 18: 9-11).

## 2.5 FROM TEXT TO TEACHING

The investigation of the MRCC's use of Old Testament texts such as Genesis 49: 29 - 50: 13; Exodus 13: 19; Exodus 20: 12 in the *famadihana* demonstrates that certain traces of an ancient kind of ritual have been found by Malagasy Catholic interpreters in these texts. They have attempted to apply it to the *famadihana*, with the aim of legitimising the *famadihana* so that it can be incorporated into the Christian Church and serve to inculcate the Christians' faith.

It should be emphasised that the MRCC has made a major and courageous decision in this respect. The *famadihana* is the most dominant religio-cultural rite in the central part of Madagascar. Almost all the other churches, especially the Protestant ones, have condemned the *famadihana* as Satan's means of causing Christians to deviate from God's ways, to their damnation, because, according to these churches, the ritual involves ancestor worship. Therefore, they have continually sought to abolish it by forbidding Christians from practising it and by uttering hostile propaganda against it. However, despite all their efforts, the rituals of the *famadihana* still survive to this day because most Malagasy Christians actually continue to celebrate them together with their non-Christian relatives.

On the other hand, the MRCC perceives that it is not at all necessary to abolish the *famadihana* but rather that it is the Malagasy people's duty to defend it and to retain it for the reason that it constitutes one of the most important Malagasy cultural identities. The MRCC is convinced that the best way to protect it from abolishment is to legitimise it by means of biblical texts so that it can be performed in a Christian manner.

With regard to legitimisation, since the MRCC uses Old Testament texts to legitimise the *famadihana*, I consider that such an idea is quite acceptable, given the important cultural value it constitutes. Ukpong (2000b: 12) explains that legitimisation represents the first phase (the 1930s-70s) of the development of biblical interpretation in Africa, which, according to him, can be divided into three phases. Phase I is apologetic and reactive; its focal point is the legitimisation of African religion and culture, dominated by comparative methods. Phase II (the 1970s-90s) is reactive-proactive and makes use of the African context as a resource for

biblical interpretation, dominated by inculturation, which Ukpong regards as an evaluative method, and liberation hermeneutics. In Phase III (the 1990s), the recognition of the ordinary reader and the African context as subjects of biblical interpretation, dominated by liberation and inculturation methodologies (2000b: 12), constitute the emphasis.<sup>45</sup>

Taking Ukpong's theory into consideration, legitimisation has served as a response to the condemnation that African religion and culture undergo from Christians who inherited missionary perspectives or who are motivated by revivalism, as is the case in Madagascar. Fortunately, some western scholars, who were aware that the African cause or the need of Africans for self-definition should be supported, have discovered an effective method to legitimise African religion and culture. This was done by way of comparative studies carried out within the framework of comparative religion, and essentially consists of demonstrating continuities and discontinuities, or similarities and dissimilarities, between the African religio-cultural context and the Bible, particularly the Old Testament (cf. Ukpong 2000b: 12).

Legitimisation that involves comparative studies constitutes an important subject in the teaching of the Old Testament. Therefore, its insertion in the matter of study is indispensable even though it belongs to the first phase of the development of biblical interpretation or modern biblical studies in Africa. The reason is that African Christians are still struggling with their quest for religious and cultural identity, on the one hand, and their search for a suitable approach that enables them to link the biblical text to the African context, on the other. Legitimisation is thus, according to Rajaona (DCL 8), an informant from Antananarivo, a way in which African religion and culture are recognised as preparation for the gospel or as a fertile ground for the Christian message. He even points out that once legitimised, African traditional religion can be considered as 'Africa's Old Testament'.

It is therefore necessary to teach learners how to interpret the Old Testament methodologically if the interpretation in question is aimed at legitimising African religion and culture. More specifically, learners need to know how legitimisation should be done, by way of the comparative studies that they carry out within the framework of comparative religion. Their ability to control these comparative studies methodologically enables them to adopt a suitable approach to the interpretation of the Old Testament that should be simultaneously reactive, apologetic and biblical.

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<sup>45</sup> Ukpong (2000b: 12) notes that the purpose of such a division is to facilitate discussion and not to parcel biblical interpretation in Africa into compartments. He also underlines the point that these three divisions are complementary because each new phase emerges from the former.

Therefore, my critical suggestion is that ordinary Christians as well as theologians who are working on this process should be able to discern which elements of the culture should be legitimised and which ones must be rejected as undesirable. In fact, Le Roux (1999: 255) emphasises that every culture or system can contain elements that are relevant and should thus be retained, and others that are undesired, and must thus be left behind. Christians and theologians should also be able to offer adequate and convincing reasons why some elements are to be legitimised and others rejected. Otherwise, the culture with all its components, including the undesirable ones, will be legitimised or rejected.

As far as inculturation is concerned, the MRCC's leaders argue that it constitutes one of the biggest challenges facing mainline churches for it consists of evangelising at the same time the individual and the culture, and should take place in every aspect of Christian life (cf. 2.3.4). They also point out that the process of inculturation touches deeply on the issue of the Church's mission within a particular context. Therefore, the Church must, in their opinion, urge theologians to reflect on the inculturation of the Old Testament and its relevance for the Church's teaching and Christians' faith as well.

To some extent, I concur with these leaders because I am convinced of the importance of inculturation, which is a useful tool for making the Old Testament, as well as the teaching of it, genuinely relevant to the Malagasy Christians' faith. I also recognise that this is a major challenge which the mainline churches must face. In Madagascar, there are various forms of religio-cultural practices that the Malagasy, both Christians and traditionalists, consider as exhibiting similar features to certain Israelite contexts described in the Old Testament. In addition to the *famadihana*, one could mention sacrifices, offerings, and circumcision. These religio-cultural practices have survived the attacks of the colonisers and, partly, those of the missionaries in particular and they now form part of the Malagasy cultural heritage.

I find that the MRCC is making positive use of the process of inculturation to safeguard the *famadihana* and to make it a Christian cultural rite. In my opinion, it is up to each church in Madagascar to establish the most appropriate way of helping members to perform the *famadihana* as a Christian celebration instead of seeking to abolish it or persecuting those who practise it. I am convinced that evangelising the individual without taking his/her culture into consideration is not very effective.

Nevertheless, I would like to suggest that the interpreters of the MRCC should focus their attention and their reflection on highlighting the scriptural and theological foundations for inculturation. Once these principles are clearly established, the theologians will be better

prepared to adopt appropriate strategies for promoting authentic and effective inculturation. In addition, theologians and Church leaders should always bear in mind that inculturation is a general hermeneutical issue and not just a Malagasy/African problem that stems from the re-evaluation of the religio-cultural heritage. Consequently, they need to develop a framework of academic biblical interpretation that will be responsive to the social, cultural and religious context (cf. Ukpong 2000a: 587).

Another point to be made is that inculturation is a useful tool which helps the Church to convince Christians that the Bible must be understood and accepted both as the Word of God and as a cultural product of the human communities that have passed on this word to us (cf. Ukpong 2000a: 593). Expressing the same idea, Ralibera (DCL 5), an informant from Antananarivo, remarks that the Word of God in the Old Testament came to the Malagasy people by assuming the ways of expression of different cultures. For this reason, Christians need to recognise that the interpretation of the Bible can be influenced by human culture. In other words, theologians should make believers aware that when they interpret the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, their attitude to it and the questions they put to the biblical or the Old Testament text may be influenced by their culture.

Inculturation also enables theologians to orientate their students in seminaries/faculties towards a more effective mode of reading and interpreting the Old Testament, which is capable of responding adequately to the questions that Malagasy/African Christians are daily asking about their experience of the Bible. One of the fundamental questions that inculturation seeks to wrestle with and that teachers and students must deal with together is: how to make the Old Testament alive and active in contemporary societies and in the lives of individual Christians within their contexts?

The present mode of reading and interpreting the Bible or the Old Testament, which is to some extent inherited from the missionaries' methods, is not able to answer such a question. The reason is that such a query, according to Noiret (DCL 2), an informant from Fianarantsoa, stems from a certain conceptual frame of reference that involves a new mode of reading and understanding the Bible, which appropriately responds to that conceptual frame of reference. This demands not a literal reading and understanding of the Bible, but a reading and understanding that would pay serious attention to the Malagasy context and questions that have arisen. In short, inculturation helps the Malagasy/African Church's teachers to show Christians and students how to read the Old Testament with Malagasy/African eyes (cf. Ukpong 1995: 3-14), and how to understand and interpret it in a Malagasy/African way.

Reflecting on what has been explained above, I am still persuaded that inculturation is a useful tool that enables the Church to make Christians aware of the precious value of the Malagasy context. But, as I have mentioned earlier, those who are assigned to establish the process of inculturation should make sure that the Malagasy context and the biblical contexts to be applied to it are compatible, in order that the interpretation can be appropriately performed.

I find that despite the dissimilarities observed between the *famadihana* and Jacob's burial, the transfer of Joseph's bones and the Fourth Commandment (cf. 2.4.1; 2.4.2; 2.4.3), the MRCC's use of Genesis 49: 29-50: 13; Exodus 13: 19 and 20: 12 in the *famadihana* has to some extent solved the problems caused by this traditional custom in the faith of the Malagasy Roman Catholic Christians. On the other hand, the *famadihana* still remains a big problem in the other churches, especially in the MLC. Examples showing this problem are the splitting of Christian families and conflicts between Christians and Church leaders because of divergent opinions about the *famadihana*. The questions that many Malagasy Lutheran Christians ask are: Why the Catholics are allowed to practise the *famadihana* while the Lutherans are prohibited to do it? Are they not the same Christians? Why the Catholic Bible can be used in the *famadihana* while the Protestant one is not allowed to be used in it? Are these Bibles different from themselves? In response to these questions, Lutheran Church leaders repeatedly declare that the Lutheran Christians are prohibited to practise the *famadihana* because it opposes the will of God in the Holy Scriptures. However, most Lutherans are not satisfied with such a general condemnation of the *famadihana* because they are convinced that the concepts and elements in the practice of this custom are not all against God's will.

In my opinion, the problem of the MLC concerning the *famadihana* is basically due to the fact that there have been gaps in the hermeneutical training of theologians and pastors. Therefore, what I plan to do is to include the African biblical hermeneutics among subjects to be taught and discussed in the teaching of the Old Testament at our Graduate School of Theology. This matter is so far somewhat neglected by Lutheran theologians and pastors because it seems that they think there is no room for it in the Church's life. On the other hand, I find that it is an unavoidable subject which enables me to explain to the students, who are all pastors, the interaction between the Old Testament and the culture.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CASE STUDY TWO: NENILAVA'S ROBE AND CROWN IN THE MALAGASY LUTHERAN CHURCH

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter endeavours to investigate the use of Old Testament texts by the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC) in the design and creation of a robe and a crown for Nenilava (Tall mother), the well-known revival leader of this Church. This constitutes the second case study exploring the use of Old Testament passages in Malagasy contexts. The texts that the MLC has applied are Exodus 28, which describes the high-priestly garments, and Deuteronomy 28, which contains blessings promised to those who obey God's commandment and curses addressed to those who disobey it.

The context in which these Old Testament texts have been used is the revival movement, which has emerged from and spread within Malagasy Protestant churches, especially within the Lutheran Church. This Protestant revival movement essentially includes four main revival groups founded in different periods by four charismatic leaders termed *Raiamandreny* (Father-and-mother/charismatic leaders) or also 'servants of God'. These *Raiamandreny*, who possessed different religious and cultural backgrounds, stemmed from different parts of Madagascar. One of them was Nenilava, who was the second woman among them; she founded the widespread revival movement of Ankaramalaza.<sup>46</sup>

All of these four people played important roles in the Malagasy Protestant churches, especially in the domain of evangelisation. Therefore, they were greatly respected and venerated. The Protestant churches considered them as prophets. Nenilava was even recognised by the MLC, both as prophetess and priestess.

As leaders of revival movements, but also as shepherds, the above-mentioned *Raiamandreny* usually wore special clothes, which essentially consisted of long white robes and white headdresses. When Nenilava began functioning as a shepherd, she was wearing

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<sup>46</sup> The names of these four *Raiamandreny* were as follows: Rainisoalambo (a man), from the MLC, who founded the revival movement of Soatanana; Ravelonjanahary (a woman), from the Reformed Church, who founded the revival movement of Manoloitrony; Rakotozandry, a Lutheran pastor, who founded the revival movement of Farihimena; and Nenilava (a woman), from the MLC, who founded the revival movement of Ankaramalaza.

these clothes (cf. Photo 12). But, a number of years before her death, the members of the revival movement of Ankaramalaza, after having gained the approbation of the MLC, made for her a robe modelled on the priestly garments described in Exodus 28. They also created a crown, aiming at symbolising Nenilava's prophethood, which they related to Deuteronomy 28.

The purpose in this chapter is to provide possible answers to the following questions: How and why did the people responsible for the revival movement of Ankaramalaza and in the MLC employ these specific Old Testament texts as directions for making Nenilava's robe and crown? What are the function and purpose of the application of Old Testament texts in this context? What could be the implications of this use for the academic teaching of the Old Testament in Madagascar?

## 3.2 CONTEXT

A Malagasy dictum holds that 'if one wants to see the root of a tree, one first has to clear the leaves that hide it from the ground'. Likewise, before investigating the purpose of the MLC as well as the revival movement of Ankaramalaza in using the above Old Testament texts, it is first necessary to provide appropriate information about Nenilava, as well as her robe and crown, and about the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC).

### 3.2.1 Nenilava's background

Nenilava, whose true name was Volahavana, was the daughter of non-Christian parents from the Antaimoro ethnic group, which occupies a part of the southeast coast of Madagascar. Her father was, simultaneously, the chief of his clan, regarded by people as a king, and a famous traditio-practitioner. Nenilava had thus been familiar with traditional religious rites and practices since her childhood. She knew how her father performed his divination. She also knew how he healed people from their illnesses, freed and protected them from evil spirits, made them prosperous and even made the barren fertile (Rabehatonina 2000: 78). One day, she asked his father about the god that he served and invoked, but he was not able to give her a satisfying answer. She was consequently disappointed and said to him that she did not like a god who is not only unknown but is also unable to speak (Tsivoery 2001: 181).

While Nenilava was still a young girl, she felt the strong desire to meet and see the true God. Therefore, she often knelt at the foot of a large tree, as the traditionalists used to do, and in crying, she asked God to appear to her. Later on, she heard Jesus' voice calling her

name every day at noon, ordering her to stand up, to preach the gospel and to drive the demons out of people because the time had come to glorify the Son of Man in her country as well as in the world.<sup>47</sup> When Nenilava was seventeen years old, Tsirefo, a widower, a Lutheran catechist who lived in Ankaramalaza, came to her parents and asked for her hand in marriage (1935). Before the celebration of their marriage, Tsirefo had taught the Small Catechism to her in order that she could be baptised (Tsivoery 2001: 186).<sup>48</sup> It should therefore be emphasised that Nenilava already felt called to an evangelistic mission even before becoming a Christian.

Like most of the women in her region, Nenilava was illiterate. Therefore, it is said that Jesus himself undertook to teach her, both the Holy Scriptures and speaking in tongues.<sup>49</sup> He also made her aware that her mission would be difficult because she would have to struggle against Satan. However, the Lord promised that he would be with her, so she should not be afraid. Nenilava revealed that to prepare her to confront and defeat Satan and his demons, as well as to overcome all the difficulties and tests she would inevitably meet in the course of her mission, Jesus forced her to fight against a horrible dragon. She confessed that the fight was terrible but that she defeated the dragon because of Jesus' help (Tsivoery 2001: 195-199).<sup>50</sup> In addition, Nenilava asserted that Jesus recommended that she should use the Holy Scriptures, prayer and fasting as her main weapons (Rabehatonina 2000: 79-80).

Before discussing Nenilava's robe and crown, it is necessary to say some words about where, when and how the ceremonies organised by the MLC and the revival movement of Ankaramalaza, in order to confirm the consecration of Nenilava, took place. The information I use in this presentation is gathered from Rakoto Endor Modeste (DCL 15) who was at that time the head of the Malagasy Lutheran Theological Seminary in Fianarantsoa, which later became the Lutheran Graduate School of Theology.

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<sup>47</sup> According to Nenilava herself, she did not know, at first, that Jesus was the One who had called her. But, later on, Jesus appeared to her and not only did she know and see him but she also conversed with him.

<sup>48</sup> Tsirefo died some years after their marriage (1947), but Nenilava continued to live in Ankaramalaza, which became the centre of the revival movement that she founded.

<sup>49</sup> Regarding tongues, Nenilava specified that Jesus did not teach unknown languages to her but twelve foreign languages, of which the first one was French. Therefore, when Nenilava spoke in tongues, she mingled these twelve languages (Tsivoery 2001: 195).

<sup>50</sup> Nenilava narrated that before she fought against the dragon, Jesus laid his hands on her head while saying 'do not be afraid because I am your strength. From now on, you will defeat him (Satan)'. According to Nenilava's description, the dragon with a hairy head and a body covered with stiff spines resembled a gigantic crocodile (Tsivoery 2001: 198).

The event, the theme of which was based on Luke 10: 16 took place in Ankaramalaza, the centre of the revival movement founded by Nenilava, in 1983, from 28 July to 2 August. She was about seventy years old at that time. The ceremony was divided into three parts. The first section comprised the worship according to the ritual and liturgy that the MLC usually follows every Sunday. The confirmation of Nenilava's consecration took place in the second part. The third section was intended for the consecration of hundreds of new *mpiandry* (shepherds), men and women, who were dressed in white robes (cf. Photos 14 and 15).<sup>51</sup>

Pastor Peri Rasolondraibe who was a lecturer at the Malagasy Lutheran Theological Seminary at that time led the ceremony. Before proceeding to the ritual of consecration, he preached a sermon based on Revelation 1: 4-8, in which he laid emphasis on Nenilava's priesthood and prophethood. Thereafter, Nenilava, who was already crowned and dressed in her priestly robe (cf. Photo 13) was taken by a few women into the Church and seated in a chair placed in front of the altar. After some songs and the reading of Revelation 2-3, Pastor Peri Rasolondraibe came to Nenilava and laid his hand on her right shoulder (instead of on her head, which was wearing the crown), while reading Isaiah 60: 1-5, 18-20 and 1 Thessalonians 5: 23-24 and offering prayers.

After a song following this ritual of consecration, the president of the eastern synod came to Nenilava and congratulated her on behalf of the congregation. Subsequently, Nenilava was taken back to the sacristy while the worship proceeded with the consecration of the new shepherds as mentioned above.

As Rakoto Endore Modeste (DCL 15) notes, the missionaries working in the MLC, namely Norwegians, Americans and Danes, were invited to attend the event but they did not come. On the other hand, kings or chiefs of clans from Nenilava's ethnic group did journey a few days later to Ankaramalaza in order to visit her. Nenilava agreed to receive them in her house but she insisted that they first went to the Church to attend the worship with the congregation. These kings then met Nenilava in her house after the service. They congratulated her on her consecration as queen, for they believed that Nenilava had been consecrated by the MLC as a queen. According to the custom, Nenilava ordered her 'children' to kill three bulls and to prepare a meal of meat and rice for these honourable guests as well as for the representatives of the clans who accompanied them. Rakoto Endor Modeste (DCL 15)

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<sup>51</sup> The '*Mpiandry*' that I render 'shepherds' in this thesis are lay ministers in the Malagasy Protestant Churches. Their mission especially consists of preaching the Gospel, healing people of their diseases, driving out evil spirits and caring for poor and orphan people.

specifies that Nenilava did not wear her priestly robe and crown when she received those kings.

### **3.2.2 Nenilava's robe and crown**

It has been remarked that, when Nenilava started her work, she was not consecrated, as was normally the case for every shepherd in the MLC. The reason is that Nenilava affirmed that Jesus himself had already consecrated her before he sent her to the world to accomplish her evangelistic mission. This consecration was not revealed to the people in public. However, according to Nenilava, Jesus promised her in 1959 that she would be displayed to the public, in the Church, no longer as a shepherd but as a prophetess and priestess. After having received this promise, she saw a vision in which she wore priestly garments and a crown (Edland 2002: 186).

Rakoto Endor Modeste (DCL 15) reports that, as a humble person, Nenilava rejected this project of confirming her consecration. On the one hand, she was afraid to conceal the glory of God, but on the other hand, she was also afraid to shock Christians who might not understand the reason for her robe and crown. But finally she accepted, as she became very ill; an illness that she related to her refusal of Jesus' plan (DCL 15). Jesus' promise was carried out on 2 August 1983 when the MLC and the revival movement of Ankaramalaza decided to confirm Nenilava's consecration.<sup>52</sup> On the occasion of this event, Nenilava was dressed and crowned as a priestess and as a prophetess (Edland 2002: 186).

#### *3.2.2.1 Nenilava's robe*

As already indicated, at the time of the confirmation of her consecration Nenilava wore a special robe that the adherents of the revival movement of Ankaramalaza usually call a 'holy vestment'. According to her vision mentioned above, this robe was modelled on the priestly garments described in Exodus 28. Rakoto Endor Modeste (DCL 15) points out that, previously, Jesus' plan had been that Nenilava would be dressed as a bride in order to symbolise what is recorded in Isaiah 54. However, this plan evolved as time went by. Finally, Jesus decided, as Rakoto Endor Modeste reports, that Nenilava should be dressed like the high priest in the Old Testament and not like a bride.

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<sup>52</sup> It should be emphasised that Nenilava was already advanced in age when the ritual and ceremonies of the confirming of her consecration, according to Jesus' promise, took place in Ankaramalaza in 1983. At the time of this event, she was about seventy years old.

Rakoto Endor Modeste (DCL 15) notes that, according to Jesus' instructions concerning this robe, revealed by Nenilava herself to her 'children',<sup>53</sup> the necessary raw materials for making it had to be found in Madagascar itself. As reported by Rakoto Endor Modeste, Jesus' purpose was to clothe the Malagasy people gloriously with the good things with which God had provided them. Therefore, the members of the 'children of Ankaramalaza' who were appointed to make Nenilava's robe and crown were given the order to find these raw materials in the country instead of importing them from abroad.<sup>54</sup> Likewise, the work was required to be done in Madagascar by talented Malagasy weavers and artisans who were all shepherds and members of the movement (DCL 15). The work proved to be more complicated than those who were appointed to perform it had initially thought, for three reasons in particular: firstly, the various precious stones required had to be found in different parts of Madagascar. Secondly, the weavers and artisans that were appointed to weave, sew and to embroider the robe came from different places, had different experiences and were required to work together for the first time. Thirdly, the work, including the cutting of the precious stones and their insertion into the robe, had to be done entirely by hand and not by machines (cf. Rabarihoela 1999: 268-269). Because of these complications, it took almost three years to make Nenilava's priestly robe (Rabehatonina 2000: 83). Apart from the great complexity of the work, it is not difficult to estimate that the robe cost the revival movement of Ankaramalaza much money.

In general, Nenilava's robe consists mainly of an ephod, a breastpiece, a robe of the ephod and a tunic (cf. Photos 16 and 17). According to Rabarihoela's description (1999: 104-105) and according to what I saw myself, this robe or 'holy vestment' can be described as follows:

The ephod, which is a kind of apron, is made of gold and of other materials such as blue, purple and fine coloured linen. It comprises two pieces, one on the chest and the other, tied together by straps, on the back. The ephod is held up by two shoulder-pieces on which are fixed precious stones engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

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<sup>53</sup> The adherents of the revival movement of Ankaramalaza are called 'Nenilava's children' or 'the children of Ankaramalaza'. It should be pointed out that many Malagasy Lutheran theologians are part of this group of 'Nenilava's children'.

<sup>54</sup> Some people argued that the cloth of fine linen that served to make Nenilava's robe was imported from Iran (Rabehatonina 2000: 83). However, Rakoto Endor Modeste, who is the current vice-president of the MLC and, at the same time, one of the leaders of the revival movement of Ankaramalaza, categorically denied this after Nenilava's death. He emphasised that the cloth was woven from fine linen found in Madagascar and not imported from anywhere else (DCL 15).

The breastpiece or the 'pectoral' is made of materials similar to those of the ephod. On it are set four rows of three precious stones such as agate, topaz, emerald, sapphire, diamond and amethyst. These precious stones are also engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. The breastpiece is square (approximately 25 cm square) and doubled, or folded over, like a pouch. It is firmly attached to the shoulder-piece and the ephod, and it lays flat on the breast when Nenilava wore it.

The robe of the ephod, which is entirely blue and which has an opening for the head, is a long and sleeveless robe made of fine linen. When Nenilava wore it over the tunic its upper part was covered with the ephod and the breastpiece. What enhances the magnificence of this robe is a series of alternating pomegranates and golden bells,<sup>55</sup> suspended on its edge, which rang as Nenilava moved around.

As for the tunic or coat, it is a long robe with sleeves serving as an undergarment, which is made of embroidered fine linen. Over this tunic Nenilava wore the sacerdotal robe, the ephod and the breastpiece.

### 3.2.2.2 *Nenilava's crown*

It has been shown that the 'children of Ankaramalaza' went to great lengths to reproduce the essential items of the high priest's garments as described in Exodus 28. Yet, it should be noticed that the turban or the head-plate was lacking. To be precise, it was replaced by a crown (cf. PHOTOGRAPHS, Photo 13). As Rabarihoela (1999: 269) emphasises, there was no model in the Bible according to which the crown could be made. He therefore specifies that it was made according to instructions given by Jesus himself and that Nenilava communicated to her 'children'. Consequently, no one was able to know in advance what the crown should look like. Besides, the artisans were obliged to make different models before they developed the one which corresponded most closely to the request. As a result, the cost of the crown became exorbitant (1999: 269).

According to information provided by Rabarihoela (1999: 227-231), Nenilava's crown, in general, can be described as follows: It was made of pure and solid silver. A cross fixed on top makes it distinct from ordinary crowns. It has twelve gates on which the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are inscribed. These gates have roofs with ninety-six small filaments in

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<sup>55</sup> Pomegranates grow in many parts of Madagascar, especially in the highlands.

total, each of them being approximately 18 cm long.<sup>56</sup> Seven motifs of flowing blood are set between these twelve gates. Seven doves representing the seven spirits of God are also shaped into the crown.<sup>57</sup> Apart from this, other motifs such as thorns, nails, marks of flogging, leaded whips, tied ropes and fern leaves are depicted on its outer side.

It is mentioned in the booklet (Rakotoarivony et al. 1983: 7) recording the event of the confirmation of Nenilava's consecration that this crown, on the one hand, symbolises the glory of God. As seen in the crown, God's glory is represented by the cross, the crown of thorns, the blood which flows and the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem, which illustrate how God, through the suffering and death of his son, saved the world. In other words, the glory of God symbolised by Nenilava's crown constitutes his love, mercy and grace to the human beings for whom his salvation was accomplished. But, on the other hand, the crown is intended especially to symbolise Nenilava's prophethood.<sup>58</sup>

As noted above, Nenilava's robe and crown had to be made by hand. Andrianarijaona (DCL 14), an informant from Antananarivo, mentions that jewellery and weaving experts were requested to craft them. But the latter refused when they saw that the work was difficult and complicated. Therefore, the work was entrusted to weavers and jewellers who were members of Nenilava's 'children' or the 'children of Ankaramalaza'. Andrianarijaona then emphasises that it was Jesus himself who made use of the hands and talents of those artisans, otherwise Nenilava's robe and crown would never have been ready for the confirmation of her consecration.

As mentioned earlier, Nenilava had founded the revival movement of Ankaramalaza within the Malagasy Lutheran Church in which she was baptised. Therefore, it is necessary to give some information about this Church.

### **3.2.3 The Malagasy Lutheran Church**

The Lutheran mission in Madagascar was started in 1865 by the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS), which had already been working in South Africa since 1844. In 1862, the attitude of

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<sup>56</sup> The first six gates have roofs with forty-two filaments, whereas the other six have fifty-four.

<sup>57</sup> Rabarihoela does not mention the exact meaning of these figures containing 'seven'. In my opinion, they are connected with Jesus' seven words addressed to the seven churches of Minor Asia that were read during the confirmation of Nenilava's consecration (see 3.2.1).

<sup>58</sup> The booklet was written by Stephenson Rakotoarivony, Péri Rasolondraibe, Rakoto Endor Modeste and Noël Rabemanantsoa. The first three authors were respectively lecturers at and Head of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at the time of the confirmation of Nenilava's consecration. Noël Rabemanantsoa was the General Secretary of the MLC at the time.

King Radama II, who opened Madagascar to Christianity, attracted the attention of the Christian world.<sup>59</sup> The NMS then decided to extend its missionary work among the Malagasy people and despatched Bishop Schreuder to the island (1865) in order to investigate how to manage this new project (Buchenshutz 1939: 1).<sup>60</sup>

One year after Schreuder's investigation (1866), the NMS posted the first two missionaries, John Engh and Nils Nilsen, to Madagascar. They arrived in Antananarivo on 27 August 1866, during the reign of Queen Rasoherina who had succeeded Radama II (Rakotomalala 1998: 6). Therefore, the NMS arrived in Madagascar 48 years after the London Mission Society (LMS; 1818). This also coincided with the re-establishment of Madagascar's foreign relations that had been interrupted during the reign of Queen Ranavalona I (1828 – 1861; Edland 2002: 18-19).

John Engh and Nils Nilsen stayed in Antananarivo for one year, to learn the Malagasy language and to establish where and how to start their work. In 1867, Bishop Schreuder, accompanied by a third missionary, Martinius Borgen, returned to Madagascar to represent the NMS and to supervise the Lutheran missionary work (Edland 2002: 65). When Schreuder met with the British missionaries who came from a Presbyterian background, the latter did not hide their disappointment at knowing that he was a bishop. Nevertheless, the two parties agreed that the LMS would continue to occupy the central part or the highlands of the country, whereas the NMS would concentrate on the coastal regions (Buchenshutz 1939: 1). But, following some influential friends' advice, Schreuder broke this agreement in visiting the region of the Betsileo, which is part of the southern highlands of Madagascar (Edland 2002: 66-67).

Schreuder's decision caused a bitter conflict between the British and Norwegian missions. To solve the problem, the LMS's representatives proposed that the Norwegian missionaries should join them and work with them. But Schreuder categorically rejected such an idea and emphasised that the Lutheran Church should be independently established in

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<sup>59</sup> One should recall that Queen Ranavalona I the predecessor of Radama II, who was a rigid traditionalist, had forbidden the Malagasy people to profess the Christian faith. Therefore, to eradicate Christianity, she expelled the missionaries of the London Missionary Society (LMS) as well as all other foreign citizens from Madagascar, and persecuted the Malagasy Christians after having forced some of them to renounce their faith.

<sup>60</sup> Bishop Schreuder was at that time responsible for the Norwegian mission in South Africa.

<sup>17</sup> Ankaratra is the name of a famous mountain located 60 km to the south of Antananarivo and which stretches from the town of Ambatolampy to Antsirabe. Considering this division, it is to be noted that the LMS had kept the region of Antananarivo.

Madagascar. After a long and heated discussion, the two missions agreed to divide Madagascar into two parts. The first part, which was defined from the mountain of Ankaratra towards the north, was given to the LMS whereas the second part, which stretched from Ankaratra to the south, was accorded to the NMS (Buchenshutz 1939: 1).<sup>61</sup>

Having obtained Schreuder's consent, Engh and Borgen planned to travel to Betafo, the capital of the Vakinakaratra.<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, the Prime Minister, Rainilaiarivony, did not provide them with the letter of authorisation they needed. Informed about this problem, the Minister of Foreign Affairs encouraged them in their project and promised that he would intervene in their favour if difficulties arose. What he asked was that they should not become involved in government affairs (Rajosefa 1967:19).

Engh and Borgen then proceeded to Betafo. Ramanjakanoro, who ruled over the people of the Vakinakaratra, received them.<sup>63</sup> To show his sympathy for them as well as for the Lutheran faith, he donated them a parcel of land located some hundreds of meters to the east of his palace. He also encouraged and assisted them in building their first station, as well as the first Malagasy Lutheran Church. Following his example, other noble people accompanied by relatives and servants approached the Norwegian missionaries. Most of them eventually became catechumens and Church members. Ramanjakanoro himself and Prince Ramasimanana converted to the Lutheran faith and were baptised in 1869, on 11 April. Some months later, nine children were also baptised. Two of them, Andriantasy and his sister Maria, were Ramanjakanoro's children (Rakotomalala 1998: 8-9).

In 1869, the Norwegian missionaries decided to extend their missionary work outside the area of Betafo. They thus planned to travel to the east, in the region of Antsirabe, and to the south, among the Betsileo ethnic group. The arrival of other missionaries made this expansion realisable and fruitful (Rakotomalala 1998: 9).

However, the situation of the Norwegian missionaries became problematic because the Malagasy government did not officially recognise their presence in Madagascar. Fortunately, Bishop Schreuder was again posted to Madagascar (1869), accompanied by new missionaries such as Lars Dahle and Christian Borchgrevink. As an English citizen, Schreuder convinced

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<sup>62</sup> Vakinakaratra is a small intermediary region between the Merina and the Betsileo territories. The town of Betafo is located 21 km to the west of Antsirabe, which is now the new capital of the Vakinakaratra, and where the main station of the NMS is established.

<sup>63</sup> In reality, Ramanjakanoro, who was the King of the Vakinankaratra, ruled under the sovereignty of the King of Antananarivo.

the Malagasy government to recognise that he was visiting the country under the British embassy's protection and was part of their responsibility. Therefore, he emphasised that the Lutheran mission for which he was responsible had already been included in the political agreement reached during the reign of Radama II between both the Malagasy and British governments. As a result of Schreuder's intervention, the Prime Minister Rainilaiarivony gave the Norwegian missionaries a letter authorising them to officially establish the Lutheran Church in Madagascar (Edland 2002: 69-70).

When the difficulties with the LMS and the government had been resolved, the NMS undertook its efforts to extend its missionary work from Betafo to the southern part of Madagascar. The missionaries who were posted to different regions exhibited willingness and a firm determination to accomplish their evangelistic and educational mission successfully in spite of the dangers, risks, and illnesses they were required to face.

In general, one can say that the Lutheran mission developed rapidly. During the first ten years (1867-1877), fourteen stations and churches, as well as schools, were founded in the region of Antsirabe and Fianarantsoa, which later on became important centres of the Lutheran missionary activities. In 1871, Lars Dahle obtained from the Malagasy government an authorisation to establish, in Antananarivo, the first Lutheran theological seminary.<sup>64</sup> In the same year, Borchgrevink founded a Lutheran hospital in this city, as well as a school of medicine that was called the 'Medical Missionary Academy'.<sup>65</sup> Apart from these schools of theology and medicine, boarding schools for girls (1872) and for boys (1877) were also founded in Antananarivo (Munthe 1971: 11).

As a result of these missionary activities, the number of the Lutheran Christians in Antananarivo kept increasing. Therefore, the NMS saw that it was essential to establish a Church in this city. The English missionaries, as well as some state dignitaries, strongly opposed the project. However, when the matter was discussed with supervisors sent from London by the LMS, it was agreed that the Lutheran mission could set up one Church in Antananarivo (Randriamandroso 1989: 6). Therefore, Lars Dahle bought a parcel of land in Ambatovinaky and started to build the Lutheran Church there, which was inaugurated in 1875

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<sup>64</sup> Nine students from the region of Betafo and Antananarivo began their studies in this first Lutheran theological seminary. Before being ordained, they were first appointed as teachers in primary schools for some years (Munthe 1971: 23). This theological seminary was transferred in 1893 from Antananarivo to Fianarantsoa because the town was considered the centre of the Lutheran mission at that time.

<sup>65</sup> Borchgrevink was both an ordained pastor and a medical doctor.

(Munthe 1971: 14).<sup>66</sup> Before extending the Lutheran mission to the extreme south and southeast of Madagascar, the NMS first despatched Nilsen-Lund to explore these regions (1877, 1878 and 1888). Nilsen-Lund's exploration enabled the NMS to establish the Lutheran Church successfully in these southern and southeastern regions (Rajosefa 1967: 28). The work in the southwest of Madagascar began in 1875 among the Sakalava ethnic group but many difficulties were experienced, to some extent owing to the hostility of the people towards all visitors from the Merina and Betsileo lands, the lack of roads, the climate and the insecurity caused by the frequent quarrels between kings or princes. However, the work succeeded when Sakalava pastors and teachers were appointed to help the missionaries (cf. Edland 2002: 105-108).

In 1877, the Lutheran Church counted about 1000 baptised Christians. According to the missionaries who worked in Madagascar at that time, such a development was, to some extent, a result of the political stability that had held sway in the country since 1863, the conversion to Christianity of Queen Ranaivalona II, the resulting proscription of idols (1869), and the adherence of many members of the Malagasy government to Christianity (Buchenshutz 1939: 1).

Twenty years after the arrival in Antananarivo of the first Norwegian missionaries, American missions such as the ELC (Evangelical Lutheran Church) (1888) and the LBM (Lutheran Boards of Mission) (1890), which belonged to the Norwegian tradition of the Lutheran Church in the United States of America, were established in Madagascar. When the leaders of these new Lutheran missions met with the NMS' representatives, it was agreed that they would occupy the southern part of the island. The two American missions, therefore, divided this large region into two parts: the southeast and the southwest. The ELC, whose first missionary and representative was Hogstad, occupied the southeastern part, whereas the southwestern region was assigned to the LBM, represented by the missionary Tou (Rakotomalala 1998: 11).

When Madagascar was colonised by France (1896-1960), the Lutheran mission faced

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<sup>66</sup> The inauguration of the Lutheran Church of Ambatovinaky was attended by the Prime Minister, Rainilaiarivony, who represented Queen Ranaivalona II, and by LMS representatives, missionaries and Malagasy pastors. Ambatovinaky was called the 'ambassador' Church because it was intended to make the Lutheran Church and its mission known to the state and the other denominations. It remained the only Lutheran Church in Antananarivo for more than 100 years. The second one, which was erected by the adherents of the revival movement founded by Nenilava, was inaugurated in 1985.

many difficulties. The French Roman Catholic missionaries claimed that since Madagascar belonged to France the Malagasy Christians should follow the Catholic faith. Besides, Gallieni, the general governor, decreed in 1896 that education in Madagascar should be carried out in French. To assist the Lutheran Church, the ANELF (Alliance Nationale des Eglises Luthériennes de France) posted three missionaries, Parrot, Buchenschutz and Beaudroit, to the island in 1897 (Buchenschutz 1939: 19).

Gallieni was succeeded by Augagneur, who ordered that the churches should no longer be used as schools. This caused the closing of many Lutheran schools. Fortunately, the inter-missionary conference was founded in 1913 to defend the Protestant missions and interests against Augagneur's attacks. Apart from these difficulties with the French colonisers, the Lutheran mission also underwent painful experiences and experienced material damage caused by Malagasy nationalist rebels. Regarding all foreign citizens as friends of the colonisers, they terrorised Lutheran missionaries, burnt churches and schools, as well as stations, after having looted some of them (cf. Randriamandroso 1989: 13-15).

In 1950, the first Lutheran General Synod took place in Fianarantsoa. The members of this General Synod stemmed from the NMS, the ELC and the LBM, and they established the 'Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy', the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC), with a constitution and different practical regulations. From that year, the MLC was regarded as an independent Church vis-à-vis the American and Norwegian missions. However, in order to respect the rules decreed by the colonialist government, a missionary had to supervise it. In 1958, The Federation of the Protestant Churches in Madagascar, which was founded in the same year, decided to dissolve the frontier separating the reformed and Lutheran zones. This enabled the MLC to extend its missionary work towards the northern part of Madagascar (Rabemanahaka 1993: 54).

The administration of the MLC was entrusted entirely to Malagasy leaders in 1961, or one year after the proclamation of the political independence of Madagascar. Nowadays, the Malagasy Lutheran Church is found in every part of the country, and it is considered the third biggest Church in Madagascar, after the Roman Catholic and the Reformed Church. However, it should be noted that one of the factors that has favoured this rapid development of the Lutheran Church was the emergence of the revival movement. It should also be emphasised that this revival movement did not result from the missionaries' work but was founded by Malagasy charismatic leaders (cf. Edland 2002: 137, 185).

### 3.2.4 Nenilava's role in the Malagasy Lutheran Church

As mentioned above, Nenilava was one of the charismatic leaders who founded the revival movement in the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC). To be precise, she founded the revival movement of Ankaramalaza, which is now spreading throughout Madagascar and even abroad, such as in France and Reunion.

Nenilava started this mission on the night of 1 August 1941. What Jesus ordered her to do on this day, she said, was to drive demons out of her husband's daughter and to heal this young girl from her illness. She initially refused, saying that she was not ready to perform such a difficult task. However, when Jesus repeatedly asked her to obey, she stood up and went to the sick girl. During the night, she was combating the demons, which possessed the young girl and had made her suffer terribly. In the morning, i.e., on 2 August, the demons said, 'We accept to go out since the one who is stronger than us has come' (Edland 2004: 185). The revival movement of Ankaramalaza is thus unanimously accepted as having been born on this day.

Some days after this first event, Nenilava claimed that she had been sent by Jesus to a small village to heal a child who was gravely ill. She obeyed and went to the place indicated. But when the traditionalist healers as well as some of her relatives, who had already arrived there before her, were informed about her intention to heal the child, they were extremely enraged. Her brother, saying that Nenilava had dishonoured their parents, even slapped her face and prevented her from approaching the sick child. The traditionalist healers tried the whole night to save the life of the girl. But she died in the morning, despite their efforts. Then Nenilava said that Jesus had ordered her to resurrect the girl. Obeying, without asking how she would be able to perform such a miraculous task, she approached the dead girl and said to her: *Talita komy: mijoroa ianao* (Talita cumi: arise). The girl was brought back to life again and Nenilava laid her hands on her head, while thanking Jesus gratefully. From this day on, some people who were not pleased to see her possess such considerable power sarcastically gave her the nickname 'Nenilava' (Tall mother), because she was a tall woman (Rabarihoela 1998: 13).

The fact that she was baptised in the Lutheran Church and was married to a Lutheran catechist caused Nenilava to believe that Jesus wanted her to serve him in this church. She therefore left Ankaramalaza and, accompanied by some shepherds and friends, undertook a long evangelistic journey throughout Madagascar. This journey enabled her to visit many Lutheran churches and to transmit Jesus' message to all those who came to hear her. Nenilava

even travelled to the Comoros, France, Norway and America to demonstrate to the people of these countries God's glory and greatness and to cause them to know what she had seen and heard from the Lord (Tsivoery 2001: 186).<sup>67</sup>

In general, Nenilava's work in the MLC consisted of preaching the gospel, driving demons out of people, healing all kinds of illnesses, strengthening Christians' faith and hope and giving advice to all those who came to her. When she drove the demons out of the persons they were possessing, she always ordered them to depart in the name of Jesus. As far as her healing method is concerned, she laid her hands on the sick person's head and prayed the Lord to heal him/her as well as to forgive his/her sins (cf. Rajosefa 1967: 218-219).

As said earlier, Nenilava remained attached to the Lutheran Church, but her evangelical message and diaconal work were addressed to all people, including Christians of all denominations, traditionalists and Muslims. As a result, about a hundred people visited her every day wanting to hear what Jesus would say through her, asking for advice and seeking freedom from sicknesses and evil spirits.

It should be noted that as the founder of the revival movement of Ankaramalaza, Nenilava was considered by most Protestant Christians and Christians from other denominations to be a shepherd. But, in reality, no consecration making her a shepherd was performed before she started her work (Edland 2002: 186). Besides, she was also regarded as a prophetess because she was able to read the thoughts of the person to whom she was speaking and to predict what would happen in the future.<sup>68</sup> But she always asserted that she preferred the role of 'evangelist' to be attributed to her rather than that of 'prophetess'. Apart from this, however, it is to be mentioned that the MLC as well as the revival movement of Ankaramalaza nonetheless regarded Nenilava as a priestess and prophetess.

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<sup>67</sup> During the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the MLC in 1967, Nenilava was decorated by the Norwegian state for the important evangelistic work that she had accomplished in this Church. She travelled to Norway five years after this ceremony to visit and to thank the Norwegian King and to preach the Gospel to the Norwegian people (Edland 2002: 186).

<sup>68</sup> For example, Nenilava predicted on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June 1957 that the town of Port-Berger, located on the north-west coast of Madagascar, should be rebuilt in another place because it would be destroyed by a flood due to the sins committed by its inhabitants. Obviously, most of these inhabitants did not believe in this prediction. Two years later (1959), a heavy rain flooded the town, which was completely destroyed in a few days. The inhabitants, who were compelled to abandon it, were obliged to rebuild a new town in another place that they still called Port-Berger (Rabehatonina 2000: 82).

### 3.3 THE MALAGASY LUTHERAN CHURCH'S USE OF OLD TESTAMENT TEXTS RELATED TO NENILAVA'S ROBE AND CROWN

Recalling the discussion in 3.2.4.1, it was initially planned that Nenilava would be dressed as a bride. But, as this plan had evolved gradually, she finally wore a holy robe modelled on the high priest's garments described in Exodus 28. According to Rabarihoela's description (1999: 104-105) and also according to what I have seen myself, this robe mainly consists of an ephod, a breastpiece, a robe of the ephod and a tunic. As far as the head-plate is concerned, the crown replaces it. What I intend to examine in this section is, therefore, the MLC's interpretation and use of the text of Exodus 28 to make Nenilava's robe.

#### **3.3.1 The interpretation and use of Exodus 28 related to Nenilava's robe**

In general, the MLC's theologians accord the high priest's garments, as recorded in Exodus 28, Christocentric interpretations and meanings. They argue that the purpose of these items was to foreshadow the features of the sacerdotal ministry of Christ. It should be emphasised, however, that despite their efforts to place Jesus at the centre of their interpretations they always regard the Old Testament as the main source from which they draw their information and views. It is also to be mentioned that the interpretations to which I refer in this part are not documented in written sources. Malagasy Lutheran theologians, with whom I conducted interviews, simply transmit them orally as necessary explanations to the 'children of Ankaramalaza', especially to the weavers and jewellers appointed to make Nenilava's robe and crown.

##### *3.3.1.1 The ephod*

28:6 Make the ephod of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen, the work of a skilled craftsman. 7 It is to have two shoulder pieces attached to two of its corners, so it can be fastened. 8 Its skillfully woven waistband is to be like it, of one piece with the ephod and made with gold, and with blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and with finely twisted linen. 9 Take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel 10 in the order of their birth-- six names on one stone and the remaining six on the other. 11 Engrave the names of the sons of Israel on the two stones the way a gem cutter engraves a seal. Then mount the stones in gold filigree settings 12 and fasten them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel. Aaron is to bear the names on his shoulders as a memorial before the Lord. 13 Make gold filigree settings 14 and two braided chains of pure gold, like a rope, and attach the chains to the settings. (NIV)

Rakotoarivony (DCL 16), an informant from Fianarantsoa, as the person responsible for the teaching of the Old Testament in the Malagasy Lutheran Seminary at that time, reminds one that the ephod constituted the main garment of the priestly vestments in the Old Testament. According to his explanation, it was used in early Israel when consulting Yahweh. Therefore, he supposes that it may have contained at that stage the Urim and Thummim by means of which God imparted knowledge, through the high priest. As far as the ephod described in Exodus 28 is concerned, Rakotoarivony argues that it announced the sacred value of the sacerdotal office that Christ would accomplish before God.

Similarly, Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) emphasises that the ephod is regarded as the most important item of the garments of which Nenilava's robe consists. According to his description, it is a kind of apron, made of gold and of other materials such as blue, purple and fine coloured linen. As Rakotoarivony mentions, Nenilava's ephod is composed of two pieces, the one on the chest and the other on the back, tied together by straps. It is, he says, held up by two shoulder-pieces on which are fixed precious stones engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

It should be noted here that some theologians and Christians were disappointed when they heard that Nenilava, who was a *Raiamandreny* (charismatic leader) of the Malagasy Christians, should bear in her ephod the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Therefore, some of them who were motivated by nationalist thoughts argued that it would be perhaps more authentic and significant to see her bearing on her ephod the names of the eighteen ethnic groups of the Malagasy people instead of the names of these Hebrew tribes. In response to this, Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) states that the MLC as well as the movement of Ankaramalaza must integrally take and faithfully use what is recorded in Exodus 28. Besides, he underlines the fact that the names of the twelve tribes of Israel that Nenilava bore in her ephod should be taken as representatives of all God's people, including the Malagasy Christians.

Offering a Christocentric interpretation of the materials of which Nenilava's ephod is made, Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) explains that the gold speaks of what is divine. In other words, it can be taken as the emblem of the divine justice, on the foundation of which Christ fulfils his sacerdotal function. Rakotoarivony also points out that it is according to this divine justice, symbolised by the gold, that Jesus Christ intercedes with God for us. In addition to Rakotoarivony's explanation, Andrianarijaona (DCL 14), an informant from Antananarivo,

suggests that the gold of which Nenilava's ephod is made indicates that God has assigned the eternal priesthood to Jesus Christ, after he resurrected and glorified him.<sup>69</sup>

The other materials such as the blue, the purple and the fine linen used in the making of the ephod are accorded Christocentric significances too. Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) notes that the blue generally illustrates the heavenly character of Christ, whereas the purple expresses his glories as Son of Man or as Son of David. As for the fine linen, it symbolises Jesus' immaculate purity or, in other words, his holiness and innocence. Rakotoarivony, therefore, emphasises that the ephod of Nenilava's robe, to some extent, represents Jesus as 'God-man', acting for human beings as a mediator and a great high priest.

As mentioned above, two shoulder-pieces or straps serve to hold up the ephod of Nenilava's robe. Rakoto Endor Modeste (DCL 15), an informant from Fianarantsoa, argues that, in the Bible, the strap always speaks of service. To support his argument, he refers to Jesus' parable, recorded in Luke 12:37, in which the master girded himself and served his servants whom he found watching when he came. Basing his interpretation on this argument, he suggests that the shoulder-pieces or the straps of Nenilava's ephod evoke the force or the power of the indestructible life with which Jesus fully accomplished his sacerdotal function. Rakoto Endor Modeste also stresses that these shoulder-pieces which hold up Nenilava's ephod are intended to ensure that Jesus, our great high priest, who is everlastingly alive, is always ready to serve us, to help us and, especially, to intercede with God for us (DCL 15).

It has also been mentioned that two precious stones engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (six names of tribes on each of them) are set on the shoulder-pieces of Nenilava's ephod. Offering his interpretation, Rakoto Endor Modeste (DCL 15) argues that they serve to demonstrate that the names of those who constituted the people of God, represented by the twelve tribes of Israel, appear permanently on the great high priest's shoulders. He thus emphasises that, similarly, Nenilava's shoulder-pieces with their precious stones symbolise Christ bringing his believers with all his power into the presence of God. In other words, we are continually brought before God because Christ cannot appear in his presence without our names being seen on his shoulders (DCL 15).

Andrianarijaona (DCL 14) mentions that, having provided Nenilava's ephod with a Christocentric interpretation and meaning, Malagasy Lutheran theologians found that there was no obstacle to manufacturing it like the high priest's ephod, described in Exodus 28: 6-

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<sup>69</sup> Germain Andrianarijaona is Nenilava's adoptive son.

14. Therefore, the ‘children of Ankaramalaza’ assigned Malagasy Lutheran theologians to study the high priest’s ephod meticulously. Some of them were even asked to draw it as faithfully and accurately as possible. Andrianarijaona also reports that other members of the ‘children of Ankaramalaza’ were given the task of finding the necessary materials such as fine linen and precious stones.

Andrianarijaona (DCL 14) points out that, according to Jesus’ instructions revealed by Nenilava to the ‘children of Ankaramalaza’, the necessary raw materials for making the garments of her robe had to be found in Madagascar.<sup>70</sup> As he reports, Jesus’ purpose was to clothe the Malagasy people gloriously with the good things with which God had provided them. Thus, there was no need to import these materials from abroad. Likewise, the work of making all the items had to be performed in Madagascar (DCL 14).

When the necessary raw materials and detailed information about the high priest’s ephod as well as illustrations of it were ready, they were put at the disposal of weavers and jewellers appointed by the ‘children of Ankaramalaza’. Assisted by the theologians responsible for this revival movement, the latter undertook to make Nenilava’s ephod. A large and quiet room in which they installed the tools of their craft to weave and to embroider Nenilava’s ephod was assigned to them. Andrianarijaona (DCL 14) explains that since their task was regarded as sacred the weavers and jewellers were given instructions not to let anyone disturb them, to pray all the time and to cast out the evil spirits every day. Besides these instructions that they followed to the letter, these talented shepherds, as Andrianarijaona says, from time to time fasted, especially when they met with some difficulties or technical problems. It was necessary that these instructions were observed and maintained unchanged during the creation of all the garments of Nenilava’s robe (DCL 14).

Rakoto Endor Modeste (DCL 15) notes that the work presented some unexpected complications because those who were appointed to find the fine linen and the precious stones had to visit different parts of Madagascar. Besides, Rabarihoela (1999: 268-269) explains that the work, including the cutting of the precious stones and their insertion into the ephod, had to be done entirely by hand and not by machines. This was, he points out, in order to fulfil the word of God in Exodus 28: 3 which had instructed Moses as follows: ‘Tell all the skilled men

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<sup>70</sup> Some people argued that the cloth of fine linen that served to make Nenilava’s garments was imported from Iran (cf. Rabehatonina 2000: 83). However, Rakoto Endor Modeste (DCL 15), who is one of the current leaders of the revival movement of Ankaramalaza, categorically denied this after Nenilava’s death.

to whom I have given wisdom in such matters that they are to make garments for Aaron, for his consecration, so that he may serve me as priest’.

As Rakoto Endor Modeste (DCL 15) reports, the appointed weavers and jewellers finished Nenilava’s ephod after a few months of hard and exhausting work that involved energy, perseverance and devotion. He specifies that when the representatives of the ‘children of Ankaramalaza’, including some theologians, had received the item and examined it they were simultaneously astonished and fascinated to see that it had been faithfully made according to the model taken from Exodus 28: 6-13.

### *3.3.1.2 The breastpiece*

15 Fashion a breastpiece for making decisions-- the work of a skilled craftsman. Make it like the ephod: of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen. 16 It is to be square, a span long and a span wide, and folded double. 17 Then mount four rows of precious stones on it. In the first row there shall be a ruby, a topaz and a beryl; 18 in the second row a turquoise, a sapphire and an emerald; 19 and the third row a ligure, an agate, and an amethyst. 20 in the fourth row a chrysolite, an onyx and a jasper. Mount them in gold filigree settings. 21 There are to be twelve stones, one for each of the names of the sons of Israel, each engraved like a seal with the name of one of the twelve tribes. 22 For the breastpiece make braided chains of pure gold, like a rope. 23 Make two gold rings for it and fasten them to two corners of the breastpiece. 24 Fasten the two gold chains to the rings at the corners of the breastpiece, 25 and the other ends of the chains to the two settings, attaching them to the shoulder pieces of the ephod at the front. 26 Make two gold rings and attach them to the other two corners of the breastpiece on the inside edge next to the ephod. 27 Make two more gold rings and attach them to the bottom of the shoulder pieces on the front of the ephod, close to the seam just above the waistband of the ephod. 28 The rings of the breastpiece are to be tied to the rings of the ephod with blue cord, connecting it to the waistband, so that the breastpiece will not swing out from the ephod. 29 Whenever Aaron enters the Holy Place, he will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the breastpiece of decision as a continuing memorial before the Lord. 30 Also put the Urim and the Thummim in the breastpiece, so they may be over Aaron's heart whenever he enters the presence of the Lord. Thus Aaron will always bear the means of making decisions for the Israelites over his heart before the Lord. (NIV)

The second garment of Nenilava’s robe is the breastpiece, which is also called the ‘pectoral’. Providing a general description of Nenilava’s breastpiece, Rakotoarivony (DCL 16), an informant from Fianarantsoa, stresses that, like the ephod, it was modelled on the high priest’s breastpiece described in Exodus 28: 15-30 and was made of materials similar to those of the ephod. As he specifies, four rows of three precious stones such as agate, topaz, emerald, sapphire, diamond and amethyst engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were

set on it. With regard to its outside appearance, Rakotoarivony explains that Nenilava's breastpiece is a double square gold plate (approximately 25 cm square) forming a flat pouch or bag.

Referring to the explanation that he provided for the 'children of Ankaramalaza', Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) suggests that the original breastpiece in the Old Testament probably contained the Urim and the Thummim. However, he specifies that the high priest's breastpiece presented in Exodus 28: 15-30 by the priestly redactors no longer possessed oracular significance. He also emphasises that in putting on the breastpiece Aaron bore the names of Israel on two precise parts of his body: on his shoulder and on his heart. On the one hand, this signified that Aaron bore the children of Israel in the holy place of the tabernacle as a memorial before Yahweh. But, on the other hand, it also signified that Yahweh always saw his people as situated on the heart of Aaron (DCL 16).

As far as Nenilava's breastpiece is concerned, Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) points out that, obviously, it has no oracular purpose since its pouches do not contain any Urim and Thummim. He also stresses that when Nenilava put on her breastpiece she bore, as the high priest Aaron did, the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on her shoulders and on her heart.

According to Rabemanantsoa's interpretation (DCL 17), an informant from Fianarantsoa, the shoulders and the heart generally symbolise power and affection or love. Therefore, the names of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved on Nenilava's shoulder-piece and breastpiece, in his opinion, illustrate that, on the one hand, Jesus powerfully brings his people before God; but on the other hand, he bears them on his heart, in his eternal love. In other words, Rabemanantsoa argues that the names of the twelve tribes of Israel that Nenilava bore on her shoulders and heart symbolise the union of Jesus' eternal power and his eternal love in the presentation of the believers before God. This helps us, he says, to understand and accept the value of Jesus' intercession, which is based on the effectiveness of his sacrifice (DCL 17).

In addition to Rabemanantsoa's argument, Andriantsiratahina (DCL 18), an informant from Antananarivo, makes it clear that these precious stones set on Nenilava's shoulder-piece and breastpiece represent the shining glory of God and his perfection as well. They also demonstrate, in his opinion, that God who is perfect in knowledge is the light who makes everything visible.

According to Andrianarijaona (DCL 14), an informant from Antananarivo, all the necessary materials for making Nenilava's breastpiece were, like those of the ephod, collected from different parts of Madagascar. He notes that, as in the making of the ephod, theologians

carefully studied what is written about the high priest's breastpiece in Exodus 28: 15-30. When the necessary raw materials were available, the same appointed weavers and jewellers started their work, assisted by theologians and some representatives of the 'children of Ankaramalaza'. Their instructions remained the same: working in total discretion, praying all the time and driving out evil spirits.

As Andrianarijaoma (DCL 14) reveals, the work that consisted of making Nenilava's breastpiece involved energy and great care. Nevertheless, he notes that, according to the weavers' and jewellers' report, it was to some extent less complicated and took less time in comparison to the making of the ephod. Having examined the item, the representatives of the 'children of Ankaramalaza' were satisfied and declared that the high priest's breastpiece described in Exodus 28: 15-30 had been faithfully reproduced.

### *3.3.1.3 The robe of the ephod*

28:31 Make the robe of the ephod entirely of blue cloth, 32 with an opening for the head in its center. There shall be a woven edge like a collar around this opening, so that it will not tear. 33 Make pomegranates of blue, purple and scarlet yarn around the hem of the robe, with gold bells between them. 34 The gold bells and the pomegranates are to alternate around the hem of the robe. 35 Aaron must wear it when he ministers. The sound of the bells will be heard when he enters the Holy Place before the Lord and when he comes out, so that he will not die. (NIV)

According to Rakotoarivony's description (DCL 16), Nenilava's robe of the ephod is a long blue robe woven from fine linen, which corresponds to what Yahweh commanded in Exodus 28: 31-35. As he explained to the 'children of Ankaramalaza', scholars argue that 'violet' is a better translation as far as the colour of this item is concerned. However, in his opinion, it is better to keep faithfully to what is written in the Bible. Therefore, Rakotoarivony gave the weavers the instruction to make Nenilava's robe of the ephod entirely of blue cloth, which is in accordance with Yahweh's recommendation in Exodus 28: 31. As he describes it, the item is sleeveless, without fastenings of any kind, has a strengthened opening for the head, and arms so that it can be pulled on over the head like a pullover or a nightshirt.

Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) indicates that, properly speaking, the ephod, the shoulder-pieces and the breastpiece, are not vestments. They are, rather, characteristic items of the priesthood vestments; they are exclusively related to the sacerdotal service and thus constituted the official garments of the high priest. On the other hand, he emphasises that the 'robe of the ephod', as indicated by its name, is a vestment. It should therefore be

distinguished from the ephod itself and considered to be the personal robe of the high priest. As far as Nenilava's robe of the ephod is concerned, she wore it under her ephod and therefore under her breastpiece as well.

Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) points out that the edges of Nenilava's robe of the ephod are decorated with pomegranates embroidered with three coloured yarns, including the blue yarn of which the robe itself is made. These pomegranates are interspersed with golden bells, which pattern is continued all around the edges.

Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) also explains to the 'children of Ankaramalaza' that the robe of the ephod was intended to remind the high priest of the heavenly character of his sacerdotal duties, or rather the perfect harmony between this character and the holy place in which he had to carry out these duties. Therefore, Yahweh required that he always wore it when he entered the holy place in the tabernacle or in the temple to perform his sacerdotal duties.

Providing a Christocentric interpretation of Nenilava's robe of the ephod, Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) stipulates that it is intended to represent Christ as 'holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners and exalted above the heavens', as is quoted in Hebrews 7: 26. Accordingly, he argues that to see Nenilava wearing this robe makes her 'children' lift their eyes and hearts to Jesus, the true great high priest, who continually performs his sacerdotal function in interceding with God for us.

As mentioned above, pomegranates embroidered with coloured yarns and alternating with golden bells are suspended from the edges of Nenilava's robe of the ephod.<sup>71</sup> The pomegranate in Madagascar is considered by most people to be a symbol of the fruitfulness of life. Andrianarijaona (DCL 14) therefore interprets the pomegranates hung from the edges of Nenilava's robe of the ephod as the fruit of the Spirit that includes the fullness of the glory of Christ, which shines in the life of his redeemed people. As for Rabemanantsoa (DCL 17), he understands them as the emblem of the richness and the plenitude of life. Accordingly, he emphasises that these pomegranates should be regarded as the symbol of the life that emanates from Christ and that imbues his faithful people, personified in his servant Nenilava.

Regarding the golden bells that alternate with the pomegranates, Andriatsiratahina (DCL 18) argues that, in the Old Testament priesthood, the high priest's movements when he

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<sup>71</sup> The pomegranate is a tree with a thick-skinned round fruit which, when ripe, contains a large number of juicy red seeds. This kind of fruit tree, which is mostly wild, grows abundantly in many parts of Madagascar and because of its perfect roundness people, as well as the Malagasy Bible, call it '*apongaben-danitra*', which literally means: big drum of the heaven.

entered the holy place of the tabernacle or the temple had to be accompanied by the sound of these bells. They served to make people aware that the high priest was performing his duties. He also notes that the sound that these bells made was aimed at inviting people and the high priest himself to attention and meditation. However, Andriatsiratahina remarks that if it happened that the bells ceased for a long period, people often supposed that the high priest might have been struck by an accidental death.

Interpreting the golden bells suspended from Nenilava's robe of the ephod, Andriatsiratahina (DCL 18) emphasises that they are aimed at announcing that Christ is living in heaven, before God, and that he is at work. They are also, he states, intended to make Christians aware that Jesus Christ, who gloriously entered heaven and triumphantly sat at the right hand of God, will come back to judge the living and the dead. Therefore, the sound of the golden bells of Nenilava's robe of the ephod, to some extent, plays the same role as the reveille. They serve to remind the Christians, especially the members of the revival movement of Ankaramalaza that the age will end soon, so they have to wake up and rise from the dead. In other words, the sounds of these bells are intended to remind us to fix our eyes on Christ, our redeemer and the author of our faith (DCL 18).

Concerning the work that consisted of making Nenilava's completely blue robe of the ephod, Andrianarijaona (DCL 14) notes that the appointed weavers and jewellers did not complain to him about its complexity. What they did in the first place was to make, according to the text of Exodus 28: 31-35, the pattern illustrating the shapes of the various parts of the item and the pattern illustrating the sizes and forms of the pomegranates as well as the golden bells. They were, as usual, assisted by theologians and some people responsible for the 'children of Ankaramalaza'. Afterwards, they undertook the work, and the robe of the ephod with its accessories was ready after one and a half months. Andrianarijaona reports that the responsible people appointed by the 'children of Ankaramalaza' to examine and receive it were quite satisfied with the precision and the fineness of the work.

#### *3.3.1.4 The tunic*

28:39 Weave the tunic of fine linen and make the turban of fine linen. The sash is to be the work of an embroiderer. 40 Make tunics, sashes and headbands for Aaron's sons, to give them dignity and honor 41 after you put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they may serve me as priests. 42 Make linen undergarments as a covering for the body, reaching from the waist to the thigh. 43 Aaron and his sons must wear them whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting or approach the altar to minister in the Holy Place, so that they will

not incur guilt and die. This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants. (NIV)

Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) describes Nenilava's tunic or coat as a long robe with sleeves serving as an undergarment. He specifies that it is made of fine linen and has an embroidered sash, in accordance with Yahweh's recommendation recorded in Exodus 28: 39-40. He also notes that Nenilava wore this item under the sacerdotal robe such as the ephod and the breastpiece. Therefore, the tunic is partly hidden by the robe of the ephod.

Giving a Christocentric interpretation to Nenilava's tunic, Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) argues that fine linen has always been, from the Old Testament priesthood until the present, understood as a symbol of purity. He thus emphasises that Nenilava's tunic represents the absolute personal purity of Christ. Still, he makes it clear that this purity is hidden from unbelievers' eyes; it is only visible to God's and faithful Christians' eyes. Concerning the embroidery of Nenilava's tunic, Rakotoarivony reports that it is intended to emphasise the admirable features of the grace and the moral glory of the Lord Jesus Christ (DCL 16).

Rakoto Endor Modeste (DCL 15) offers another interpretation of the fine linen of which Nenilava's tunic is made. In his opinion, it speaks of Jesus' perfect humanity. In fact, he points out that Jesus Christ is perfectly holy, without blemish, completely innocent and is therefore the only great high priest who is suitable for us.

As far as the work that consisted of making Nenilava's tunic is concerned, the weavers humbly and confidentially reported to Andrianarijaona (DCL 14) that it was the easiest of the tasks that had been assigned to them. Assisted by theologians and representatives of the 'children of Ankaramalaza', they simply made the pattern according to the description given in Exodus 28: 39-40 and used it to make the tunic for which the cloth had been woven from the fine linen. According to their report, the work took only a few weeks.

### *3.3.1.5 The head-plate*

'28:36 Make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it as on a seal: "Holy to the Lord".  
37 Fasten a blue cord to it to attach it to the turban; it is to be on the front of the turban. 38 It will be on Aaron's forehead, and he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate, whatever their gifts may be. It will be on Aaron's forehead continually so that they will be acceptable to the Lord' (NIV).

As recorded in Exodus 28: 36-38, the head-plate was part of the high priest's garments. Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) explains that it was in the shape of a flower of pure gold that the

high priest was required to wear on the front of his turban. According to Yahweh's recommendation in verse 36, the inscription: 'Holy to the Lord', which served to remind both the high priest and Israel of their position before Yahweh, was engraved on it.

Rakoto Endor Modeste (DCL 15) specifies that the head-plate as required and described in Exodus 28: 36-38 was not included among the garments that were made for Nenilava. The reason is, according to his explanation, that Jesus had ordered Nenilava to wear a crown, as a bride does. Therefore, he emphasises that the appointed jewellers were given the order to make a crown like that of a bride and not a head-plate like that of a high priest.

It should be noted that, as Andrianarijaona (DCL 14) mentions, the instructions concerning prayer, vigilance and the casting out of evil spirits were continually repeated to the appointed weavers and jewellers. The reason is, he explains, because both the MLC and the revival movement of Ankaramalaza regarded the garments they were assigned to make as holy. According to the members of the revival movement, 'to be holy' means 'to be hated by the Devil'. Therefore, everyone who was appointed as one of the workers making Nenilava's holy robe had at all times to be on his/her guard against the Devil's disturbance and attacks (DCL 14).

Hence the priestly garments made for and worn by Nenilava at the time of the confirmation of her consecration have been Christocentrically interpreted by the MLC's theologians. In terms of this interpretation, they are intended to speak of Jesus Christ as the redeemer, full of grace and love. At the same time, they symbolically serve to show Christ as the holy, glorious and great high priest who everlastingly carries out his sacerdotal function in the heavenly sanctuary. But they also symbolically show how Christ gloriously and beautifully dresses his faithful servants and believers with the cloth of salvation (Rakotoarivony et al. 1983: 6). This is probably why Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) argues that this confirmation event should be understood as a 'prophetic symbolic action'. It is also certainly the reason why the leaders of the MLC, who are reputed to be conservative, allowed Nenilava to wear these priestly garments.

### **3.3.2 The interpretation and use of Deuteronomy 28 related to Nenilava's crown**

It should be noted that the MLC's use of Deuteronomy 28, related to Nenilava's crown, is quite different from its use of Exodus 28, related to Nenilava's robe. In fact, as has been discussed in the preceding section, the MLC and the 'children of Ankaramalaza' employ the text of Exodus 28 as a source from which they have directly drawn models for the garments of

Nenilava's robe. On the other hand, they apply the text of Deuteronomy 28, which concerns blessings (v. 1-14) and curses (v. 15- 68), to make the members of the Church aware of the consequences of obedience to and disobedience of the prophetic message that Nenilava's crown symbolically conveys. Therefore, the 'children of Ankaramalaza' have not employed Deuteronomy 28 as an inspirational text to create Nenilava's crown but rather as a warning text to indicate what this crown should convey to Christians.

What follows is a consideration of the way in which some representative Malagasy Lutheran theologians interpret and relate the text of Deuteronomy 28 to Nenilava's crown. As in the preceding section, the interpretations to which I refer here are not found in written sources. They were provided by Malagasy Lutheran theologians, with whom I conducted interviews, as a necessary oral explanation to the 'children of Ankaramalaza' and to the artisans appointed to make Nenilava's crown.

### *3.3.2.1 The blessings*

28:1 If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. 2 All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God: 3 you will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. 4 The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock, the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. 5 Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. 6 You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out. 7 The Lord will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven. 8 The Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The Lord your God will bless you in the land he is giving you. 9 The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the Lord your God and walk in his ways. 10 Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they will fear you. 11 The Lord will grant you abundant prosperity, in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground, in the land he swore to your forefathers to give you. 12 The Lord will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. 13 The Lord will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the Lord your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom. 14 Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them. (NIV)

According to Rakotoarivony (DCL 16), an informant from Fianarantsoa, Yahweh was revealed to Israel as a God of grace and benediction. Therefore, blessing played an important role in the life of the ancient Israelites. He points out that in Madagascar too, which is

considered to be a 'country of blessing', the idea of blessing occupies an important place in society as well as in individual relationships. Giving a short definition of the concept, he states that it refers to the favour and protection that God, because of his grace and love, provides for his obedient people.

As Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) reminds one, Yahweh promised the children of Israel individual and collective blessings in Deuteronomy 28: 1-14. However, he emphasises that the conditions required for them to obtain these blessings were a hearkening to God's voice and obedience to his commandments. According to him, the expression 'If you hearken...', which is repeatedly mentioned in the discourse, is the fundamental condition for the divine blessings to spread to all aspects of life and all domains of the activity of God's people: the ancient Israelites as well as Christians today.

In general, Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) divides the pronouncement of blessings which is recorded in Deuteronomy 28: 1-14 into two parts: the blessings in the city (vv. 3-6) and the blessings in the country (vv. 7-14). He points out that Israel was a 'terrestrial' people, to such an extent that the blessings received were bound to her life on this earth. In other words, wealth, peace and glory were regarded as signs of God's approval. It is thus not surprising, he asserts, to see that the two domains where God's favour was promised, the city and the country, corresponded to the Israelites' social and material life. This is, Rakotoarivony stresses, why Israel was required to stay faithful and obedient to her God, in every situation, in order to receive his blessings.

Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) considers that for the people of God, constituted by the believers of the present period, things are different. He states that they are a 'celestial' people, whose blessings are not terrestrial but spiritual, in a celestial place that is in Christ. He recognises that on the earth, the Christians must undergo tests and sufferings, but Jesus' promise remains: 'I am always with you' (Mt 28: 20). Expressing his opinion about the promise of blessings 'in the city', Rakotoarivony argues that this statement causes us to think of our relationships with brothers and sisters in the local Church, with whom we share joys, peace and love, without hypocrisy and in the absence of all slander.

In addition to Rakotoarivony's explanation, Rabemanantsoa (DCL 17), an informant from Fianarantsoa, stresses that everything that a human being could desire was promised to Israel: a prosperous family, wealth, victory over her enemies and an elevated position. Yahweh will provide all: he will establish Israel, he will open his good treasure to her, and he will place her at the forefront. What the Lord demands is that his people obey his

commandments without deviating from his ways. Rabemanantsoa notes that, likewise, everything good is divinely promised to Christians. Sharing Rakotoarivony's argument, he acknowledges that the blessings of Christians, who live in the Spirit, are essentially celestial. However, Rabemanantsoa (DCL 17), referring to Jesus' words in Matthew 6: 33, argues that Christians, as children of God, who is the creator of all things, celestial and terrestrial, possess the right to terrestrial blessings too. In his opinion, the difference between the two people, the ancient Israelites and the Christians, as far as these terrestrial blessings are concerned, is that for the Israelites they only constitute promises to hope for, whereas the Christians have been given them as a material example of the celestial or spiritual blessings which are already theirs because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Mentioning some examples of terrestrial blessings received by Christians, Rabemanantsoa (DCL 17) refers to miraculous works that the Lord Jesus accomplished through Nenilava. The most important of these comprise the healing of different illnesses, mental and physical, the cleansing of lepers, the recovering of their sight by blind people, the casting out of evil spirits, the raising of the dead, the construction of *toby* (centres) to accommodate homeless families, taking charge of the schooling of poor children, and the supplying of food as well as clothes for needy families.

Rabemanantsoa (DCL 17) notes that in the course of the history of Israel, faithful believers had experienced the truthfulness of these terrestrial promises and that even the whole nation had already benefited from them at certain times. In the same way, Christians who accept and believe in the prophetic messages that the Lord has entrusted to elected servants like Nenilava, and who faithfully put them into practice, can count on the divine blessings that they will enjoy in their terrestrial lives. Nevertheless, Rabemanantsoa points out that all the promises of God will perfectly be fulfilled only under Christ's future reign, in which the faithful believers will enjoy everlasting life and eternal happiness.

Regarding the sentence 'in the city [...] in the field' (Dt 28: 3), Andrianarijaona (DCL 14), an informant from Antananarivo, comments that the same expression is frequently used by the Malagasy in the pronouncements of blessings. The same remark applies to the phrase 'come in [...] go out' (Dt 28: 6). According to his explanation, both expressions refer, in the Malagasy context, to the totality of life and all the daily activities in which one may be engaged. However, he emphasises that the expression 'come in [...] go out' speaks more to the Christian believers. In his opinion, 'come in [...]' in the Christian context, can be understood as to approach God through Jesus Christ, to be held in his presence, to see his

glory and to adore him. As for 'go out [...]', Andrianarijaona explains that it denotes going to the world with the objective of bringing to non-believers the message of the gospel, the good news of the salvation of sinners by Jesus Christ, as Nenilava did.

Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) states that, as in the time of the ancient Israelites, the Lord, who is the same yesterday, today and forever, promises his blessings to the Christians. However, he emphasises that as in the time of the ancient Israelites, the conditions required by God also remain the same: that Christians hearken to his words and faithfully put his instructions into practice. Referring to the Malagasy Christians, especially to the members of the revival movement of Ankaramalaza, who include Christians from different denominations, Rakotoarivony reminds one that they are required to hearken attentively to the prophetic message that the Lord transmits to them through his servant Nenilava and to obey fully the instructions this message contains. Yet he makes it clear that the Malagasy Christians are exhorted to do God's will, not with the aim of receiving blessings, as the ancient Israelites did, but because these blessings have already been given freely to them through Jesus' grace and salvation.

Rabemanantsoa (DCL 17) points out that the prophetic message divinely entrusted to Nenilava was, in general, based on the proclamation of the glory of God, as well as his grace and love for the human beings that had been demonstrated by Jesus Christ through his death on the cross and his resurrection. Her mission since 1941, he emphasises, specifically consisted of inviting all people, Christians and non-Christians, to repent of their sins, to glorify God, to turn to him for forgiveness and help and to exercise a trustful faith in Jesus' redemption and everlasting life as its grace-filled consequence.

Rabemanantsoa (DCL 17) explains that when the time (1983) to confirm Nenilava's consecration arrived, which was to a certain extent an opportunity for the 'children of Ankaramalaza' to show her both as a prophetess and as a priestess, she was already getting old. He says, however, that Jesus, who is a provident Lord, had already planned a solution, which would prevent the proclamation of his prophetic message from ceasing because of Nenilava's age.

According to Rabemanantsoa (DCL 17), this solution comprised Jesus' recommendation to inscribe the prophetic message in symbolic motifs on Nenilava's crown. In line with this explanation, these motifs correspond well with the contents of Nenilava's prophetic message because they represent God's glory, Jesus' suffering and death for sinners, the giving of the Holy Spirit and the New Jerusalem where the faithful will dwell

everlastingly.<sup>72</sup> Rabemanantsoa then stresses that Nenilava's crown, inscribed with these symbolic motifs, is especially intended to serve as a lasting reminder of the prophetic message the Lord had given her to proclaim. But, it is also, he says, intended to encourage and remind the Christians that God's blessings pronounced in Deuteronomy 28: 3-14 will come upon them and accompany them if they continue to hearken to this prophetic message and observe the instructions it contains.

The explanations presented above accord with what is contained in the booklet, which records the event of the confirmation of Nenilava's consecration (Rakotoarivony et al. 1983: 7). In fact, the booklet indicates that the crown, which symbolises Nenilava's prophethood, is a visible sermon transmitting the Lord's message to the Church and the nation. And like all true sermon, it must have consequences for its listeners. To those who accept and receive the message faithfully, the consequences they could expect encompass blessings such as edification, exhortation, comfort and everlasting life. These correlate with the blessings divinely promised in Deuteronomy 28: 3-14 to the ancient Israelite believers, and this is the reason why Jesus recommended that the pronouncements of blessings recorded in this passage must be related to Nenilava's crown (1983: 7).

### 3.3.2.2 *The curses*

28:15 However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: 16 you will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. 17 Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. 18 The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. 19 You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out. 20 The LORD will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him. 21 The Lord will plague you with diseases until he has destroyed you from the land you are entering to possess. 22 The Lord will strike you with wasting disease, with fever and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, with blight and mildew, which will plague you until you perish. 23 The sky over your head will be bronze, the ground beneath you iron. 24 The Lord will turn the rain of your country into dust and powder; it will come down from the skies until you are destroyed. 25 The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth. 26 Your carcasses will be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away. 27 The lord will afflict you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors, festering sores and the itch, from

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<sup>72</sup> These symbolic motifs inscribed on Nenilava's crown have already been presented and explained in 3.2.4.2.

which you cannot be cured. 28 The Lord will afflict you with madness, blindness and confusion of mind. 29 At midday you will grope about like a blind man in the dark. You will be unsuccessful in everything you do; day after day you will be oppressed and robbed, with no one to rescue you. 30 You will be pledged to be married to a woman, but another will take her and ravish her. You will build a house, but you will not live in it. You will plant a vineyard, but you will not even begin to enjoy its fruit. 31 Your ox will be slaughtered before your eyes, but you will eat none of it. Your donkey will be forcibly taken from you and will not be returned. Your sheep will be given to your enemies, and no one will rescue them. 32 Your sons and daughters will be given to another nation, and you will wear out your eyes watching for them day after day, powerless to lift a hand. 33 A people that you do not know will eat what your land and labor produce, and you will have nothing but cruel oppression all your days. 34 The sights you see will drive you mad. 35 The Lord will afflict your knees and legs with painful boils that cannot be cured, spreading from the soles of your feet to the top of your head. 36 The Lord will drive you and the king you set over you to a nation unknown to you or your fathers. There you will worship other gods, gods of wood and stone. 37 You will become a thing of horror and an object of scorn and ridicule to all the nations where the Lord will drive you. 38 You will sow much seed in the field but you will harvest little, because locusts will devour it. 39 You will plant vineyards and cultivate them but you will not drink the wine or gather the grapes, because worms will eat them. 40 You will have olive trees throughout your country but you will not use the oil, because the olives will drop off. 41 You will have sons and daughters but you will not keep them, because they will go into captivity. 42 Swarms of locusts will take over all your trees and the crops of your land. 43 The alien who lives among you will rise above you higher and higher, but you will sink lower and lower. 44 He will lend to you, but you will not lend to him. He will be the head, but you will be the tail. 45 All these curses will come upon you. They will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the Lord your God and observe the commands and decrees he gave you. 46 They will be a sign and a wonder to you and your descendants forever. 47 Because you did not serve the Lord your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, 48 therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the Lord sends against you. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you. 49 The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, 50 a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young. 51 They will devour the young of your livestock and the crops of your land until you are destroyed. They will leave you no grain, new wine or oil, nor any calves of your herds or lambs of your flocks until you are ruined. 52 They will lay siege to all the cities throughout your land until the high fortified walls in which you trust fall down. They will besiege all the cities throughout the land the Lord your God is giving you. 53 Because of the suffering that your enemy will inflict on you during the siege, you will eat the fruit of the womb, the flesh of the sons and daughters the Lord your God has given you. 54 Even the most gentle and sensitive man among you will have no compassion on his own brother or the wife he loves or his surviving children, 55 and he will not give to one of them any of the flesh of his children that he is eating. It will be all he has left because of the suffering your enemy will inflict on you during the siege of all your cities. 56 The most gentle and sensitive woman among you-- so sensitive and gentle that she would not venture to touch the ground with the sole of her foot-- will begrudge the husband she loves and her own son or daughter 57 the afterbirth from her womb and the children she bears. For she intends to eat them secretly during the siege and in the distress that your enemy will inflict on you in your cities. 58 If you do not carefully follow all the words of this law, which are written in this book, and do not revere this glorious and awesome name, the Lord your God, 59

the Lord will send fearful plagues on you and your descendants, harsh and prolonged disasters, and severe and lingering illnesses. 60 He will bring upon you all the diseases of Egypt that you dreaded, and they will cling to you. 61 The Lord will also bring on you every kind of sickness and disaster not recorded in this Book of the Law, until you are destroyed. 62 You who were as numerous as the stars in the sky will be left but few in number, because you did not obey the Lord your God. 63 Just as it pleased the Lord to make you prosper and increase in number, so it will please him to ruin and destroy you. You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess. 64 Then the Lord will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods, gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. 65 Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the Lord will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. 66 You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. 67 In the morning you will say, "If only it were evening!" and in the evening, "If only it were morning!" because of the terror that will fill your hearts and the sights that your eyes will see. 68 The lord will send you back in ships to Egypt on a journey I said you should never make again. There you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you. (NIV)

Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) remarks generally that in the ancient Israelite and traditional Malagasy customs the pronouncement of curses always follows the declaration of blessings. He also explains that in terms of the curses containing the statement of a series of pains and disasters in Deuteronomy 28: 15-68, poverty, suffering and slavery are the unavoidable consequences of disobedience to God's words and instructions.

Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) observes that this series of terrifying sufferings such as: sterility (of soil, herds and people), illnesses and natural calamities, as well as servitude to other peoples in total humiliation, which means loss of well-being, health, peace and possession of land, could be regarded by modern readers as being too exaggerated. However, he finds that such a punishment is correct and logical if one considers the greatness of God's love, his holiness and the generosity of his grace which is rejected by the disobedient. In addition, he argues that this pronouncement of curses shows God's goodness and mercifulness because it makes his people aware of what will happen to them if they do not obey his voice and do not carefully follow his instructions.

However, Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) emphasises that the pronouncement of curses recorded in this part of Deuteronomy 28 should not only be taken as a prophecy. He explains that numerous prophecies announce calamities for Israel as consequences of her disobedience, but they also mention her final exaltation and future glory. This is not the case in Deuteronomy 28: 15-68. Rakotoarivony thus argues that the pronouncement of curses in this passage is, rather, a threat that should have acted as a warning. More explicitly,

Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) points out that these curses served as a beacon or parapet intended to prevent the people of God from falling into the temptation of disobedience. Unfortunately, Israel was not faithful. Consequently, as he reminds one, her history, which had been marked by a progressive decadence, ended by means of terrifying and anguished sieges, resulting in the destruction of her land as well as her temple and the deportation of most of her people.

As far as believers of the present period are concerned, Rakotoarivony (DCL 16) considers that they are no longer under the threat of such curses. They are children of a God of love whose justice has been satisfied by Jesus' redemptive work on the cross. Yet, he adds that, like the ancient Israelites, Christians since their baptism have been accorded the responsibility to walk on a path of dependence and faithfulness as their answer of love towards God, their Father. Otherwise, unfortunate consequences will make them experience God's discipline for the purposes of their instruction. To stress this idea of responsibility, Rakotoarivony refers to Paul's words, 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man sowed, that shall he also reap' (Gl 6: 7). Therefore, he states that the Malagasy Christians, especially the members of the revival movement of Ankaramalaza, are required to obey the prophetic message proclaimed by Nenilava and symbolically represented by her crown; otherwise curses similar to those pronounced in Deuteronomy 28 will come upon them (DCL 16).

In addition, Rakotomaro (DCL 19), an informant from Antananarivo, argues that as in the tradition common to the peoples of the Ancient Near East, it is also a Malagasy custom to pronounce blessings and curses as the conclusion of a pact or an alliance entered into between two persons or two peoples. The forms of the rites that traditionally accompany these pronouncements of blessings and curses may vary with regions or ethnic groups, but the basic element, which consists of blood, remains the same everywhere.

Regarding the rite or ceremony of the confirmation of Nenilava's consecration, Rakotomaro (DCL 19) contends that it is to a certain extent a visible manifestation of the alliance between Jesus and Nenilava, on the one hand, and between the latter and the Church, to which she was sent as prophetess, on the other hand. He also recalls that when Nenilava, in her childhood, was called by Jesus, she was not yet Christian and continued to live in the non-Christian context, that is in terms of the Malagasy customs mentioned above, until she was baptised and given in marriage to a Lutheran catechist. Therefore, Rakotomaro notes that it is not at all surprising to find the text of Deuteronomy 28 used by the MLC and the 'children of Ankaramalaza' as the conclusion of the aforesaid alliance because such a usage is customary

in both contexts, biblical and Malagasy.

As stated in the booklet recording the event of the confirmation of Nenilava's consecration (Rakotoarivony et al. 1983: 7), Nenilava's crown is aimed at representing her prophetic message and at symbolically transmitting the content of this message as a visible sermon to the Malagasy Christians. The booklet argues that, as in all divine and true messages, part of the consequences for the unbelievers and the disobedient should encompass disgrace, remorse, curses and perdition for them. This is the reason, the booklet stresses, why Jesus recommended that the pronouncement of the curses following that of the blessings recorded in Deuteronomy 28 must be related to Nenilava's crown. Yet the booklet states specifically that this text is not intended to threaten the people of God with curses but rather to preserve them in their continuous renewing, in blessing and in salvation.

The MLC's use of the Old Testament texts in Exodus 28 and Deuteronomy 28 related to Nenilava's robe and crown, respectively, has now been presented according to the Malagasy Lutheran theologians' explanations and arguments. In the following sub-section I intend to investigate the function of this use.

### **3.3.3 The function of the use of Old Testament texts related to Nenilava's robe and crown**

Having examined and evaluated diverse information collected from different sources, I will argue that the use of certain Old Testament texts, namely Exodus 28 and Deuteronomy 28, within the MLC functions as an example of legitimisation and contextualisation. Obviously, none of my informants mentioned this explicitly. However, having reflected on their arguments, it is my conviction that these texts have been used, simultaneously, to legitimise Nenilava's prophetic mission and to contextualise the Old Testament in present-day Church life. Therefore, this sub-section aims at investigating and showing this legitimisation and contextualisation as a function of the MLC's use of Exodus 28 and Deuteronomy 28.

#### *3.3.3.1 Legitimation*

As said above, one of the intended functions of the MLC's use of Old Testament texts related to Nenilava's robe and crown is to legitimise the prophetic mission that Nenilava was required to accomplish in Madagascar and abroad. The verb 'to legitimise' is generally used

in terms of making something lawful or regular.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, the question that may arise is: 'Does such a legitimisation signify that Nenilava's mission or her prophetic vocation is doubtful or unconvincing?'

In response to such a question, Rakoto Endor Modeste (DCL 15) states firmly that nothing concerning Nenilava's vocation and mission needs to be legitimised by human acts. As he explains, the hard and fiery trials to which Jesus submitted Nenilava during many years (42 years) legitimise her, as well as her vocation and prophetic mission. Rakoto Endor Modeste emphasises that she had endured these trials without having tried to escape from them or to ask the Lord to ease them, although she knew perfectly well that most of them could put her life in mortal peril. He notes that these trials made Nenilava different from the prophets of the Old Testament who, according to him, were not tested in the same way as Nenilava. On the other hand, Nenilava's trials were similar to what Jesus underwent before he accomplished his messianic mission. To reinforce his argument, Rakoto Endor Modeste mentions, among others, the terrible fight in which Nenilava faced and defeated Satan disguised as a dragon (cf. 3.2.1). In his opinion, this combat is similar to that in which Jesus, in the desert, confronted Satan and made him lose face (Mt 4: 1-11).

Rakoto Endor Modeste (DCL 15) indicates that Nenilava had passed all the trials to which she was submitted, successfully and triumphantly: not because of her ability to summon up religious courage but because she exhibited a strong faith and absolute trust in Jesus, who promised not to abandon her in her struggles. Rakoto Endor Modeste then points out that by these trials Jesus had given Nenilava the benefit of the doubt. Therefore, Nenilava was already quite strongly legitimised as God's servant and prophetess when she went to the world to proclaim the Good News, to teach God's words and to perform, in the name of Jesus, miraculous works.

Consequently, Rakoto Endor Modeste (DCL 15) makes it clear that Nenilava's robe and crown to which the texts of Exodus 28 and Deuteronomy 28 were related were not at all intended to legitimise either her prophethood or her priesthood. In other words, he emphasises that it is not the robe and the crown that made Nenilava a prophetess and priestess or that caused her to be recognised as such. Rather, they served to display, to the Church, that Jesus himself had already accomplished this legitimisation after Nenilava had surmounted her trials.

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<sup>73</sup> For an explanation of the use of 'legitimation', see 2.5.

Besides, the robe and the crown were also intended to show that Jesus had fulfilled all that he had promised to Nenilava when he called her (DCL 15).

It should be said that Rakoto Endor Modeste is indisputably right if one simply considers this idea of legitimisation from the perspective of the members of the revival movement, especially from the angle of the 'children of Ankaramalaza'. Indeed, it is quite inconceivable that Christians belonging to the different revival movements in Madagascar, especially to the movement of Ankaramalaza, would doubt the legitimacy of Nenilava's prophetic vocation and mission. Such a doubt would be regarded as an insult to the Lord's anointed or even as blasphemy against Jesus, who is firmly believed, in the circle of the revival movement, to have called Nenilava and consecrated her as his messenger. Speaking of legitimisation in this circle as a function of the use of those Old Testament texts related to Nenilava's robe and crown, or related to the confirmation of her consecration, is thus inadequate or even out of place.

However, the situation is quite different if one considers the matter from the perspective of those who do not feel that they are part of the revival movement. Indeed, it should be noted that the revival movement in Madagascar, although divided into four groups and accepted among different denominations, does not include all of the Malagasy Christians.

According to what Rakotomaro (DCL 19), an informant from Antananarivo, has observed, the people who distance themselves from the revival movement can be divided into two categories. The first category includes pastors and lay leaders. On the one hand, they are not completely convinced of Nenilava's prophetic vocation and her charismatic power, and on the other hand, they do not recognise the spiritual authority she is supposed to have since she is a woman. The second category mainly comprises ordinary Christians. Here Rakotomaro refers to Christians who are actively involved in the Church's life but do not feel concerned with theological matters and the Church's policy. What they need are concrete facts or signs to strengthen and enhance their faith. In addition to these two categories of people are the non-Christians, who are part of the principal aim of Nenilava's prophetic and evangelical mission (DCL 19).

Rakotomaro (DCL 19) supposes that one of the reasons that prevent pastors and lay leaders from integrating themselves into the revival movement, especially that of Ankaramalaza which was founded by Nenilava is that they experience doubt about the role of Nenilava or about the function of the movement. He declares that these people are not to blame, especially as it is human to doubt. Rakotomaro reports that it is some of these sceptical

pastors and lay leaders who told him that the ‘children of Ankaramalaza’ made for Nenilava a priestly robe and a crown with the aim of legitimising her prophethood and charismatic leadership in the eyes of theologians and Church leaders.

Rakotomaro (DCL 19), to whom some of these theologians and Church leaders confided their point of view, declares that they consider as a failure the attempt of the revival movement of Ankaramalaza to legitimise Nenilava’s prophetic vocation and charismatic authority. The reason is that wearing, in the Christian Church, vestments modelled on garments worn by the high priest in the Old Testament is quite inconceivable and out of place. Besides, they note that these garments were specially made for men since there was no female high priestess in the Old Testament. Expressing their opinion concerning the idea that Nenilava wore these garments as Jesus’ bride, not as a high priestess, these sceptical pastors and Church leaders reply that nowhere in the Bible is there any mention of a bride wearing high priest’s vestments. According to them, the Holy Scriptures rather speak of God, Jesus, angels and saints as clothed in dazzling white robes (Dan 7: 9; Mk 9: 3; Mt 28: 3; Re 7: 13). Thus, they argue that Nenilava’s role in representing the Church as Jesus’ bride at the time of the confirmation of her consecration would have been more adequate and convincing or more effectively legitimised if she had worn a white, majestic and long robe instead of the high priest’s garments which have no place in the context of the Christian Church (DCL 19).

As far as Nenilava’s crown, which was made for symbolising her prophethood, is concerned, Rakotomaro (DCL 19) reports that the critics find it tolerable. Obviously, they admit that there is in the Bible no mention of a prophet wearing a crown as a symbol of his prophethood. However, they consider that the crown worn by Nenilava as a prophetess in the Christian Church is not so difficult for ordinary Christians to understand and to accept. As they confided to Rakotomaro (DCL 19), most ordinary Christians regard Nenilava’s crown as a symbol of the crown of life that Jesus promises as their reward to the faithful, when he returns to render to everyone according to what he/she has done.

It should be noted that these comments and examples of criticism, showing certain pastors’ and Christians’ disapproval of dressing Nenilava in high priest’s garments, were made some time after the event of the confirmation of Nenilava’s consecration. Of course, they were not taken into consideration because they were not directly addressed to the ‘children of Ankaramalaza’. Furthermore, none of the critics who are regarded as opposed to the revival movement features among responsible members and dignitaries of the MLC.

Besides, after the event of the confirmation of her consecration (1983) up until her death in 1998 Nenilava no longer wears the priestly robe and the crown.

As discussed above, the making of a priestly robe and a crown according to Exodus 28 and Deuteronomy 28 in order to legitimise Nenilava's prophethood and charismatic authority is regarded by sceptical pastors and lay leaders as incomprehensible and even inconceivable because they find it to be out of context. However, it should be noted that ordinary Christians do not share such an opinion. As mentioned earlier, this category of Christians is not concerned about theological matters. As Rakotomaro (DCL 19) affirms from his observation, what they need is to see more convincing and visible signs. Such signs, he says, are for them of great importance because they highlight Nenilava's spiritual authority as well as her charismatic leadership. Therefore, Rakotomaro asserts that it is no exaggeration to point out that Nenilava's priestly robe and crown well represent these convincing and visible signs.

Rakotomaro (DCL 19) then points out that Nenilava's robe and crown have caused no problem for ordinary Christians. On the contrary, these items have made a strong impression on them, owing to the fact that they make Nenilava unique in comparison with the other Malagasy prophets that Jesus had called before her.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, Rakotomaro emphasises that in the eyes of ordinary Christians, the MLC's use of Old Testament texts to create Nenilava's robe and crown served to legitimise her priesthood and prophethood, despite the efforts by the 'children of Ankaramalaza' to reject such an idea.

Rasoanjanahary (DCF 12), an informant from Antsirabe, is one of these ordinary Christians. She declares that before the event of the confirmation of Nenilava's consecration she had fervently followed the revival movement of Farihimena, founded by pastor Rakotozandry. She explains that the reason for her attachment to this movement was the fact that its founder was at the same time a pastor and a prophet, two qualities that brush aside all doubts. Rasoanjanahary confesses that during her unconditional adherence to the revival movement of Farihimena, she did not show much consideration for Nenilava, whom she regarded as a prophetess inferior to Rakotozandry. However, after having attended the ceremony of the confirmation of Nenilava's consecration, she has detached herself from the revival movement of Farihimena and adhered to that of Ankaramalaza.

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<sup>74</sup> In mentioning these other prophets, Rakotomaro (DCL 19) explains that ordinary Christians specifically refer to Rainisoalambo and Rakotozandry (cf. 3.2.1), who were always shown in white robes only.

Rasoanjanahary (DCF 12) reveals that such a change was, to some extent, the result of her seeing Nenilava admirably dressed in her special holy robe and crowned like a queen. In her opinion, the robe and crown, which showed Nenilava both as prophetess and as priestess, made her fundamentally different from other prophets not only by her outward appearance but also by her vocation. In fact, Rasoanjanahary contends that, because of her prophethood which took on a sacerdotal character, Nenilava was more than a mere prophetess. Being convinced that Nenilava was the great prophetess or the prophetess *par excellence*, she became a devoted follower of the revival movement of Ankaramalaza. Therefore, Rasoanjanahary felt an irresistible need to see her as often as possible. She then came, with her family and friends, several times a week to Nenilava's house to hear the Word of God, to be strengthened by the laying on of hands and by prayer, and to seek Nenilava's advice and guidance.

Another witness in the category of ordinary Christians is Ramarozaka (DCF 13), an informant from Fianarantsoa. His wife and one of his daughters have been fervent shepherds of Ankaramalaza for a long time. He, therefore, follows the revival movement of Ankaramalaza in order to please his family, especially his wife and daughter, and not by conviction. He often confides to his wife and other ordinary Christians that he appreciates Nenilava's preaching and work but the problem is that she lacks authority because she is too simple and too humble. In his opinion, Nenilava, as a prophetess and a woman leader working in a society still dominated by a patriarchal mentality, must be a person of authority in character and attitude.

When the date of the confirmation of Nenilava's consecration as well as her wearing of her special holy robe and crown on this occasion was officially announced, Ramarozaka (DCF 13) and his family travelled to Ankaramalaza, the *toby* (centre) where the event took place. He confesses that it was his burning curiosity, to know what would be going on, which impelled him to undertake the journey. Actually, Ramarozaka had already been informed about Nenilava's robe and crown. He was consequently very curious to see what Nenilava, an elderly Christian woman and prophetess of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, would look like under a crown and in a robe modelled on the high priest's garments in the Old Testament. Of course, he was inclined to think that such a vestment, which he ironically called an 'extraordinary get-up', in his first reaction, would do nothing but ridicule Nenilava. Therefore, he was tempted to blame those who proposed the idea to make such a strange robe.

However, Ramarozaka (DCF 13) completely changed his mind when he arrived in Ankaramalaza and saw Nenilava wearing the priestly robe and the crown during the ceremony of the confirmation of her consecration. He was extremely impressed, noticing that the robe and the crown admirably suited Nenilava instead of ridiculing her. But what particularly struck Ramarozaka was his perception that the priestly robe and the crown gave Nenilava not only a completely new look but also, and especially, a new personality reflecting grace, dignity and power of spirit.

Concluding his testimony, Ramarozaka (DCF 13) emphasises that Nenilava's robe and crown really brought out and confirmed her prophethood and priesthood as well as the quality of her charismatic leadership. He also affirms that the robe and the crown made Nenilava a person of authority and one unique in the Christian world. What is regrettable, in his opinion, is that they had been created rather too late in Nenilava's life and that the confirmation of her consecration was the only occasion on which Nenilava wore them.

It should be noted that Nenilava's priestly robe and crown made an impression not only on ordinary Christians but also on traditionalists. Rakoto Endor Modeste (DCL 15) reports that eight days after the confirmation of Nenilava's consecration, *Ampanjaka* (kings or chiefs of clans) from her ethnic group, who are at the same time responsible for traditional religion, visited Ankaramalaza. They had heard about Nenilava's robe and crown and believed that the special event celebrated in the Church of Ankaramalaza on which Nenilava wore them was organised to make her queen. As Rakoto Endor Modeste supposes, these *Ampanjaka* probably thought that Nenilava had inherited her father's nobility and power, so that she richly deserved such an elevation. Therefore, they came to visit her according to the traditional custom and in the expectation of seeing her wearing her robe and crown.

According to Rakoto Endor Modeste's report (DCL 15), Nenilava required that these *Ampanjaka* first go into the Church to hear the Word of God before meeting her. Rakoto Endor Modeste records that they were not at all reluctant to satisfy Nenilava's demand, although it was probably taboo for them to enter a Christian Church. After the service, the *Ampanjaka* visited Nenilava's house to congratulate her on her elevation to the rank of queen, to show respect for her and to give her offerings according to the custom.

Rakoto Endor Modeste (DCL 15) points out that these *Ampanjaka* obviously knew very well that Nenilava was a famous chief/king's and traditio-practitioner's daughter. They had also certainly been informed about the amazing story of her conversion to Christianity as well as the miraculous works that she had accomplished since she had founded the revival

movement of Ankaramalaza within the MLC. However, it is to be noticed that nothing of what they had heard about Nenilava previously did arouse their interest. But, as soon as they *Ampanjaka* were informed about a solemn and religious ceremony, aimed at consecrating Nenilava both as prophetess and priestess, they hastened to visit Ankaramalaza. As mentioned above, they arrived especially expecting to see Nenilava wearing her priestly robe and crown. However, Rakoto Endor Modeste (DCL 15) states clearly that Nenilava did not wear her robe and crown when she met them.<sup>75</sup> He mentions that the *Ampanjaka* also came to congratulate Nenilava and to honour her with offerings as was customarily done to a new *Ampanjaka*. Such gestures meant that these *Ampanjaka* accorded Nenilava's robe and crown much significance and, because of them, they recognised her as a queen although their ethnic group, particularly dominated by Arabic traditions, had never experienced a female ruler.

Rakoto Endor Modeste (DCL 15) does not mention whether or not Nenilava appreciated these traditionalists' congratulations and offerings as well as the honour they showed to her. However, he reports that she received them with all the honour and respect due to their noble status. According to the custom, she even slaughtered three bulls in their honour and prepared a lavish meal of rice and meat to feed them as well as the people who accompanied them before they returned home.

Taking what has been presented above into account, I consider that one is not wrong to acknowledge that in the eyes of ordinary Christians and traditionalists Nenilava's robe and crown function as a legitimisation of her prophethood and priesthood as well as of her charismatic authority. In other words, the use of Exodus 28 and Deuteronomy 28, related respectively to her priestly robe and her crown, serve to legitimise her prophetic and priestly mission. It is far from my intention to insinuate that it was her robe and crown which made Nenilava a priestess and prophetess or which gave her power and charisma. What I mean by 'legitimation' is that from the time when Nenilava wore her priestly robe and crown she became, at least for the above-mentioned categories of people, increasingly important, imposing, credible and popular.

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<sup>75</sup> According to Rakoto Endor Modeste, Nenilava just wore the priestly robe and crown only once, on the confirmation of her consecration in Ankaramalaza (1983). On the other hand, Andrianarijaona (DCL 14) affirms that she wore them for the second time during the fiftieth anniversary of the revival movement of Akaramalaza (1991).

### 3.3.3.2 Contextualisation

Another supposed function of the use of Old Testament texts, in other words Exodus 28 and Deuteronomy 28, by the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC) and the ‘children of Ankaramalaza’ in the making of Nenilava’s robe and crown is contextualisation. According to Lee’s definition (Lee 1993: 84),

“Contextualisation” comes from the word “context”. “Context” in turn is linked with “text”. “Context” and “text” are words taken from biblical hermeneutics. The “text” here, in Protestant circles, refers mainly to the biblical text, as the source of inspiration.

As for Mashao (2003: 128-129), who quotes Mazibuko (1992: 21-22),

Contextualisation is the effort to take seriously the specific context of each human group and person on its own terms and in all its dimensions – cultural, religious, social, political, as well as economic and to discern what the Gospel says in that context, so that the particular needs and hopes of people are addressed and met.

Considering these definitions, one can assume that contextualisation is an effort made to relate the context of a biblical text to the context in which the interpreter and the audience find themselves. More precisely, contextualisation is a process for interpreting biblical texts and applying them in various contemporary contexts. The principal aim of contextualisation is thus to make the revelation of God relevant and meaningful to a specific context. As Mashao (2003: 29) says, ‘contextualisation recognises the reciprocal influence of culture and socio-economic life’.

As mentioned in 1.1, the Malagasy Protestant theologians, especially the Lutheran ones, accord more weight to contextualisation than inculturation. According to Rakotomaro (DCL 19), an informant from Antananarivo, the reason for such a preference is that they feel that the term ‘inculturation’ places an emphasis on the ancestral or inherited cultures that generally serve as resources for theological thinking. Their negative attitude to this term, which has already been mentioned in Chapter One, is explained below.

Rakotomaro (DCL 19) emphasises that, on the one hand, the MLC is to a great extent still based on the traditional Western models brought by the missionaries and is also, on the other hand, dominated by the revival movements’ tendencies. Thus, Malagasy Lutheran theologians consider that almost all the Malagasy cultures inevitably contain elements of the traditional religion such as divination, idolatry and dependence on the ancestors.

Consequently, they regard inculturation as a danger to the Christian faith because it could appropriate the Word of God and distort its meaning. In other words, Malagasy Lutheran theologians take care not to do inculturation because they are afraid of falling into syncretism.

On the other hand, as Rakotomaro (DCL 19) specifies, Malagasy Lutheran theologians consider that contextualisation possesses a more extended meaning and places an emphasis on such matters as the Church's life and socio-economic or political realities. Therefore, it is, in their opinion, more appropriate to the Christian Church's thinking. Nevertheless, Malagasy Lutheran theologians admit that contextualisation and inculturation have the same purpose, which is to make the Christian religion genuine and meaningful to present-day Christians (DCL 19).

In this case study, neither the MLC nor 'the children of Ankaramalaza' specifically mentioned contextualisation as the purpose of their use of Old Testament texts. However, such a purpose can be discerned in the explanations given by certain leaders. Andrianarijaona (DCL 14), for instance, explains that the use of the high priest's garments, described in Exodus 28, as the model for Nenilava's holy robe is an application or an adaptation of the Old Testament context to the contemporary Church's life. He emphasises that the Old Testament, for the Malagasy Lutheran Christians, especially for the followers of the revival movement, is not a mere history of the past or just a shadow of the New Testament as theologians used to teach, but rather God's living Word. Therefore, theologians who are members of the 'children of Ankaramalaza' find no reason preventing them from applying or adapting it to the Church's life. In repeating what certain Malagasy Lutheran theologians have said, Andrianarijaona points out that the use of Exodus 28 to make Nenilava's robe is a way to cause the Old Testament to become alive in the contemporary Christian Church (DCL 14).

Rasata (DCL 7), an informant from Antananarivo, speaks of another form of contextualisation in arguing that the use of Exodus 28 and Deuteronomy 28 enables the MLC to provide its Christians with visible signs or symbols. He notices that, contrary to the Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church has eliminated most visible symbols. It retains only the cross and the sacramental elements, such as the water for baptism, and the bread and wine for Holy Communion. The Lutheran Church, therefore, became exclusively dependent on verbal symbols.

However, Rasata (DCL 7) points out that as humans living in this visible world, Christians, in order to enhance their faith and to become more active members of the Church, need larger numbers of visible signs or symbols. He indicates that although the Christian faith

does not depend on outside and material forms but only on Christ's redemptive act and the word of God, it needs to be made concrete and to be felt by means of visible symbols. Therefore, Nenilava's holy robe and crown, for Rasata, constitute some of these indispensable visible symbols. He argues that, once explicated properly and interpreted Christocentrically, these visible symbols provided by Nenilava's robe and crown can serve as effective means to strengthen Christians' faith and to affirm their life and trust in the Lord. Rasata's argument can be supported by Loewen (1976: 418), who suggests that '[African] people were probably starved for some ways of expressing their Christian experience other than only with words'.

### 3.4 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE RELEVANT TEXTS IN RELATION TO THE MALAGASY LUTHERAN CHURCH'S USE OF THESE TEXTS

In this section, I will attempt to offer a critical analysis of Exodus 28 and Deuteronomy 28, which the MLC and the 'children of Ankaramalaza' have employed to design and create Nenilava's robe and crown. My aim is to analyse these texts by making use of scientific sources and to compare them with the MLC's method of interpreting and using them. Exodus 28 provided models of garments that the MLC and the children of Ankaramalaza have applied to make Nenilava's robe (see 3.2.2.1 and 3.3.1), whereas Deuteronomy 28 has been used to emphasise Nenilava's prophetic message, symbolised by her crown (see 3.2.2.2 and 3.3.2).

#### **3.4.1 Exodus 28**

Exodus 28, specifically verses 6-43, is the text in which the priestly garments are described in detail. These garments consist largely of the ephod, the breastpiece, the robe of the ephod, the tunic and the head-plate.

##### *3.4.1.1 The ephod*

28:6 Make the ephod of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen, the work of a skilled craftsman. 7 It is to have two shoulder pieces attached to two of its corners, so it can be fastened. 8 Its skillfully woven waistband is to be like it, of one piece with the ephod and made with gold, and with blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and with finely twisted linen. 9 Take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel 10 in the order of their birth, six names on one stone and the remaining six on the other. 11 Engrave the names of the sons of Israel on the two stones the way a gem cutter engraves a seal. Then mount the stones in gold filigree settings 12 and fasten them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel. Aaron is to bear the names on his shoulders as

a memorial before the Lord. 13 Make gold filigree settings 14 and two braided chains of pure gold, like a rope, and attach the chains to the settings.’ (NIV)

The first priestly garment described in Exodus 28 is the ephod. Some scholars affirm that it is not easy to visualise what this sacerdotal vestment was exactly. Likewise, the original significance, as well as the form, of this item remains imprecise in all texts where the word ‘ephod’ (דְּוּפָא) appears, although it is mentioned numerous times in the Old Testament. Consequently, it is impossible to reconstruct a complete picture of the ephod’s form (Jacob 1992: 812) because nobody can claim to know what an ephod is really like (Brueggemann 1994: 905).

However, De Vaux (1965: 350) argues that the word דְּוּפָא was originally used for the robe of a goddess who was called Anath in a poem of Ras Shamra. He also points out that, in the ancient Assyrian tablets from Cappadocia, the word *epattu* (plural: *epadatu*) means ‘rich vestment’. De Vaux then supposes that the origin of the word ‘ephod’ is probably of foreign derivation. In addition, he observes that in using the ephod as one of the high priest’s garments, the Israelites seemingly desired to perpetuate archaic customs. As for Michaeli (1974:250), he speculates that the word ‘ephod’ might have something to do with the verb ‘to cover’.

As mentioned above, the word דְּוּפָא appears numerous times in the Old Testament, but apparently with different meanings or purposes (cf. Jdg 8: 27; 17: 5; 18: 14, 20 and 1 Sm 14: 3; 18-19, 36-42). Regarding the ephod referred to in Exodus 28: 6-14, Brueggemann (1994: 905) presents it as the principal garment that the high priest was required to wear over his tunic and cloak. In his opinion, its purpose was to announce and enhance the authority of Aaron as well as the other priests. According to Mackintosh (1974: 294), it constituted the sacerdotal vestment *par excellence* because without it the high priest was not supposed to be able to perform his office completely. This is why, according to him, the text describing the priestly garments begins with it.

In the text referred to above, the ephod was a kind of apron or corselet woven of materials such as gold (בְּחָז), blue (טַלְטַל), purple (אַמְרָא), scarlet (שָׁנִי) and fine linen (פָּנִי; (Ex 28: 6). The presentation of these precious materials shows that the ephod was exotically decorated and richly coloured. The text specifies that it consisted of two pieces fitted over the shoulders (עַל־כְּתָפַיִם). These two pieces were held up by straps designated as the

‘shoulder-pieces’ of the ephod, which were fastened together by means of a cord on the back of the wearer.

On these shoulder-pieces were set two onyx ( $\sim\text{h}\nu$ ) stones engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, according to their birth or according to their mothers (Godet 1985: 494): ‘six of the names on one stone and the other six names on the other stone’ (Ex 28: 9-11). These inscribed stones are said to be ‘stones of memorial’ ( $!w\text{r}kz \quad !ba$ ; (v. 12) or ‘stones of remembrance’ as some scholars used to term them. According to Brueggemann (1994: 905), it is these engraved stones which exhibit the main purpose of the ephod: ‘it serves to bring Israel, with all its generations gathered in a moment, into the holy presence of God, where Israel can be reconciled in a light that it can find nowhere else’.

Brueggemann’s opinion is complementary with Mackintosh’s observation (1974: 252), which points out that, because of these ‘stones of remembrance’, the children of Israel were represented before God by the high priest. He even emphasises that ‘whatever might be their infirmities, their errors, or their failures, yet their names glittered on these precious stones with unfading brilliancy’. Godet (1985: 494) notes that the stones engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel that Aaron had to shoulder were intended to remind him that his people constituted for him a sacred burden. He also specifies that the names of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved on these precious stones displayed the main function of the high priest as a mediator between God and the children of Israel.

As explained earlier, it is supposed that the ephod was used in early Israel for consulting Yahweh through the oracular process. Therefore, it might have been a kind of pouch in which were placed the Urim ( $\sim\text{Y}\text{r}\text{w}\text{a}$ ) and the Thummim ( $\sim\text{Y}\text{m}\text{t}$ ) that the ancient Israelites used for this process. However, it is to be noted that the ephod mentioned in Exodus 28: 6-11, which was worn by the high priest, namely Aaron, might possess no oracular significance because, as will be described below, the Urim and the Thummim were in the breastpiece and not in the ephod (Ex 28: 30).

From a Christian perspective, Dennett (1992: 296) notes that the ephod of Aaron was intended to symbolise the sacerdotal function that Christ would carry out. In other words, it spoke of future glories, which would be displayed when Christ, as the high priest who bears the sins of human beings, was to perform his sacerdotal function on the cross.

In comparing the two ephods, that of the high priest, described above, and that of Nenilava,

presented in 3.3.1.1, one can discern similarities and differences between them. The first similarity is noted in the primary importance attached to both of them. The high priest's ephod is said to be the most important of his garments because it constituted his sacerdotal vestment, with which he carried out his office properly. Similarly, the MLC and the 'children of Ankaramalaza' regard Nenilava's ephod as the most important item of her priestly vestments because it symbolises the foundation of Christ's sacerdotal function.

The second similarity is to be seen in the function of the shoulder-pieces. The high priest's shoulder-pieces were to remind the high priest that he had to shoulder his people. In other words, they were intended to show that the high priest was always ready to serve the children of Israel. A similar function is attributed to Nenilava's shoulder-pieces: they are intended to represent Jesus as the powerful, great high priest who is always ready to serve and to help those who believe in him.

The third similarity resides in the function of the precious stones engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, which were called 'stones of memorial' or 'stones of remembrance'. The precious stones that were set on the high priest's shoulder-pieces were intended to symbolise Israel, as represented before God by the high priest. Likewise, the precious stones set on Nenilava's shoulder-pieces, as explained by Malagasy Lutheran theologians, remind the believers that Christ permanently represents them before God.

The fourth similarity is discerned in the main function of the ephod. The high priest's ephod was to bring the children of Israel, with all their generations, into the holy presence of God, where they found forgiveness and reconciliation. This also displayed the main function of the high priest, as the mediator between God and the people. Similarly, the main function of Nenilava's ephod, according to Malagasy Lutheran interpreters, is to represent Christ as the everlasting great high priest, bringing the believers into the presence of God and acting for them as a mediator.

However, notable differences can be perceived between the high priest's ephod and that of Nenilava as far as their utilisation is concerned. The high priest's ephod was specifically associated with his sacerdotal office. It was used as a functional garment that the high priest was obliged to wear every time he carried out his sacerdotal duties. On the other hand, the MLC did not institute a priestly office for Nenilava. Her title as priestess (or high priestess) was merely symbolic. Accordingly, her ephod was made and worn not as a functional garment but as a 'prophetic symbolic action' (cf. Rakotoarivony et al. 1983: 4). Actually, Nenilava just wore her priestly robe only once, according to Rakoto Endor Modeste

(DCL 15) or twice, according to Andrianarijaona (DCL 14).

As said above, the high priest's ephod was connected with his actual sacerdotal function, but at the same time, it symbolised the future sacerdotal function that Christ would perform, according to some commentators (cf. Dennett 1992: 296). On the other hand, Nenilava's ephod serves to show the accomplishment of Christ's sacerdotal function and to symbolise his everlasting sacerdotal office.

It is also to be noted that a woman had never worn the Old Testament ephod, since there was in Israel no woman who had been consecrated as high priestess or priestess. It was made to be worn exclusively by the high priest, who was ordained according to the Israelites' religious law. On the other hand, Nenilava was a woman and was not ordained priestess or high priestess in a visible manner.

Besides, one should remember that, as scholars affirm, it is difficult to visualise the form of the ephod precisely (cf. Brueggemann 1994: 905). Therefore it is practically impossible to reproduce accurately or reconstruct this item by relying on the description given in Exodus 28, which scholars consider to be imprecise (Jacob 1992: 812), and also by relying on drawings showing the high priest wearing his garments. Considering this explanation, one can assert that the similarity between both ephods, that of the high priest and that of Nenilava, is not altogether convincing as far as their form is concerned.

#### *3.4.1.2 The breastpiece*

15 Fashion a breastpiece for making decisions, the work of a skilled craftsman. Make it like the ephod: of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen. 16 It is to be square, a span long and a span wide-- and folded double. 17 Then mount four rows of precious stones on it. In the first row there shall be a ruby, a topaz and a beryl; 18 in the second row a turquoise, a sapphire and an emerald; 19 and the third row a ligure, an agate, and an amethyst. 20 in the fourth row a chrysolite, an onyx and a jasper. Mount them in gold filigree settings. 21 There are to be twelve stones, one for each of the names of the sons of Israel, each engraved like a seal with the name of one of the twelve tribes. 22 For the breastpiece make braided chains of pure gold, like a rope. 23 Make two gold rings for it and fasten them to two corners of the breastpiece. 24 Fasten the two gold chains to the rings at the corners of the breastpiece, 25 and the other ends of the chains to the two settings, attaching them to the shoulder pieces of the ephod at the front. 26 Make two gold rings and attach them to the other two corners of the breastpiece on the inside edge next to the ephod. 27 Make two more gold rings and attach them to the bottom of the shoulder pieces on the front of the ephod, close to the seam just above the waistband of the ephod. 28 The rings of the breastpiece are to be tied to the rings of the ephod with blue cord, connecting it to the waistband, so that the breastpiece will not swing out from the ephod. 29 Whenever Aaron enters the Holy Place, he will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the breastpiece of decision as a continuing memorial before

the Lord. 30 Also put the Urim and the Thummim in the breastpiece, so they may be over Aaron's heart whenever he enters the presence of the Lord. Thus Aaron will always bear the means of making decisions for the Israelites over his heart before the Lord.' (NIV)

As recorded in Exodus 28: 28, the ephod should be inseparably connected with the pectoral or breastpiece. Michaeli (1974: 250) mentions that the term 'breastpiece' ( ! v x ) or 'pectoral' is only used for designating this piece of the high priest's sacerdotal vestments. It occurs only here and in Leviticus 8: 6-9, where Moses finally gives Aaron all these authorised insignia of office and authority. Consequently, Michaeli notes that it is difficult to define the etymology of this word. Regarding its usual translation, he argues that it is probably derived from the placing of this object on the breast of the high priest.

According to Exodus 28: 15, the breastpiece was a piece of cloth made of materials similar to those of the ephod, i.e. of gold ( b h z ), of blue ( t l k t ), of purple ( ! m g r a ), of scarlet ( y n v ) and of fine twined linen ( v v ). This demonstrates that the dress of the high priest in ancient Israel was required to display great pride and value. According to the divine recommendation, the ! v x should be square and double: its length a span and its breadth likewise a span (v. 16) and it had to be attached to the ephod (v. 28). It was approximately 9 inches (approximately 22, 86 centimetres) square, and doubled or folded over, like a pouch in which the Urim and the Thummim were kept (v. 30). In the text, it is said to be a 'breastplate of judgement', but other translators render it 'oracle pouch', which is probably intended to indicate the purpose of this item (Hyatt 1980: 282).

As mentioned above, the ! v x should be connected with the ephod. The system of connection described in vv. 22-28, which is rather complicated, can briefly be presented as follows: two rings ( t [ b j ) at the inside lower corners of the breastpiece were used to attach it to the rings of the ephod with a blue cord. Two golden rings on the top of the breastpiece fastened it to the shoulder-pieces of the ephod with two golden chains ( h r v r v ).

Scholars suppose that the breastpiece probably derived from the royal tradition, rather than from the priestly tradition. Michaeli (1974: 251), for instance, argues that the garments of the high priest were no doubt borrowing elements from royal vestments, while the monarchy had disappeared in the period when the sacerdotal redactors compiled the book of Exodus. As for Hyatt (1980: 282), he points out that scholars specifically refer to a royal piece of clothing,

similar to the breastpiece, found in the tomb of a king of Byblos who reigned during the Middle Bronze Age. According to his report, this royal breastpiece consists of an approximately rectangular gold plate set with precious stones, and hangs from a gold chain, which is directly reminiscent of the ‘twisted chains’ of verse 24. Hyatt also adds that the ‘covering’ of the king of Tyre in Ezekiel 28: 13 is to be similarly understood; it contained only nine stones, but all of them occur in the present list (1980: 282).

According to the divine recommendation in verses 17-21, four rows of three precious stones engraved with the names of the twelve sons of Jacob, should be set on the breastpiece. Thus, the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were twice inscribed on the vestments of the high priest, on the ephod as described previously, and on the breastpiece.

The function of the breastpiece is specified in verses 29-30: Aaron had to bear continually before Yahweh both the names of the children of Israel and their judgement upon his heart when he entered the holy place of the tabernacle/the temple. In other words, these stones were set on this garment in order to symbolise the relation of love that linked the high priest with his people (Godet 1985: 496). Michaeli (1974: 254) argues that this function, attributed to the breastpiece as well as the ephod, emphasised the central role of the high priest as mediator between Yahweh and the children of Israel.

As mentioned in verse 30, the breastpiece contained the Urim (~ΥΡWΑ) and the Thummim (~ΥMΤ). These names literally mean ‘lights and perfection’ (Kaiser 1994: 115). It is to be noted that the function of these objects is not specified in the text. Likewise, it is not indicated what the Urim and the Thummim looked like. Hyatt (1980: 283) suggests that they were certainly sacred lots that the Israelites, in earlier times, used while consulting Yahweh through the oracular process. With regard to their forms, Kaiser (1994: 1061) supposes that they probably resembled flat stones (of different shapes and colours), similar to the ‘purim’, i.e., the dice used for casting lots.

Referring to Numbers 27: 21, Kaiser (1994: 115) argues that the Urim and the Thummim were especially used in ancient Israel during times of crisis to determine the will of God. In his opinion, they were only intended to symbolise the special revelation open to the high priest, rather than being used for oracular purposes. According to Hyatt (1980: 283), these oracular purposes may have ceased after the time of David. Considering these arguments, one can infer that in mentioning these objects in v. 30 the sacerdotal redactors

connect them with the notion of a memorial and the mediation of the high priest, and no longer with the practice of the oracle.

In comparing the two breastpieces, that of the high priest described above and that of Nenilava presented in 3.3.1.2, one can observe similarities and differences between them. The similarity is discerned in the function of the breastpiece. As described above, the main function of the high priest's breastpiece, on which were set precious stones engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, was to remind Aaron that he had to bear continually the names of the children of Israel for a memorial before God. These precious stones are said to symbolise the relation of love that linked the high priest with the people. As its name 'breastpiece of judgement' indicates, the high priest's breastpiece was also intended to remind the high priest that he had to bear the judgement of Israel upon his heart when he went to the holy place.

Similarly, Nenilava's breastpiece, presented in 3.3.1.2, with its precious stones engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, is designed to represent Christ bearing the believers on his heart. The engraved precious stones set on it remind the Christians, especially the revival movement of Ankaramalaza, of Jesus' invaluable love and his redemptive intercession or mediation. Nenilava's breastpiece, therefore, points out the central role of Christ as the only mediator between God and the human beings.

Concerning the difference, it should be noted that like the ephod, the high priest's breastpiece was a functional garment worn by the high priest every time he was performing his sacerdotal duties. On the other hand, Nenilava's breastpiece was worn to represent symbolically Christ's love for human beings and his mediation.

The presence of the Urim and the Thummim in the high priest's breastpiece, though they were connected with the notion of memorial and the mediation of the high priest and no longer with oracular practice, also makes both breastpieces different from each other. Obviously, Nenilava's breastpiece contains no Urim and Thummim.

#### *3.4.1.3 The robe of the ephod*

28:31 Make the robe of the ephod entirely of blue cloth, 32 with an opening for the head in its center. There shall be a woven edge like a collar around this opening, so that it will not tear. 33 Make pomegranates of blue, purple and scarlet yarn around the hem of the robe, with gold bells between them. 34 The gold bells and the pomegranates are to alternate around the hem of the robe. 35 Aaron must wear it

when he ministers. The sound of the bells will be heard when he enters the Holy Place before the Lord and when he comes out, so that he will not die.’ (NIV)

The robe of the ephod, according to Exodus 28: 32, refers to a long and sleeveless robe usually worn by the high priest under the ephod, which is probably why it was termed the ‘robe (לַיָּמִין) of the ephod (דָּפָא)’. The kind of cloth of which this garment was made is not specified in the text, but one can suppose that, although it was not as luxurious as the ephod, it was probably made of precious cloth (Godet 1985: 497).

In terms of Kaiser’s description (1994: 115), it was woven into one piece and reached a little below the knees. It was only seen from the waist down because the upper part of it was supposed to be covered by the ephod and the breastpiece. This robe of the ephod had slits for the arms and a hole for the head, with a woven binding around in order to keep it from being torn (v. 32).

As recommended in v. 31 the robe of the ephod was supposed to be made of blue colour. According to Dennett (1992: 303), the colour ‘blue’ (תֵּלֶכֶת) indicates the function of this garment. In fact, he argues that the colour blue, which is commonly interpreted as the colour of the heavens, symbolises the heavenly character of the sacerdotal function attributed to the high priest as well as the place where he had to perform it. Dennett also suggests that the use of the expression ‘that it not be rent’ (לֹא יִרְצָק) in verse 32 was probably aimed at reminding the high priest that the one who was consecrated to bear the heavenly character had to be unfailing in his perfection.

It is recorded in verse 33 that along the hem of the robe of the ephod were blue (תֵּלֶכֶת), purple (אַמְרָא), and scarlet (צָרְבָּא) alternating, pomegranates (אַמְרָא) and golden bells (בְּרִיָּא). According to Hyatt’s explanation (1980: 284), pomegranates were plentiful in ancient Palestine and in ancient art and mythology, they were often represented as symbols of fertility. But he assumes that no such symbolism is apparent in the present text. In my opinion, the pomegranate, which contains innumerable seeds, might represent the fruitfulness or the fullness of the life that God provided for the children of Israel through the sacerdotal duties carried out by the high priest.

As far as the bells are concerned, they must have jingled as the high priest moved about when he served in the holy place in the tabernacle or in the temple. Hyatt (1980: 284) suggests that, originally, the function of the sounds of these bells was ‘to frighten away any

demons that might be present'. But he specifies that in its present form, verse 35 may mean

[...] either the high priest is to follow this practice lest he die for breach of an important ceremonial requirement; or as long as the people can hear the tinkling of the bells the people know the high priest is still alive; if they cease for a long period, the people may suspect accidental death and take appropriate measures (1980: 284).

In Fox's view (1995: 416), the bells might have served a protective function. In his opinion, their sounds were intended to maintain the proper distance between God and Aaron when the latter carried out his duties in the holy place of the tabernacle.

In comparing the two robes of the ephod, that of the high priest described above and that of Nenílava presented in 3.3.1.3, one can again observe similarities and differences between them. The first similarity resides in the function of this item. The primary function of the high priest's robe of the ephod was to symbolise the heavenly character of the high priest's sacerdotal office as well as the place where it had to be performed. It also reminded the high priest that because of the heavenly character he had to bear he was to be unflinching in his perfection. A similar function was attributed to Nenílava's robe of the ephod; it prefigures the divine character of Christ's heavenly sacerdotal office. It also represents Christ as the great high priest who is perfect, holy, harmless, and pure.

The second similarity is perceivable in the symbolism represented by the pomegranates and the golden bells. The pomegranates hung alternately with golden bells on the high priest's robe of the ephod are said to represent the fruitfulness or the fullness of the life that God had provided for the children of Israel through the sacerdotal duties carried out by the high priest. Similarly, the pomegranates on Nenílava's robe of the ephod symbolise the fruit of the Spirit and, at the same time, illustrate the richness and the plenitude of life emanating from Christ, which permeates his people.

However, the difference between both robes of the ephod is evident when one refers to the functions of the golden bells suspended on their respective edges. In the Old Testament, the sounds of these golden bells were intended to make people aware that the high priest was carrying out his duties. If their tinkling ceased for a long period, people considered that an accidental death might have happened to the high priest and that appropriate measures should be taken.

On the other hand, the function of the bells hung on Nenílava's robe of the ephod,

according to the MLC's interpreters, is to make Christians aware that Christ will return to judge the living and the dead. In other words, the sounds of the bells of Nenilava's robe play the role of the reveille, reminding the Christians, especially the members of the revival movement of Ankaramalaza that they must wake up, for the end of the age is near.

#### 3.4.1.4 *The tunic*

28:39 Weave the tunic of fine linen and make the turban of fine linen. The sash is to be the work of an embroiderer. 40 Make tunics, sashes and headbands for Aaron's sons, to give them dignity and honor 41 after you put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they may serve me as priests. 42 Make linen undergarments as a covering for the body, reaching from the waist to the thigh. 43 Aaron and his sons must wear them whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting or approach the altar to minister in the Holy Place, so that they will not incur guilt and die. This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants.' (NIV)

It is to be noted that the text of Exodus 28: 39-43 mentions the tunic or 'coat' (ṭnṭk) without giving explicative details. Hyatt (1980: 285) explains that it was in ancient Israel the usual undergarment for both sexes. In his opinion, it was a long robe, usually with long sleeves, of which the lower part almost reached the feet. Contrary to Hyatt's opinion, though, Kaiser (1994: 1060) claims that the high priest's tunic had short sleeves.

Kaiser (1994: 1060) points out that the tunic was the first garment that the high priest and priests wore against their bodies in order to cover their nakedness, as the verse 42 indicates. It was held in place by a girdle (jnbā) that scholars call a 'sash'. As mentioned in the text, it was made of embroidered fine linen (vv). As an undergarment, the tunic had placed over it the other garments such as the robe of the ephod or the sacerdotal robe, the ephod with its shoulder-pieces and the breastpiece or the pectoral. Except for its lower part, which reached the feet, it was consequently hidden by the robe of the ephod.

As said above, the priestly redactors mention the recommendation to make a tunic for Aaron without furnishing more details. As a result, Wiseman (1977: 202) makes the remark that it is hard to see what relation this tunic bore to the other priestly garments. He also mentions that the function of this garment remains obscure. Obviously, the text indicates that this item was intended to give Aaron and his sons dignity (dwbk) and honour (hrapt ;v. 40), but he points out that, as mentioned in Exodus 28: 2, this is the purpose of all the priestly

garments and not of the tunic only. However, Dennett (1992: 305) suggests that the fine linen of which the tunic was made symbolised the divine purity of the high priest's sacerdotal office. He also argues that the other garments (for glory and beauty) hiding this simple tunic represent the glory of the Son of God covering the glory of his humanity.

In comparing the two tunics, that of the high priest briefly described above and that of Nenilava presented in 3.3.1.4, one can establish a similarity and a difference between them. The similarity is discerned in the function of the tunic. The fine linen of which the high priest's tunic was made indicated that it symbolised the divine purity of the high priest's sacerdotal office. However, the tunic as hidden by the other garments, for glory and beauty, might also represent the glory of Jesus' humanity covered by the glory of the Son of God.

Similarly, the function of Nenilava's tunic is to symbolise the absolute personal purity of Christ, which is hidden from unbelievers' eyes but visible to the faithful Christians' spiritual eyes. It also illustrates the grace and the glory of Christ as the holy and perfect great high priest who is set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens but meets our needs.

However, it should be pointed out that the function of the tunic also causes the high priest's tunic and that of Nenilava to differ from each other. As mentioned above, scholars find that owing to the lack of details the function of the high priest's tunic remains obscure. Consequently, it is not easy to define the purpose for which it was really used. On the other hands, Malagasy Lutheran interpreters easily define the function of Nenilava's tunic without taking the original function of this item in the Old Testament into account.

#### *3.4.1.5 The head-plate*

28:36 Make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it as on a seal: "Holy to the Lord".  
37 Fasten a blue cord to it to attach it to the turban; it is to be on the front of the turban. 38 It will be on Aaron's forehead, and he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate, whatever their gifts may be. It will be on Aaron's forehead continually so that they will be acceptable to the Lord.' (NIV)

The last garment of the high priest to be considered here is the head-plate. Actually, its description is given in the text before that of the tunic, but since it is not part of the high priest's vestments, I present it in the last place.

As specified in the text, the head-plate (CYC) refers to a plate of pure gold, which

constituted a garment that the high priest, namely Aaron, had to bear on his forehead (כִּטְמוֹן). It was fastened on the high priest's fine linen turban by a blue cord (לַיָּטֵב). On it was engraved the inscription: 'Holy to the Lord'. According to Hyatt (1980: 284), the usual meaning of this item is 'blossom' or 'flower'. This is because it was something like a 'flower' that was tied to the high priest's turban by a diadem of violet ribbon (Wiseman 1977: 202).

It is to be noted that in three other passages, the word 'crown' (כִּטְמוֹן), which is referred to as the same object, occurs: 'the holy crown' (Ex 29: 6), 'the plate of the holy crown' (Ex 39: 30), 'the golden plate, the holy crown' (Lv 8: 9). It is also worth noting that in pre-exilic times it was the king who wore the crown (2 Sm 1: 10; 2 Ki 11: 12; Ps 89: 39). The wearing of a crown by the high priest is therefore, as Hyatt (1980: 285) argues, 'another example of the adoption by the priesthood of a symbol formerly associated with the kings of Israel, like the breastpiece of judgement'.

Hyatt (1980: 285) points out that the inscription 'Holy to the Lord' was intended to signify that 'the high priest had been set apart as being especially holy to Yahweh, and he represented Israel as a holy people'. According to Brueggemann (1994: 907), this insignia on the head-plate was to remind the high priest that 'he was not a priest to the people but was concerned only for the glory of Yahweh'. As for Fox (1995: 252), he emphasises that the head-plate with its inscription 'Holy for Yahweh' (his translation) served to symbolise 'the high priest's efforts to obtain forgiveness on behalf of the Israelites, one of his primary functions as priest'. This function, he outlines, tended to 'cover even unintentional transgressions, such as accidents in the handling of sacred cultic objects'.

As already explained in 3.2.2.2, it was a crown and not a high priest's head-plate that the MLC and the children of Ankaramalaza made for Nenilava. Nevertheless, one can observe a similarity between the high priest's head-plate described above and Nenilava's crown: both of them are inscribed with the words 'Holy to the Lord'.

But it is to be noted that the two items are quite different from each other as far as the precious metal of which they were made is concerned. The high priest's head-plate was made of pure gold, whereas Nenilava's crown was made of pure silver.

Regarding their shapes, the high priest's head-plate was a golden plate in the shape of a flower, which was tied to his forehead. On the other hand, Nenilava's crown, which made of silver, is an item similar to a bride's crown and, besides the inscription 'Holy to God', it is

inscribed with symbolic motifs (cf. 3.2.2.2).

Concerning their functions, the high priest's head-plate was to signify that he was set apart as being especially holy to Yahweh. It was also intended to remind the high priest that as long as he wore it he represented Israel as a holy people. On the other hand, Neneva's crown is intended to show the glory of God and to symbolise, by means of the motifs inscribed on it, the prophetic message that the Lord had entrusted to her. Besides, it is also to remind Christians that all who believe in and obey this prophetic message will be blessed, whereas whoever disobeys it will be cursed.

### **3.4.2 Deuteronomy 28**

Deuteronomy 28 is the text where blessings, as rewards for the Israelites' obedience to God, and curses, as consequences for their disobedience, are recorded in extreme detail. Before proceeding to the detailed analysis of these blessings and curses, I consider that it is first necessary to offer a general survey of the document recorded in Chapter 28 as a whole.

As Clifford (1982: 147) explains, the texts of this genre in ancient Israelite custom were not mere legal documents; they also reflect ceremonies in which the people stood before God and consciously took upon themselves the consequences of their acts. As for God, he would reward fidelity to the oaths sworn before him and would punish infidelity.

According to Mann (1995: 148), the details recorded in Deuteronomy 28 were not the product of Moses' imagination; rather, they expressed the terms of the political model of a treaty, including blessings and curses, in the light of which ancient Israel understood its relationship to Yahweh. Besides, Mann (1995: 149) assumes that the blessings and curses also reflected a world-view showing the inextricable link between nature and the divine power. This world-view in ancient Israel, according to him, was closely tied to the covenant theology of blessing and curses in which Yahweh controlled and used the natural forces as one means of awarding favours or of inflicting punishments.

Clifford (1982: 147) notes that this chapter is a 'patchwork of sections gradually added to reflect the actual conditions of exile'. As for Nelson (2002: 327), he points out that much of the content of Deuteronomy is thoroughly Yahwistic (vv. 9, 36, 60, 64, 68). Therefore, he argues that Deuteronomy 28 is a scribal reworking of borrowed material, relating to political curses, for theological purposes. He also emphasises that, as was the case with blessings and curses in the ancient treaties and law codes, this catalogue was intended to motivate obedience.

### 3.4.2.1 *The blessings*

28:1 If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. 2 All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God: 3 you will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. 4 The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock-- the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. 5 Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. 6 You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out. 7 The Lord will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven. 8 The Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The Lord your God will bless you in the land he is giving you. 9 The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the Lord your God and walk in his ways. 10 Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they will fear you. 11 The Lord will grant you abundant prosperity-- in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground-- in the land he swore to your forefathers to give you. 12 The Lord will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. 13 The Lord will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the Lord your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom. 14 Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them.' (NIV)

The pronouncements of the blessings recorded in Deuteronomy 28: 1-14, according to Coffman (1988: 305) can be understood as prophetic statements, of which the aim was to encourage the Israelites to walk in God's ways. The blessings, therefore, only occupy the first fourteen verses of this lengthy chapter, while the curses, which will be treated in the next sub-heading, are delineated more extensively (Dt 28: 15-68). This disparity is, according to Schultz (1971: 90), because the Israelites had already experienced the blessings of God or his favours under Moses' leadership. Suggesting another explanation, Clifford (1982: 146) observes that according to the customs prevailing among ancient Near Eastern peoples, the curses always far outnumbered the blessings. As for Nelson (2002: 327), he contends that the curses and threats in this chapter outnumber the blessings because the goal of the pronouncements was to deter the Israelites from transgressing God's commandments.

Clifford (1982: 147) points out that the  $\text{h}\bar{\text{k}}\text{r}\bar{\text{b}}$  (blessings) pronounced in this chapter are tied to the land of Canaan that Yahweh had promised to Abraham and his descendants. The land that the Israelites were going to inherit, he said, ‘will or will not yield life to them according to their obedience’. In other words, the children of Israel will be maintained in the fruitful Promised Land and protected from their enemies if they obey the voice of the Lord their God, observe his commandments and walk in his ways (cf. Dt 28: 1-2).

It should be noted that the blessings  $\text{h}\bar{\text{k}}\text{r}\bar{\text{b}}$  recorded in vv. 1-14 are coordinated with the much longer list of curses in verses 15-68 by the opposition of the words ‘if you obey’ (;(vv. 1-2) and ‘if you do not obey’ (v. 15; cf. v. 58). According to Nelson’s note (2002: 427), the positive condition of verse 1 is carried forwards by ‘if you obey/keep’ ( $[\text{m}\bar{\text{v}}/\text{r}\bar{\text{m}}\bar{\text{v}}]$ ) in verses 2, 9 and 13. As for the negative conditions of verses 15 and 58, they are continued by ‘because you did not obey’ in verses 45 and 62.

The blessings outlined in the first catalogue can be divided into two groups, such as verses 3-6, which contain the blessings themselves or the beatitudes, and verses 7-14 which are punctuated by promises as positive results of the Israelites’ obedience. The beatitudes can be written and arranged as follows, according to Schultz’s scheme (1971: 90):

Blessed shall you be in the city  
 Blessed shall you be in the field  
 Blessed shall be the  
     . fruit of your body  
     . fruit of your soul  
     . fruit of your livestock  
     . increase of your herds  
 Blessed shall be your baskets  
     and your kneading trough  
 Blessed shall you be when you come in  
 Blessed shall you be when you go out (cf. vv. 3-6).

According to Clifford’s interpretation (1982: 149), the six beatitudes in verses 3-6 are presented in opposites: city-field, basket-kneading trough, and coming in-going out. He explains that this literary device is known as ‘merism’ (from Greek *meros*, ‘part’), in which aspects are mentioned to express totality. He also observes that the word ‘fruit’ ( $\text{y}\bar{\text{r}}\text{p}$ ), used

in verse 4 for human offspring, animal offspring and the produce of the soil, reminds us that the Israelites did not objectify nature but perceived continuity in life. Therefore, he states that 'Yahweh's blessings enhanced all life in the world' (1982: 149). As for Nelson (2002: 329), he posits that the beatitudes of verses 3-6 are reflected by the promises of verses 7-13a in a roughly concentric structure: commercial and agricultural prosperity in verses 3 and 12-13a; fruit of the womb, ground and cattle in verses 4 and 11; food in verses 5 and 8; and military affairs in verses 6 and 7.

These divine favours will constitute the Israelites' providential lot in their whole pattern of life if they faithfully obey ( [ mV) the commandments (hWcm) of God and walk in his ways. As stated in verse 2, these divine blessings or beatitudes will even be applied to them if they are consistently concerned about living in accordance with what Yahweh has revealed to them. In other words, Yahweh will provide a beneficial matrix for the existence of the children of Israel in nature and history. However, all of this depends on and grows out of adherence to the way and will of the Lord as spelled out in the commandments and statutes (Miller 1990:197).

The second group of blessings, which contain the promises, are presented in verses 7-14. According to Schultz's arrangement (1971: 90), these promises following the beatitudes can be listed as follows:

God promised to grant them [the Israelites] victory over their enemies.

God promised to give them possession of the land of Canaan.

God promised to make them successful in all their activities so that their land would be productive.

God promised to establish them as a people dedicated to himself

If they would

- keep the commandments of the Lord and
- walk in his ways,

When they obey the commandments of God

- not deviating to the right or to the left,
- not turning towards idols to worship them;

God will

- Make Israel the head and not the tail,
- Prosper them materially,
- Provide them with rain for their crops,

- Enrich them so they can lend to many nations,
- Grant them recognition as God's people by all the nations of the earth (cf. vv 7-14).

In reading the beatitudes in verses 3-6, it seems that they are anonymous, but the promises that follow identify Yahweh as their grammatical subject. Mann (1995: 149) proposes that these promises reflect the world-view prevailing in ancient Israel. In his opinion, the best example illustrating this world-view is the moral significance of rain in which the provision of rain is regarded as a sign of God's blessing, while the withholding of rain is a sign of God's curse (Dt 28: 12a; 23-24; see also other texts of Deuteronomy such as 8: 7 and 11: 10-17).

According to Nelson (2002: 329), the language used to pronounce these promises, especially in verses 8b-10, becomes more Deuteronomic and theological. In his opinion, the verse 7 in this second catalogue of blessings, which emphasises the promises, interprets verse 6 in military terms by means of the ideology of the Divine Warrior. The generalised expression 'go out (אָוֹב) and come in (אָצַי)' is, therefore, taken to mean military expeditions in verse 7, and the urban/rural pair of verse 3 is expanded into agricultural and financial enterprises by verses 12 and 12a-13a (2002: 329).

Also to be noticed in this list of promises is the particular exaltation of Israel in verse 13, which emphasises what Yahweh promised in verse 1 (the Lord your God will set you high (אֲנִי אֶעֱלֶיךָ) above all the nations on earth). According to this exaltation, Israel is promised to be 'the head (רֵאשִׁית), and not the tail (אֲחֵרִית)', and 'above (לְמַעַל) only, and not beneath (לְמַטָּה)'. Coffman (1988: 307) points out that all these promises are merely facets of the larger favour that Yahweh freely grants Israel in every conceivable way: bodily health, material wealth, victory in war, etc. In his opinion, everything that is divinely aimed at making Israel fruitful, prosperous and strong in Canaan is included in these promises.

However, it should be noted that at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end, the list of potential blessings including beatitudes and promises is bracketed and punctuated by the condition of obedience to the commandments and walking in the ways of the Lord (vv. 1, 9, 13 and 14). The list even concludes with the explicit demand of the primary commandment, the exclusive worship of Yahweh that is placed upon the children of Israel. This demand is repeatedly expressed in the clause 'I command you today' (vv. 1, 13, and 14).

Miller (1990:197) argues that because of the repetition of this expression, the emphasis of the temporal note cannot be lost. He also underlines the point that the divine teaching and requirement contained in the blessings are being laid upon Israel 'right now', whenever 'this day', referred to in the pronouncements, occurs.

The *hkrb* (blessings) that follow from Israel's obedience have to do with three areas: the fruitfulness of the land and the people (vv. 3-5, 8, 11-12), victory over their enemies (v. 7), and an exalted place as God's holy people (vv. 1, 9, 10 and 13). In other words, presented in these pronouncements of the blessings are Israel's national dignity, its prosperity and its glory based on diligent observation of God's commandments (Mackintosh 1994: 307). If Israel as a nation does not faithfully obey Yahweh's commandments, the divine favours promised in the blessings will be supplanted by the curses or God's disfavours with their tragic consequences. The blessings, therefore, portray the weightiness of the bond between Yahweh and his people, which shows the intensity and fullness of life with the Lord.

In comparing the analysis of the text concerning the blessings given above to the MLC's interpretation of the same text (see 3.3.2.1), one can observe similarities and dissimilarities. The similarities can be noted in the following points. In Deuteronomy 28: 1-14, the blessings were intended to emphasise the demand of the primary commandment, the exclusive worship of God, because such special favours granted to Israel would make all peoples recognise that Yahweh is the only living and eternal God. Thus, the pronouncements of the blessings were prophetic statements aimed at encouraging the Israelites and their descendants in their walking in Yahweh's ways and their observance of the Lord's instructions.

In the MLC's interpretation, the same text that is believed to have been given to Nenilava by Jesus serves to show the Christians how God, who is the Lord of the heaven and the earth, rewards those who faithfully and perseveringly worship him. The blessings are, therefore, understood as prophetic words intended, simultaneously, to strengthen the Christians' faith and to urge them to believe and trust the word of God that Nenilava as a prophetess had proclaimed and taught.

The divine favours pronounced in the blessings were prophetically promised to constitute the children of Israel's providential lot, encompassing their entire pattern of life, if they would diligently hearken to the voice of Yahweh their God and unconditionally obey his commandments. Yahweh also promised to exalt Israel 'high above all nations' in order that

they should be ‘the head, and not the tail’ and ‘above only, and not beneath’. In other words, God promised to make the children of Israel fruitful, prosperous and strong in the land of Canaan if they would faithfully adhere to his ways and not go after other gods to serve them.

Similarly, God fills with his grace, peace and protection the Christians who obey and put into practice the divine message that he addresses to them through Nenilava, as well as through the prophetic and symbolic action conveyed by the confirmation of her consecration. Moreover, the Lord clothes with his heavenly glory and righteousness the Christians who devote themselves to do what the Word of God says, and the fact that they have been specially chosen by Christ will be seen by the nations.

The blessings directed to the children of Israel portrayed the seriousness of the covenant that Yahweh made with his chosen people. They showed the intensity of the life that Yahweh promised would comprise the Israelites’ lot provided they would remain faithful to this covenant.

Similarly, MLC’s theologians point out that the blessings pronounced during the confirmation of Nenilava’s consecration demonstrate the weightiness of the bond between Christ and Christians. This bond is the result of the new covenant made by Christ with his faithful believers, in which the latter become children of God and experience the fullness of life with him.

With regard to dissimilarities, they are obvious in the following respects. The blessings promised to the Israelites were corporate. They were given to the people as a whole or to Israel as a nation because the divine instructions were conveyed to show the children of Israel how to live together as the people of God. Therefore, the fate of the nation or the community also constituted the fate of the individual.

As far as the blessings that have been given through Nenilava are concerned, they are more individual in nature. They are promised to each Christian, to whom Nenilava’s prophetic message and actions are individually addressed. Therefore, the fate of the Church is not the fate of the Christian as an individual, in the sense that each Christian will be judged according to his/her belief or disbelief in Nenilava’s proclamation.

The blessings addressed to the children of Israel were linked to the land of Canaan that Yahweh had promised to Abraham and his offspring. If they walked in Yahweh’s ways and hearkened to his voice they would be maintained in the land and protected against their enemies, and they would live there a life of happiness and prosperity. Therefore, the blessings promised to the Israelites merely included earthly favours.

On the other hand, the blessings given to Nenilava are associated with the kingdom of God. Those who do not doubt but hearken to the divine and prophetic message that Jesus entrusted to Nenilava and put it into practice will inherit it. The blessings promised to the heirs of this kingdom of God include both bodily needs in the present life and everlasting life in the future.

#### *3.4.2.2 The curses*

28:15 However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: 16 You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. 17 Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. 18 The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. 19 You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out. 20 The LORD will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him. 21 The Lord will plague you with diseases until he has destroyed you from the land you are entering to possess. 22 The Lord will strike you with wasting disease, with fever and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, with blight and mildew, which will plague you until you perish. 23 The sky over your head will be bronze, the ground beneath you iron. 24 The Lord will turn the rain of your country into dust and powder; it will come down from the skies until you are destroyed. 25 The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth. 26 Your carcasses will be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away. 27 The lord will afflict you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors, festering sores and the itch, from which you cannot be cured. 28 The Lord will afflict you with madness, blindness and confusion of mind. 29 At midday you will grope about like a blind man in the dark. You will be unsuccessful in everything you do; day after day you will be oppressed and robbed, with no one to rescue you. 30 You will be pledged to be married to a woman, but another will take her and ravish her. You will build a house, but you will not live in it. You will plant a vineyard, but you will not even begin to enjoy its fruit. 31 Your ox will be slaughtered before your eyes, but you will eat none of it. Your donkey will be forcibly taken from you and will not be returned. Your sheep will be given to your enemies, and no one will rescue them. 32 Your sons and daughters will be given to another nation, and you will wear out your eyes watching for them day after day, powerless to lift a hand. 33 A people that you do not know will eat what your land and labor produce, and you will have nothing but cruel oppression all your days. 34 The sights you see will drive you mad. 35 The Lord will afflict your knees and legs with painful boils that cannot be cured, spreading from the soles of your feet to the top of your head. 36 The Lord will drive you and the king you set over you to a nation unknown to you or your fathers. There you will worship other gods, gods of wood and stone. 37 You will become a thing of horror and an object of scorn and ridicule to all the nations where the Lord will drive you. 38 You will sow much seed in the field but you will harvest little, because locusts will devour it. 9 You will plant vineyards and cultivate them but you will not drink the wine or gather the grapes, because worms will eat them. 40 You will have olive trees throughout your country but you will not use the oil, because the olives will drop off. 41 You will have sons and daughters but you will

not keep them, because they will go into captivity. 42 Swarms of locusts will take over all your trees and the crops of your land. 43 The alien who lives among you will rise above you higher and higher, but you will sink lower and lower. 44 He will lend to you, but you will not lend to him. He will be the head, but you will be the tail. 45 All these curses will come upon you. They will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the Lord your God and observe the commands and decrees he gave you. 46 They will be a sign and a wonder to you and your descendants forever. 47 Because you did not serve the Lord your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, 48 therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the Lord sends against you. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you. 49 The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, 50 a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young. 51 They will devour the young of your livestock and the crops of your land until you are destroyed. They will leave you no grain, new wine or oil, nor any calves of your herds or lambs of your flocks until you are ruined. 52 They will lay siege to all the cities throughout your land until the high fortified walls in which you trust fall down. They will besiege all the cities throughout the land the Lord your God is giving you. 53 Because of the suffering that your enemy will inflict on you during the siege, you will eat the fruit of the womb, the flesh of the sons and daughters the Lord your God has given you. 54 Even the most gentle and sensitive man among you will have no compassion on his own brother or the wife he loves or his surviving children, 55 and he will not give to one of them any of the flesh of his children that he is eating. It will be all he has left because of the suffering your enemy will inflict on you during the siege of all your cities. 56 The most gentle and sensitive woman among you-- so sensitive and gentle that she would not venture to touch the ground with the sole of her foot-- will begrudge the husband she loves and her own son or daughter 57 the afterbirth from her womb and the children she bears. For she intends to eat them secretly during the siege and in the distress that your enemy will inflict on you in your cities. 58 If you do not carefully follow all the words of this law, which are written in this book, and do not revere this glorious and awesome name-- the Lord your God-- 59 the Lord will send fearful plagues on you and your descendants, harsh and prolonged disasters, and severe and lingering illnesses. 60 He will bring upon you all the diseases of Egypt that you dreaded, and they will cling to you. 61 The Lord will also bring on you every kind of sickness and disaster not recorded in this Book of the Law, until you are destroyed. 62 You who were as numerous as the stars in the sky will be left but few in number, because you did not obey the Lord your God. 63 Just as it pleased the Lord to make you prosper and increase in number, so it will please him to ruin and destroy you. You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess. 64 Then the Lord will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods-- gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. 65 Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the Lord will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. 66 You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. 67 In the morning you will say, "If only it were evening!" and in the evening, "If only it were morning!"-- because of the terror that will fill your hearts and the sights that your eyes will see. 68 The lord will send you back in ships to Egypt on a journey I said you should never make again. There you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you.' (NIV)

Miller (1990: 197) argues that much of the material in these pronouncements reflects

traditional curse formulations known from Ancient Near Eastern treaties and elsewhere. He also observes that the curses pronounced in this second part of Deuteronomy 28 are clearly corporate and aimed at the people as a whole. This much longer list of curses, as he explains, is thus a negative warning against disobedience, alongside the positive promises of blessings for obedience.

In reading verse 15, one sees that the same conditionality and contemporising of Yahweh's commandments begins with the long list of the curses (חללך) pronounced in this second part of Deuteronomy 28, but with the reversal of the initial blessings. According to Nelson (cf. 2002: 322-324), this catalogue of curses can be divided into three sections: curses if you [the children of Israel] do not obey (vv. 15-46), because you [the children of Israel] do not obey (vv. 47-57) and plagues and exile (vv. 58-68). What follows is my investigation of these three sections of curses.

*Curses if you [the children of Israel] do not obey (vv. 15-46):* this first section begins with primary curses pronounced in verses 15-19. They can be written down as follows, according to Schultz's arrangement (1971: 92):

Cursed shall you be in the city.  
Cursed shall you be in the field.  
Cursed shall be your basket  
and your kneading trough;  
Cursed shall be the  
fruit of your body  
produce of your soil  
offspring of your cattle  
young of your flock.  
Cursed shall you be when you come in.  
Cursed shall you be when you go out.

In reading these first five verses, namely verses 16-19, which contain the primary curses, it is striking to see that they comprise the exact reverse of verses 3-6. Nelson (2002: 330) notes that the conditional heading of verse 15 introduces the six primary curses that balance the six primary blessings of verses 3-6. According to Coffman (1988: 306-307), the entry of the Israelites into Canaan would not exempt them from the obligations of the covenant. Consequently, these primary curses, in his opinion, were pronounced in order to warn them that reckless disobedience and rebellion against Yahweh's commandments could cause them to forfeit all his blessings and favours.

The following verses of the first section, namely vv. 20-44, contain four series of *hllq*, which show pictures or tableaux depicting in specific and severe language the inevitable ruin of Israel as the consequence of its disobedience and rebellion against God's commandments. In each of these series, nothing less occurs than the loss of Israel's status as the chosen nation or people of God.

The first series of *hllq* are recorded in vv. 20-26, which Nelson (2002: 328) considers as having been added somewhat later. Summarising this paragraph, Coffman (1988: 309) emphasises that 'the curse of God shall rest on all they [the children of Israel] did, and should issue in manifold forms of disease, in famine, and in defeat in war'.

This series is introduced by verse 20 that utters the threat in general. As Godet (1985: 385) argues, the threat here may designate the severe reproaches of the prophets, which will accompany and justify the divine punishments. The curses with which Israel is threatened here foretell three calamities. The first consists of a great affliction caused by seven terrible disasters such as wasting disease (*tpxv*), fever (*txdq*), inflammation (*tqlđ*), extreme heat (*rwxx*), sword (*brx*), blasting (*hpdv*) and mildew (*!wqry*), which will pursue the children of Israel until they perish (*đba*; v. 22).<sup>76</sup> The second is drought, which will bring with it burning heat and dryness, making the land powder (*qba*) and dust (*rp [ ]*) until Israel is destroyed (vv. 23-24). The third calamity is defencelessness before their enemies, owing to which the Israelites will become an object of horror (*hw [ z]*) to all kingdoms of the earth and their corpses will become food for the birds of the air (*@w [ ]*) and the beasts of the earth (*hmhb*; vv. 25-26).

As Godet (1985: 386) explains, the 'powder and dust' mentioned in v. 24 can be understood as the fine dust of the sand that the wind often carries to Palestine from the desert. The expression 'object of horror' describes, in his opinion, the children of Israel as being insulted, tormented and extremely agitated. As for the Israelites' corpses serving as food for the birds and animals, I suggest that such a terrible disaster represents Israel as struck by the ultimate indignity. As De Vaux (1973: 56) argues, to be left unburied or to be the prey to the

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<sup>76</sup> Expressing his opinion concerning the number 'seven', Godet (1985: 385) argues that it represents the stamp of the divine intervention.

birds and the wild beasts were for the ancient Israelites the worst of all curses. Schultz (1971: 92) states specifically that forsaking God, or a diminishing of their wholehearted love and devotion towards God, is the sin that will precipitate these series of curses upon the Israelites.

The second series of curses in the first section is recorded in vv. 27-34. The pronouncements delineate here the terrifying conditions awaiting the Israelites who will survive the calamities mentioned above. According to Coffman's interpretation (1988: 310), the disasters predicted here are 'judgments on the body, mind, and outward circumstances of the sinners'.

The first curses pronounced in this series consist of seven grave illnesses. Four of them such as the boils of Egypt (!YXV), tumours (RXJ), scab (bRG) and an incurable itch (SRX) will affect the Israelites physically (v. 27), whereas the three others, madness (!w[GV), blindness (!WRW[ ) and confusion of mind (!whMt; v. 28), will strike them mentally. The second curse is the total failure of the Israelites in all domains. Such a failure is, as Godet (1985: 386) argues, the logical result of both the physical and mental states pointed out in verses 27 and 28. As specified in the texts, the children of Israel will be smitten with these terrible illnesses so that they will be robbed (lZG) and oppressed (QV[ ) by the invaders who will abuse their women and confiscate their crops and livestock.

The third series of curses pronounced in this first section predicts a horrible disease that will be followed by the political ruin of the nation of Israel (vv. 35-37). This disastrous illness from which the children of Israel will not recover is referred to in the text as comprising severe boils (!YXV); v. 35). Godet (1985: 387) supposes that this might refer to the dreadful illness of elephantiasis or 'Egyptian leprosy' that causes the lower part of the body to be abnormally enlarged and the skin thickened. Concerning their political ruin, the text predicts the deportation of the Israelites together with their king, their sons and daughters to a foreign nation (v. 36). This political downfall will be followed by Israel's religious decline or fall that is announced in v. 37. For Schultz (1971: 92) the 'extreme malediction for Israel was the banishment from the land of promise into exilic bondage under pagan rulers'. He emphasises that 'the loss of their identity as God's people and the loss of their place of worshiping in the land of promise represent the curse of God bringing upon Israel its greatest calamity' (1971: 92).

The last series of curses in this first section is recorded in verse 38-46. Actually, they

consist of a short tableau putting together the punishments already pronounced against the children of Israel as the inevitable consequence of their disobedience. Their efforts to raise crops and produce their food supply will be frustrated since locusts will consume their crops as well as their trees, and worms will destroy their vineyards. Their sons and daughters will be taken into exile. Verse 43, which is the reverse of vv. 12-13, specifies that the alien and stranger will prosper materially and provide loans to the Israelites which implies that the latter will need the money; the former will be the head and the latter will be the tail. As Coffman (1988: 311) argues, the disintegration and destruction of Israel as a kingdom is clearly prophesied here.

*Because you [the children of Israel] did not obey (vv. 47-57):* the second section of curses can be summarised by this theme. This section offers a description of the calamities and horrors which will ensue when the Israelites are subjugated by their foreign enemies. Clifford (1982: 147) argues that the ‘accurate detail [given in verses 47-57] served to remind Israel that their exile (of 587-539) was the covenant curse taking effect’. Accordingly, these verses, in his opinion, are no longer merely threats; they declare that the conditions which bring on the curses have been fulfilled.

Because of the fact that the Israelites did not appreciate God’s goodness sufficiently to express their thankfulness in joyfulness of living and in praise, God will bring upon them a nation whose speech they did not know (vv. 47-49). Since the Israelites did not appreciate God’s mercy, they will be subjected to a people of fierce countenance descending upon them like a vulture, showing neither regard for the old nor mercy to the young (v. 50). Because the children of Israel put their trust in their fortified walls rather than in God, their cities will be besieged successfully. Owing to this merciless and horrific siege, this unfaithful people will be obliged to eat the flesh of their own children as a result of the intensity of the famine (vv. 51-57).

As Schultz (1971: 94) points out, ‘the greatest judgement in Old Testament times in the Israelite history took its toll when the glorious temple of Solomon and the city of Jerusalem, the capital of Davidic fame, were reduced to ashes and abandoned’. Sharing Schultz’s opinion, Godet (1985: 387) stresses that the last calamities described in this second section of curses, which illustrate in their extreme cruelty the enemy invasion with its horrors, surpass all the punishments portrayed so far.

*Plagues and exile (vv. 58-68):* this is the theme of the third section of הַלְלָו

(curses). It is evident that these verses further elaborate the curses. Summarising this section, Godet (1985: 389) states that God's anger will pursue the sinful nation [Israel] up till the exile, in order to overwhelm it with all sorts of sufferings.

The first cause of these sufferings will be the appalling plagues (חֲמָ) inflicted by Yahweh on the Israelites and their offspring (v. 59). These plagues are specified in verse 60 as the plagues that Yahweh had directed against Pharaoh and the Egyptians when he miraculously delivered Israel (cf. Ex 7: 4-12: 29). If the children of Israel and their future generations failed to revere the glorious and awesome name of Yahweh, these diseases or plagues will be released upon them until they are destroyed. The 'every other disease (יָלֵךְ) and plague (חֲמָ)' mentioned in verse 61, according to Nelson (2002: 333) would refer to 'a lost tradition of illnesses suffered by Israel in Egypt'.

The second cause of the Israelites' suffering predicted in this last section of curses will comprise their dispersion; they will be scattered (#WṔ) among the nations (~ [ ]) rather than being gathered into the Promised Land (v. 64). As a result, their psychological anguish will be great (vv. 67-68). The children of Israel will be sold (רָכַם) and end up as slaves (דָּבָר, bondmen and חֲפָצִים, bondwomen) in Egypt (v. 68), the ultimate reversal of Yahweh's great work when he rescued them from slavery.

Godet (1985: 389) argues that the חֲלָלָה (curse) predicted in verse 64 had been fully accomplished since the second destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Concerning the prediction of Israel's return to Egypt, he emphasises that this is the last term of its agony. According to Godet, the exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land had been to some extent the day of the birth of Israel as a nation, while its return to Egypt in a state of servitude would signify its death or complete disintegration.

To conclude, it should be remembered that both the blessings and the curses pronounced in Deuteronomy 28 are tied to the Promised Land. As Clifford (1982: 147) asserts, 'The land will or will not yield life to Israel according to their obedience. Yahweh will or will not afflict them with various forms of infertility or loss of land in military defeat on the same principle'. In other words, the curses portray the weightiness of the bond between Yahweh and his chosen people which demonstrates, on the one hand, the intensity of life with the Lord, and on the other hand, the horror of life away from him.

In comparing the analysis of the text concerning the curses, given above, to the MLC's interpretation and use of the same text (see 3.3.2.2), similarities can be noticed in terms of the following matters. The curses pronounced in Deuteronomy 28: 15-68 were intended to warn the children of Israel against disobeying God's commandments and deviating from his ways. The warning made it clear that reckless disobedience and rebellion against Yahweh's instructions would cause Israel to forfeit all the blessings and favours he had promised to them and would bring upon them the horrific consequences prophesied in these curses.

In the MLC's interpretation, the same curses that, it is believed, have also been ordered by Jesus to be pronounced on the occasion of the confirmation of Nenilava's consecration constitute prophetic warnings directed to those who would doubt the truthfulness of the Lord's message proclaimed by Nenilava. The warning signifies that the Christians' rejection of this message could result in their loss of the grace and the blessings from which they have benefited by means of Christ's redemption. The reason is that those who reject such a divine message do not reject Nenilava but Christ who is the source of all grace and blessings.

The curses directed to the children of Israel as the consequences of their disobedience and rebellion, which portrayed the primary importance of the bond between Yahweh and Israel, illustrated the horror of life away from the Lord. These curses also displayed the holiness and the righteousness of Yahweh, who judges and consumes whoever rises up against him and his divine commandments; and even his chosen people were not spared because of their rebellious conduct.

Similarly, the curses directed to Christians through Nenilava's prophecy demonstrate the seriousness of the relationship between Jesus and his redeemed people. These curses make the latter aware that their persistence in an unbelieving attitude will lead them away from the Lord, which means they will be separated from his grace and justification.

The dissimilarities are exhibited by the following points. The curses pronounced towards the children of Israel were corporate and encompassed them as a community or a nation. Israel, as a nation, underwent the consequences of the rebellion and disobedience, although individuals committed the offences against God's commandments.

In contrast, the curses directed to those who reject Nenilava's prophetic message are to a certain extent individual, although they are addressed to the Christians as a Church. It is each disobedient Christian, and not the Church or the community as a whole, who will endure the consequences of his/her disobedience. What the Church has to do is to pray for him/her

and to lead him/her to repentance.

The curses, which will bring upon Israel afflictions in terms of various forms of disease, infertility and military defeat, will cease with the loss of the land and their deportation. In other words, the Israelites will lose their status as the people of God, the dignity of their nation as well as the land which constituted their precious inheritance.

On the other hand, the disobedient Christians will lose not earthly and material advantages but their heavenly inheritance. Their persistence in their sinful behaviours and unfaithful attitude will not prevent them from retaining their earthly inheritance or from growing rich in their present life. However, if they refuse to repent of their sins, they will be judged according to what they have done and will be thrown into the lake of fire. This will represent their loss of the land and their deportation.

### 3.5 FROM TEXT TO TEACHING

Considering the rapid growth of the revival movement in Madagascar, I concur entirely with Magoti (2003: 91) who states as follows:

Charismatic movements represent a form of religiosity that is gaining popularity almost everywhere in the East of Africa. They are becoming an essential part of the contemporary African religious scene that can no longer be ignored by the mainstream churches and the society in general.

Effectively, charismatic or revival movements are not only widespread but they also occupy an important place in churches' evangelistic activities and play a significant role in the life of many Christians. Magoti (2003: 95) even emphasises that they are playing a crucial role in the expansion of the Church in Africa and, at the same time, are attempting to redefine Christianity (albeit imperfectly) as an African religion.

One example of these African charismatic movements is the revival movement of Ankaramalaza. Nenilava founded it in 1941, in the distant and small village of Ankaramalaza, but it has now become a nationwide and pluridenominational revival movement: it includes not only Christians from the MLC but also those from other denominations such as Reformed, Anglican and Catholic. It even has branches abroad, namely in France and Reunion.

As Magoti (2003: 95) argues,

The academic reflection generated by the activities of these movements, and the popularity with which they have been accorded [acclaimed] by the people, are perhaps clear indications that the charismatics have touched on something important.

As far as the revival movement of Ankaramalaza is concerned, the ‘something important’ on which it has touched include the major issues which, to some extent, have been forgotten or have not been given priority in the MLC. These issues are mainly related to healing, exorcism, devil and spirit possession, and poverty. Of course, such issues are not new in Christianity, but most Christians who are struggling with them consider that the MLC has not given them the attention they deserve. On the other hand, the said revival movement, led by its charismatic and dynamic founder Nenilava, has successfully dealt with these issues by healing people from their diseases, mental and physical, and driving evil spirits out of them through prayer, exorcism and laying on of hands. In addition, the movement of Ankaramalaza has constructed many *toby* (healing retreats) which serve to accommodate sick persons, needy and homeless people, as well as debauched people whose moral and spiritual lives necessitate their being renewed. Considering the comprehensiveness of this revival movement’s spiritual and social activities, which embrace various dimensions of people’s lives, one is not at all amazed to see it continuing to grow and spread.

The activities mentioned above are, in general, considered to be the common challenge for almost all revival movements which have swept across many African countries (cf. Magoti 2003: 95). The groups of other revival movements (Soatanana and Farihimena) working within the MLC, too, have similar activities as their main goals. However, the revival movement of Ankaramalaza is made different from them by the robe and crown that its founder and leader Nenilava wore. As Barrett (1968: 274) notes, most African charismatic movements are characterised by religious symbols among which are coloured clothes for dignitaries and white robes for all participants. Barret’s remark is confirmed by the training manual of the Malagasy Protestant revival movement (Toby Lehibe Ankaramalaza 1997: 56, 60) which emphasises that all shepherds must wear uniform white robes when they carry out their sacred duties (praying, exorcising, healing and laying on of hands).

But Nenilava’s robe has nothing in common with those mentioned above, for it is neither a coloured robe nor a simple white robe; it is, rather, a priestly robe modelled on the high priestly vestments described in Exodus 28. Besides, Nenilava also wore a silver crown symbolising her prophethood, whereas African prophets simply use veils or headdresses to cover their heads (Sundkler 1948: 214). Therefore, it should be pointed out that her robe and

crown have made Nenilava different from African charismatic leaders and also different from Old Testament prophets.

I understand and value the efforts of the MLC and the children of Ankaramalaza to make the Old Testament useful, according to Jesus' instructions. Their utilisation of the high priest's garments described in Exodus 28 as models for the items of Nenilava's robe demonstrates that it is quite possible to adapt materials used in the Old Testament context to the contemporary Church's context. This example therefore tangibly supports the use of the Old Testament in purposes that are more practical and not simply moral.

However, it should be mentioned that, theologically speaking, critics find the use of Exodus 28 to make Nenilava's robe to be questionable for at least three reasons. The first reason, according to them, is that Nenilava was called to be a prophetess, not a priestess and, as far as they know, no Old Testament prophet wore the high priest's garments. Referring to Isaiah 20: 2, Zechariah 13: 4 and Matthew 3: 4, they note that the dress worn by the prophet in the Old Testament was rather like a hairy garment with a leather girdle. In other words, these critics argue that the prophet in the Old Testament was always dressed moderately or even humbly.

In the opinion of these critics who are theologians, their purposes made the priest's vestment and the prophet's clothes different from each other. They emphasise that the priestly vestment that the priest was required to wear among the Israelites as God's glorious and blessed people was intended to be not only a vestment of service but also one of dignity and honour (cf. Ex 28: 2). On the other hand, the prophet usually wore a vestment of humility and mourning by which he aimed to illustrate God's sorrow, disappointment and anger because of Israel's disobedience. As far as Nenilava's prophethood is concerned, these theologians acknowledge that she was sent by the Lord to make the Malagasy people aware of their sins and to call them to repentance. Therefore, they consider that it would have been more fitting if Nenilava as a prophetess had worn a vestment or a robe showing sorrow for sin and as a sign of repentance. However, instead of this the MLC and the 'children of Ankaramalaza' made for her a priestly robe that these critics consider not appropriate to her prophetic vocation.

The second reason, according to these critics, is that it was not customary in the Old Testament to see one person assuming simultaneously the responsibility of priest and prophet. They emphasise that priesthood and prophethood were two different responsibilities entrusted to different categories of people. Referring to what is recorded in Exodus 28: 29-30, they remind one that the Old Testament priesthood was established as a permanent office that God

exclusively entrusted to Aaron and his male offspring, whereas almost all the prophets that were chosen among the people were called to transmit God's message to Israel in specific times and circumstances. Of course, the Old Testament records that the prophet Samuel sometimes carried out the function of priest (1 Sm 10: 8). But the critics regard Samuel's case as an exception because, in their opinion, he had to take that initiative owing to circumstances at the time, or, more precisely, the crisis caused by the failure of Eli's priesthood (1 Sm 3: 11-14). Therefore, they argue that the notion of consecrating or showing Nenilava at the same time as both a prophetess and a priestess was not theologically well-founded because it was not in accordance with the Old Testament structure and organisation. Besides, these critics point out that the MLC always teaches that the Christian Church has no longer anything to do with the Old Testament priesthood, for the reason that she belongs to the new covenant, founded on Christ's fulfilment of the old covenant. They consequently emphasise that the MLC has contradicted her own teaching in acknowledging, even tacitly, Nenilava's priesthood.

The third reason, in the opinion of these theologians, is that according to the information provided by some responsible for the revival movement of Ankaramalaza, Jesus' plan when he promised to confirm Nenilava's consecration was to show her as a bride representing the Church. However, having found in the Bible no suitable model for a bride's robe, theologian members of the 'children of Ankaramalaza' who were appointed to investigate the matter opted for the high priest's vestment (see 3.2.4.1). Considering this information, these critics tend to believe that the idea of altering this plan or of replacing the bride's robe by a priestly robe did not stem entirely from Jesus' will as revealed to Nenilava but, largely, from those theologians. They also note that there are major differences in forms and purposes between the bride's robe and the priestly garments. According to these critics, the fact that a suitable model for a bride's robe was not found in the Bible is not a convincing excuse for making a priestly robe in its place. As they point out, it is mentioned throughout the Bible that, in general, all saints as well as angels wear white robes. They suppose that the problem facing the 'children of Ankaramalaza' was probably that all of the ordinary shepherds were already wearing white robes, so they opted for the priestly robe in order to make a distinction between the latter and Nenilava. But, for the critics, such an option further confirms the questionability of the use of Exodus 28 to design a priestly robe for the prophetess Nenilava.

On the one hand, I recognise that the above criticism is somewhat hard to hear for the MLC and the 'children of Ankaramalaza'. But, on the other hand, I consider that it stands before them like a road sign at a junction: it does not prevent them from moving forward; it rather invites them to stop for a brief moment and to reflect on the direction in which they wish to proceed. Therefore, I hope that they will take it positively, i.e., as constructive rather than destructive.

As mentioned above, the critics have based their criticism of the use of Exodus 28 to make a priestly robe for Nenilava on a theological criterion. However, it should be noted that the decision to make this robe was not in fact taken according to any theological criterion but according to Nenilava's vision in which she saw herself wearing a priestly robe and a crown (cf. Edland 2002, in 3.2.2). Obviously, some informants have revealed that Jesus previously planned a bride's robe for Nenilava, but as this plan gradually evolved, the final decision that was taken was to make a priestly robe instead of a bride's robe (cf. 3.2.2.1). Therefore, one should recognise that the MLC and the 'children of Ankaramalaza' have had a choice between the bride's robe and the priestly one and that they have opted for the latter. They still believe that their choice of the priestly robe is in accordance with Jesus' plan since Nenilava had already seen it in a vision.

Regarding the contextualisation of the passage, I have to admit that the MLC and the 'children of Ankaramalaza' have made a remarkable decision in using Exodus 28 to make Nenilava's robe and in employing Deuteronomy 28 to keep Christians aware of the consequences of their obedience to or disobedience of her prophetic message. There was in the MLC no precedent for such an action. Although the MLC's representatives and the members of the 'children of Ankaramalaza' did not mention such a contextualisation as their objective, one can say that what they have done is an example of how to make the Old Testament meaningful and relevant to the practical life of the Church. It has also enabled the MLC to change the opinions of Christians who regard the Old Testament as nothing but a good history of the past. This way of using Exodus 28 and Deuteronomy 28 reminds us of Van Zyl's argument (1994: 54), which stresses that

The question of how the biblical materials and message should be taught in Africa has to be approached within the framework of the debate on contextualisation and the quest for an authentic African Christian theology.

However, I consider that there is a deficiency or a gap to be filled in this example of contextualisation carried out by the MLC and the ‘children of Ankaramalaza’, as far as their methodology is concerned. More explicitly, it is handicapped by the lack of critical analysis of the original contexts.

Therefore, I think it is important to include the term ‘contextualisation’ among the subjects to be taught and discussed in the department of Old Testament studies in the Malagasy Lutheran Graduate School of Theology. It should be mentioned that all the students who are admitted to pursue their theological studies in this graduate school are pastors and theologians (female students) from different regions or synods. The main objective of their training is to prepare them more thoroughly for the responsibilities of teaching as well as for the responsibilities of leadership in the local Churches in which they will be appointed after they have completed their studies.

The insertion of ‘contextualisation’ in the teaching programme will thus create a better understanding of the interaction between text and context (cf. Bosch 1999: 430). It will also offer a good opportunity to explain to them that contextualisation is an unavoidable and indeed a key component in the process of Malagasising Christianity. Therefore, the students will come to understand that contextualisation recognises the significance of this time and this place, whenever and wherever it may be. They will also understand that it combines the attempt to get inside that context [biblical] as well as this context [contemporary], and that to ignore the one is to fail to proclaim the forever incarnate and living Lord (cf. Pobee 1992: 38).

Besides, such classes will enable the students to see a proper way to undertake contextualisation. They will be taught that historical and critical study of biblical texts or reading a passage in its historical setting is recognition of the need for contextualisation. Therefore, they will understand that embarking on contextualisation is not only a matter of analysing and interpreting biblical texts and adapting them to given contemporary contexts; it also involves interpreters critically analysing the aspects of both contexts, biblical and contemporary, in order to assess whether they are compatible or incompatible. They will also learn that ‘contextualisation’ starts from the context, and that its method, which is primarily inductive, is distinct from traditional systematic theology, which deduces from a set of propositions, as Lee (1993: 87) argues.

To show the importance of this inductive method, Lee emphasises that contextualisation is ‘a critical activity at several points’. Three of these points are integrally presented as follows:

First, one already has a 'pre-understanding' as one throws oneself into a given context, but this 'pre-understanding' should be critically assessed at the start. If a Christian thinker is predisposed toward a value-orientation based on the Bible, critical hermeneutics of the biblical text is important.

Second, based on the predisposition, a critical analysis of aspects of the context is given. The analysis reveals certain social patterns, which can be subject to valuation.

Third, theological judgement is brought to bear on the social patterns of valuations. The judgement is not necessarily condemnation only but may be commendation too. It takes critical acumen to move from a primary text to a theological evaluation of social reality (1993: 87).

I am convinced that when the students start to think in terms of contextualisation, they will realise that it presupposes a clear definition of their own identity and their value as a person and as a society, based on their own criteria and the meaning that life has for them (cf. Pobee 1992: 38). It is also my conviction that when the proper, that is a careful and methodological, way to carry out contextualisation is taught to the students, they will be able to use it as an approach to read the Old Testament and to link the message it contains to the contemporary needs and aspirations of Christians in their own context.

To close the discussion, I would like to say that if contextualisation could be included as a subject to be taught and discussed in the teaching of the Old Testament in the Lutheran Graduate School of Theology, the MLC will have at her disposal pastors more prepared for and committed to contextualised theological activities, as Roman Catholic priests have done in undertaking inculturation. Therefore, the process of contextualisation will continue within the MLC and other examples of contextualisation will follow the making of Nenilava's robe and crown, which to date remains an isolated occurrence.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> After Nenilava's death (1998), her robe and crown were carefully kept in the *toby* (centre) of Ankaramalaza as precious archival items.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CASE STUDY THREE: TRADITIONALISTS' USE OF OLD TESTAMENT TEXTS

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the third case study, which will show that in Madagascar, or at least in the central part of the island, the use of the Old Testament has crossed the boundaries of the Church. What I mean is that the Old Testament is nowadays used not only within the mainstream Churches but also outside it. In fact, for some years already it has become customary in the highlands of Madagascar to hear or to see non-Christians, especially tradition-practitioners, using the Old Testament. I insist on specifying the Old Testament for the reason that, according to information I gathered from interviewees, Malagasy non-Christians prefer it to the New Testament and use it often in various ways and for different purposes.

The Malagasy context, in general, is based on the traditional religion, which is composed of three principal components: belief in the Supreme Being, the ancestors, and mystical powers.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, the religion occupies a central place in the lives of the Malagasy traditionalists as it does in the lives of African peoples in general. As Thorpe (1993: 2) states, religion for African traditionalists is a way of life and an integral part of everyday living. To this, I add that religion is, from the perspective of the Malagasy traditionalists, the ultimate solution to their spiritual and physical problems.

It is in this Malagasy context that tradition-practitioners use the Old Testament, and, according to them, they use it to ensure people's greater wellbeing spiritually and physically. This is quite a new phenomenon because as far as I know, since its introduction to Madagascar, the Christians have regarded the use of the Bible as their exclusive privilege and monopoly. Moreover, the Bible is universally recognised as the exclusive Christian holy book.

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<sup>78</sup> It should be noted that these components are common to African traditional religion (cf. Gehman 1989: 10). What may make the Malagasy traditionalists different from other African peoples is that they emphasise all three of these components, whereas Gehman mentions that in Africa, different peoples stress one of those elements: some, for instance, emphasise the Supreme Being, others focus on magic and mystical powers and most of them put emphasis on the ancestral spirits (1989: 10).

It is true that Malagasy traditionalists, including traditio-practitioners, are not unfamiliar with the Old Testament because it is, in general, one of the books the Malagasy favour. As mentioned in 1.1.2, one of the reasons for the Malagasy people's predilection for the Old Testament is the fact that it speaks of religious and cultural contexts they consider more or less similar to theirs. Therefore, most of the Malagasy people, whether Christians or traditionalists, know by heart stories and passages from the Old Testament (for example the stories of creation, Cain and Abel, the flood, Abraham, Moses, David and Goliath and so on). But, nowadays some traditionalists, especially some traditio-practitioners, are no longer content with a general and superficial knowledge of the Old Testament; they appropriate it and use it in their own context. Church leaders and theologians from almost all the major denominations know or at least have heard about this traditio-practitioners' use of the Old Testament or the Bible in general, but they have shown no reaction to it, perhaps because they take it lightly. However, it should be noted that this use of the Old Testament in the traditional context increasingly attracts Christians as well.

Questions that arise from this topic are, 'How do traditio-practitioners use the Old Testament? Why do they use the Old Testament?'

My objective in this chapter is consequently to investigate and to show the encounter between the Old Testament and the Malagasy traditional context. Subsequently, the functions of this use of Old Testament texts by traditionalists will be explored. Then, I will proceed to a critical analysis of the relevant texts, which will enable me to make a comparison between the two interpretations, academic (scientific) and traditional (popular).

The investigation, at the same time, will also present how the Old Testament is used by these traditio-practitioners as a 'closed book' and 'open book'. These two terms are introduced by Gerald O West (2000a: 48). According to his explanation, the term 'closed book' means that the Old Testament is used as a sacred or magical item, whereas the term 'open book' indicates that the Old Testament is read and interpreted as a text.

As West (2000a: 48) points out, these terms are specifically used to show the encounter between Africa and the Bible. Using Holter's argument, he emphasises that this encounter is an interface of the African religio-cultural heritage and socio-political situation with the Bible in which Africa is the actor subject and the Bible the object of the actions. According to West's explanation, 'the Bible as the object of the actions' is the expression to indicate that for most African Christians, the Bible as a holy book containing the Word of God is considered as an 'object of power'. As a result of this consideration, West specifies

that for African Christians, the Bible is not only a text to be read or interpreted but also a sacred and powerful book they can use, at the same time, to solve their daily problems and to enhance their faith.

According to my observation, Malagasy traditio-practitioners, too, use the Old Testament both as a 'closed book' (as a source of power or sacred object) and as an 'open book' (as a text to be interpreted). As mentioned above, these two perspectives will be reflected in the following investigation.

To achieve my aim, I will make use of four examples to display how traditio-practitioners use Old Testament texts for various purposes, as follows: 1) traditional healing (Exodus 3: 1-3; Leviticus 14: 1-8; Jeremiah 8: 22); 2) religious slogans (Exodus 3: 5b; Job 33: 6a; Psalm 121: 8a); 3) traditional sacrifices and offerings (Leviticus 1-6); and 4) references for morals (Psalm 113: 5-6; Genesis 2: 18, 22).

## 4.2 CONTEXT

### 4.2.1 The Malagasy traditio-practitioners

As said above, some traditio-practitioners from the highlands of Madagascar, for numerous reasons, have to some extent started to use the Old Testament in the Malagasy traditional context. Such an initiative, as people tend to believe, has brought a notable innovation to the Malagasy traditional religion and practices. Therefore, it deserves not only to be taken note of but also to be investigated.

The traditio-practitioners are persons, men and women, who are responsible for keeping up the Malagasy traditional context, which includes belief systems, cultures and religious practices, and for taking care of their followers' spiritual, moral and physical lives. Scholars give these practitioners various names according to the specific responsibility or speciality on which they wish to concentrate. Rakotomalala and his co-writers (Rakotomalala et al. 2001: 217), for instance, term them *mpitaiza*, which literally means 'the ones who take care of people'. This specifically refers to the traditio-practitioners as healers. For Jaovelo-Dzao (1985: 238), they are 'mediums'. This designates them as intermediary agents between the Supreme Being Zanahary and the ancestors, and human beings. Vig ([1892] 2001: 119) and Molet (1979a: 100) term the traditio-practitioners, respectively, 'sacred people' and 'diviners'. According to these two names, which are almost identical, they are especially responsible for divination. They are also generally identified as priests because they are considered to be equivalent to the priests who, by definition, are religious specialists acting

ritually on behalf of a community or followers. In my opinion, the most suitable term for a person who is responsible for the traditional religion is in fact 'traditio-practitioner'. This name, to my mind, is more appropriate for the multiple functions as priest, diviner, seer, healer and astrologer that this person holds simultaneously.

The traditio-practitioners occupy a central role in the Malagasy traditional religion, which is dominated by the belief that natural objects like trees, stones, wind, water etc., which are connected with the Supreme Being Zanahary and the ancestral spirits, possess souls.<sup>79</sup> The Malagasy traditional religion is then characterised by the absence of a definite border between the spiritual and the physical worlds. The traditio-practitioners thus occupy an important place in the Malagasy traditional religion because of the intermediary and representative roles, or the role of a bridge, that they fulfil between Zanahary and the ancestors, and human beings, namely their followers. On the one hand, they represent these followers in interceding with the supernatural beings on their behalf. On the other hand, they represent Zanahary and the ancestors in transmitting their responses to the followers.

Razakamady (DCF 2), an informant from Antananarivo, notes that because of these religious responsibilities the traditio-practitioners occupy an important and strategic position in Malagasy society. He also points out that they are, at the same time, feared and respected for the reason that they belong to both worlds, the visible and the invisible. To distinguish the traditio-practitioners from ordinary people, the followers call them *ny masina* (the sacred [people]) because ancestral spirits are supposed to dwell in them and endow them with particular abilities and powers.

Raney (the Mother; DTL 3), a traditio-practitioner working in Ambatolampy, explains as follows how people could become traditio-practitioners. In the Old Testament, the priesthood was hereditary from father to son, whereas in Christianity, the pastoral vocation depends on God's calling to the Church ministry. In the Malagasy traditional religion, the case is quite different from either. Generally, it is the ancestral spirits who choose those they destine to be traditio-practitioners. These ancestral spirits mostly proceed as follows: they visit the candidate through dreams or visions and explain to him/her what he/she will be going to do. The ancestral spirits' visits to the candidate become more and more frequent; to such an extent that they finally dwell in him/her or possess him/her.

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<sup>79</sup> This belief in all natural objects and phenomena as having souls is common to the African traditional religions (cf. Gehman 1989: 124).

Raneny (DTL 3) emphasises that the ancestral spirits may also proceed in ways that are more particular. For instance, they can be revealed through critical circumstances like illness, loss of wealth, an accident etc., which have occurred inexplicably in the life of the candidate. They take advantage of these particular circumstances to enter the candidate and to possess him/her. It also sometimes happens that the ancestral spirits who possessed the candidate's father or mother come to him/her and transmit to him/her the parental sacred function. This means that the function of traditio-practitioner is not only acquired but also inherited (cf. Rakotomalala et al. 2001: 1 218).

In addition to Raneny's explanation, Randriamanantena (DTL 1), a traditio-practitioner working in the east of Antananarivo, describes as follows what ancestral spirits are supposed to do when they gain total possession of the candidate. They first reveal their names to him/her. Mostly, they bear the names of either ancient Malagasy kings such as Andrianampoinimerina, Radama, Ranaivalona and so forth, or heroes belonging to the ancient Malagasy context. When these spirits see that the candidate is used to their contact and presence inside him/her they proceed gradually to give him/her their instructions through dreams or by visions. Randriamanantena underlines that in general, these instructions are based on the following points: taboos, clothes, responsibilities and the form of the worship.<sup>80</sup> Finally, such spirits show the candidate the ancestral tombs or sacred places where he/she must build shrines or other sanctuaries.

Randriamanantena (DTL 1) also explains that when the candidate is sufficiently aware of his/her future function he/she goes to an experienced traditio-practitioner to be initiated into religious rites and practices and to obtain technical information. The initiation generally takes a few weeks, during which the initiator carefully observes the behaviour of the ancestral spirits possessing the candidate. When the initiation ends, the experienced traditio-practitioner, assisted by colleagues, consecrates the candidate for his/her sacred function. According to Randriamanantena, it is this consecration which integrates the candidates into the fellowship of the Malagasy traditio-practitioners.

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<sup>80</sup> According to Randriamanantena's explanation, the taboos essentially concern foods (pork, blood, some vegetables, and so on) that the traditio-practitioners are forbidden to eat. Regarding their clothes, he points out that the ancestral spirits generally give the traditio-practitioners the instructions to wear red clothes when they carry out their sacred duties because in the Malagasy traditional religion the colour red expresses the power and the sacredness of the ancestors.

It should be mentioned that one of the major tasks the Malagasy traditio-practitioners are required to perform is healing. According to Razakamady's argument (DCF 2), all the Malagasy traditio-practitioners are healers. Generally, they heal by means of mystical power combined with empirical processes. As Razakamady claims, the traditio-practitioners should be able to heal all diseases, mental and physical. Explaining further, he points out that their methods of healing are mostly based on the hypothesis that most diseases have supernatural causes and that it is necessary to turn to supernatural powers to fight them. This means, he considers, that a person may be ill for three reasons: either he/she has offended Zanahary and the ancestors, or he/she is bewitched, or evil or demonic spirits possess him/her.

Razakamady (DCF 2), therefore, emphasises that the traditio-practitioners should first diagnose an illness by means of divination and then apply mystical remedies such as determining and removing the object that has made the patient ill or exorcising evil spirits. In parallel, the traditio-practitioners can combine these mystical practices with physical remedies such as medicinal plants and massages and so on. As Jaovelo-Dzao (1985: 238) reports, the traditio-practitioners are recommended to carry out their sacred duties in a polyvalent manner, but above all they have to excel in healing, in order to show that they are the masters of life, following the example of the Supreme Being Zanahary who provides everybody with the good life flowing from him.

As far as the traditio-practitioners' social life is concerned, Molet (1979a: 100) points out that they are not salaried. Raneny (DTL 3) confirms this fact in stressing that they must content themselves with free gifts given by followers in exchange for their consultations. More explicitly, she adds that the calling to be a traditio-practitioner is a gift from Zanahary and the ancestors; therefore, not all the traditio-practitioners are allowed to make money profitably from their religious functions. As a result, all of them manage to follow normal professions so as to support their families. This is why, Raneny considers, Malagasy traditio-practitioners, outside their religious responsibilities, could be farmers, shopkeepers, masons or carpenters.

#### **4.2.2 Malagasy traditionalists' understanding of the Old Testament**

In general, Malagasy traditio-practitioners regard the Old Testament as a universal sacred book that can be adapted and used not only in the Christian religion but also in all religions whose fundamental religious principles are based on the belief in one Supreme Being who is creator of the heaven and the earth. Randriamanantena (DTL 1), who is one of the traditio-

practitioners who claim to have certain knowledge of the Bible, argues that this universality of the Old Testament can be observed in many instances. The first example he takes is the account of the creation of the human beings whom God made in his image, as well as the blessings of fruitfulness and power which God gave them (Gn 1: 26-28). This account, he claims, takes on a universal aspect and not only a Christian one, since it refers to the first ancestors of humankind.

Another example Randriamanantena (DTL 1) uses to emphasise the universality of the Old Testament is the knowledge of the true God outside the Hebrew tradition. To illustrate this example, he refers to the story of Melchizedek recorded in Genesis 14: 17-20. According to him, Melchizedek was a famous priest of the traditional Canaanite religion based on the belief in a God Most High, creator of heaven and earth. He points out that Abraham recognised this Supreme Being as being identical to the God who called him, and that to demonstrate his recognition he accepted Melchizedek's blessings and gave him a tenth of the goods he recovered as offerings. In the opinion of Randriamanantena, this story attests that the God who was revealed to Abraham and his descendants is the universal God that all people in the world can believe in and worship in different names and ways. Therefore, he stresses that the knowledge of the true God revealed in the Old Testament is not limited to the Hebrew tradition only but is universal. To reinforce his arguments for the universality of the Old Testament, Randriamanantena quotes Job, Jethro, Ruth, the Queen of Sheba and King Cyrus as examples of other people outside the Jewish tradition who, he says, 'walked with the true God'. He thus suggests that a universal theology of the Old Testament would be relevant for everyone if specialists from Christianity, Judaism, Islam and African Traditional Religion could agree about the need for it and sit together to establish it (DTL 1).

In addition to Randriamanantena's arguments, Raneny (DTL 3) describes her understanding of the Old Testament. In her opinion, the Old Testament fits better in the Malagasy traditional religion than in Christianity because most of the traditions it contains are not found and practised in the Malagasy versions of the Christian religion. The Old Testament traditions she refers to as having no place in the Christian religion are sacrifices and offerings, healing, cleansing rituals and the belief in the ancestors as conveyors of the divine blessings. For Raneny, these Old Testament traditions are practised and lived in the Malagasy traditional religion. She, therefore, argues that the continuity between the Old Testament and the traditional religion is more obvious than between it and Christianity.

Raneny (DTL 3) for instance points out that sacrifices and offerings are performed in the Malagasy traditional religion in a similar way to that which God commanded in the book of Leviticus. What particularly illustrates this similarity, in her opinion, is the blood that is regarded as the material vehicle of life and is believed to possess a supernatural power, functioning as a purifying and atoning force. This is, Raneny explains, why the blood of the sacrificial animal is mainly used to substitute for the offerer's life. Concerning the healing and cleansing ritual, Raneny notes that, as far as she knows, the Old Testament is the only sacred book which shows how a mighty and holy God, through his representatives (priests), personally cares about the well-being of his people by healing them of their diseases and cleansing them of their physical and moral impurities. She then specifies that in this regard the Old Testament provides good and clear examples which every religious person has to follow. As far as the belief in the ancestors is concerned, in Raneny's view the Old Testament can be considered as the book of the ancestors. The reason is, she contends, that most of the good things such as the land, progeny, peace, prosperity and blessings that God promised to Israel were related to the ancestors. Raneny thus considers that the Old Testament is the only sacred book which accords great importance and value to the ancestors on whom the life of the living, to a certain extent, depends. This link between the ancestors and the living, she states, is experienced and lived in the Malagasy traditional religion (DTL 3).

As for Rakoto Jean (DTL 2), a traditio-practitioner working on the western periphery of Antananarivo, he understands the Old Testament as a legal document because, from the beginning to the end, it deals with God's laws and instructions, on the one hand, and with the human beings' responses to these, on the other. Therefore, the Old Testament, for him, is a book of laws aimed at revealing God's divine will and requiring of his people a total obedience and faithfulness. Consequently, Rakoto Jean posits that the fundamental principle of the Old Testament could be better understood and properly obeyed if it is read and interpreted in a legalistic way.

Besides, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) does not use the name 'Old Testament' for this important part of the Bible. He finds that such a name is not appropriate, for the reason that the book to which it is applied is universally recognised as the word of God, which is of the same value as its counterpart, the New Testament. In his opinion, it is the mighty God who is the same yesterday, today and forever who addresses human beings in both the Testaments which the Christians categorise as Old and New. Furthermore, he considers that it is in the so-called Old Testament that people find practical and relevant solutions to their daily physical

and spiritual struggles. Rakoto Jean, therefore, points out that on the existential level it is the Old Testament, which he terms the 'Living God's Word', which is more relevant and meaningful to the life of people such as the Malagasy.

#### 4.3 TRADITIONALISTS' USE OF OLD TESTAMENT TEXTS IN THE MALAGASY TRADITIONAL CONTEXT

This section endeavours to describe how Old Testament texts are applied by traditio-practitioners in the Malagasy context. Four cases that serve as examples of this use will be presented here. They are as follows: Old Testament texts used in traditional healing (Exodus 3: 1-3; Leviticus 14: 1-8; Jeremiah 8: 22); as religious slogans (Exodus 3: 5b; Job 33: 6a; Psalm 121: 8a); in traditional sacrifices and offerings (Leviticus 1-7) and as references for morals (Genesis 2: 18, 22; Psalm 113: 5-6).

##### **4.3.1 Traditional healing: Exodus 3:1-3; Leviticus 14: 1-8; Jeremiah 8: 22**

This case deals with traditio-practitioners' application of the Old Testament for therapeutic purposes. The example will demonstrate Rakoto Jean's (DTL 2) method of using Old Testament texts in his practice of traditional healing.

##### *4.3.1.1 Rakoto Jean's background*

Rakoto Jean, alias Ra-Claude (DTL 2), is a famous traditio-practitioner living in Ambohitratrimo, a suburb located 15 km to the west of Antananarivo. He is a native of Fandriana, a small town in northern Betsileo, which means he belongs to the Betsileo ethnic group. He is a retired employee of a society working for the Air Madagascar Company. As he points out, he became a traditio-practitioner at the age of 27 and he asserts that his function as a traditio-practitioner is not inherited but acquired. Rakoto Jean also reveals that unlike the other traditio-practitioners there is no ancestral spirit possessing him. However, he affirms that he shows a great respect for the ancestors and recognises them as sources of blessings and providers of good things for their living offspring.

Taking people's testimonies into account, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) is well-known as an excellent healer: to such an extent that a multitude of patients come to him almost every day from different parts of Madagascar; some even travel from neighbouring islands such as Reunion, Mauritius and the Seychelles. Yet, I have heard from some inhabitants of Ambohidratrimo that Rakoto Jean's way of healing is effective but it is quite strange, for the

reason that instead of referring to ancestral spirits as other traditio-practitioners do, he always refers to the God of the Bible whom he identifies as Zanahary.

Generally, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2), like almost all Malagasy traditio-practitioners, treats his followers with traditional medicines which he prepares from medicinal plants. But what makes him different from the others is that he knows most of these medicinal plants not from inherited experiences but from his knowledge of the Bible, or more particularly of the Old Testament, that he considers as his favourite book. This is why people find his way of healing quite strange.

Before describing how Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) employs Old Testament texts for therapeutic purposes, I consider that it is interesting to say something about his knowledge of the Old Testament. Referring to what he has confided to me, he is one of the most literate Malagasy traditio-practitioners and he takes a particular interest in religions, specifically in Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. Driven by the intense desire to gain certain knowledge of these three religions Rakoto Jean said that he undertook, for many years, to learn the Hebrew and Arabic languages.<sup>81</sup> He also read books about Buddhism. As a result, he is more or less able to read the Hebrew Bible and the Koran, and he also practises religious meditation in the Buddhist way.<sup>82</sup> Besides, he says that he has already read the Old Testament several times, to such an extent that he knows stories and passages of it almost by heart.

Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) states that it is from the reading of the Old Testament that he gained the inspiration to use it in his traditional healing. He confesses, however, that this was easier said than done because it was extremely difficult to discover the most suitable way to carry out such a project, which was quite unusual in the Malagasy traditional context. But, when he read Exodus 3:1-3, Leviticus 14: 1-8 and Jeremiah 8: 22 he suddenly understood what he had to do: to use Old Testament plants for medicinal purposes. As Rakoto Jean explains, these texts made him realise that the Old Testament records names of various plants

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<sup>81</sup> Rakoto Jean did not reveal to me who has taught him or how he has learnt to read the Hebrew Bible and the Koran.

<sup>82</sup> At my request, Rakoto Jean read (aloud) part of the Hebrew text of Leviticus 14: 1-8. Although his reading was a little hesitant and not quite correct I heard it as more or less understandable. To demonstrate his knowledge of the Koran, he read part of chapter 114 that is, according to his explanation, the shortest and the last chapter of this sacred book, which speaks of the human beings. With regard to Buddhism, he told me about the four noble truths that form part of the basis of the Buddhist doctrine. They are as follows: 1) All is suffering; 2) The origin of suffering is in desire; 3) A state of cessation of suffering does exist; 4) There is a means to reach this state of cessation of suffering.

that can be transformed into medicinal plants. What is more, he also discovered in these texts that God himself had used, by means of Israelite leaders, some of these biblical plants (e.g. hyssop, cedar and balm) to purify and heal the children of Israel from their diseases. Rakoto Jean then took the decision to follow God's example, as he states.

As a well-known dictum says: 'no sooner said than done', Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) immediately made plans to put his project into action. According to his report, he proceeds as follows: he undertakes to re-read the Old Testament in a new perspective or with new eyes. As he comes across the name of a plant or a tree, he carefully makes a note of it, mentioning the name of the book and the page where it is found. When he has made a large enough list of plants he stops reading and begins to study them one by one. His principal aim is to come to know the various purposes, especially the medicinal purposes, for which the plant or the tree might be used in the Old Testament. Then, he starts studying the plant botanically in order to gather information about its natural medicinal properties.

Having gained an adequate knowledge, biblical and botanical, of the plants listed, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) chooses those which can be found in Madagascar and makes a separate list of them. Afterwards, he undertakes a journey of a few months, funded by rich followers, to collect these biblical medicinal plants in different parts of Madagascar. He affirms that some of these Old Testament plants grow in the island. For those that do not exist there, he explains that he uses in their places family plants mentioned in his botanical book. When he has gathered adequate amounts of various plants (leaves, branches, flowers, seeds, barks and roots) he returns home and transforms them into traditional medicines. As Rakoto Jean argues, some of these plants mentioned in the Old Testament were used by ancient Israelite healers as medicinal plants, but others were not. However, he emphasises that what is important is not to know whether a plant in the Old Testament was used (or not) for a therapeutic purpose, but to believe that every plant mentioned in this sacred book is God's gift that his people can freely use for their health and well-being.

What follows is a description of how Rakoto Jean uses the plants mentioned in Exodus 3:1-3, Leviticus 14: 1-8 and Jeremiah 8: 22 in his practice of traditional healing. As pointed out above, he is able to make a long list of various Old Testament plants, but only those found in these texts will be investigated here by way of example. It is also to be noted that Rakoto Jean's way of using these Old Testament texts, which consists of reading, interpreting and applying them in his traditional healing, is an example showing traditio-practitioners' use of the Old Testament as an 'open book'.

#### 4.3.1.2 *Exodus 3:1-3*

3:1 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup> There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. <sup>3</sup> So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight, why the bush does not burn up." (NIV)

Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) admits that the bush Moses found in the desert or more precisely on Horeb, the mountain of God (Ex 3: 1-3), is not a medicinal plant but, rather, a sacred plant. Giving a botanical description of the bush, he says that it is a thickly wooded plant with several stems emerging from the root. Its size, he estimates, is between that of a tree and a shrub. Generally, it grows in dry and mountainous areas so it is a thorny plant, but it can produce small fruits.

Concerning the burning bush found by Moses in Horeb, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) mentions that there could be various types of bushes growing in the desert area of Sinai, so much so that it is difficult to determine its type. However, he notes that botanists tend to identify it with the acacia, which is a thorny plant with thick stems and which generally grows to an estimated height of between 50cm and 80cm. This acacia, he says, is supposed to be found in abundance in the desert of Sinai. Rakoto Jean affirms that a few types of bush similar to that of Horeb can be found in mountainous parts of Madagascar and especially in the dry area of the southern part of the island. Besides, he suggests that the mimosa, which is a tropical plant similar to the acacia growing abundantly in the high lands of Madagascar, could also be included among these types of bushes.

As mentioned above, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) recognises that the burning bush in Exodus 3: 1-3 is not medicinal in itself. Nevertheless, he utilises it as a medicinal plant for an important reason that is, he states, associated with its sacredness. In fact, Rakoto Jean explains that he regards the burning bush of Horeb as sacred in the sense that God by means of his angel had made use of it to demonstrate his holiness, glory and power.

Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) mentions that this belief in the sacredness of objects that are supposed to have been associated with the Supreme Being's power and holiness or with the life of sacred persons is common to the Malagasy traditionalists. For instance, they consider rice as sacred because they believe that it was Zanahary in person who gave it, through the ancestors, to the Malagasy people as their main food. Likewise, traditionalists regard fig trees

as sacred because almost all the kings and queens ruling in different parts of Madagascar, especially in the highlands, had usually planted these trees around their palaces or dwellings as symbols of their sovereignty and power.

With regard to God's use of the bush in Horeb (Ex 3: 1-3), Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) argues that it was not by accident but planned, because as Lord of all creatures God could have made use of other objects such as a rock or an animal or another more important plant. But, instead of these other objects, God had chosen this bush, which might be, in the eyes of experts, an insignificant plant. Rakoto Jean is not able to specify either the reason for God's choice or his plan in using the bush when he spoke to Moses, but he is firmly convinced that since it was divinely chosen among so many others it can be used for good purposes. Hence he decided to include the bush among his medicinal plants. According to his explanation, he especially uses the roots, leaves, stems and seeds of this biblical sacred plant, that he mixes with other traditional medicines, to heal mental diseases. He also uses them to cast evil spirits out of possessed people.

Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) reveals that he always includes prayer and the laying on of hands in his method of healing. His prayer, as he reports, especially consists of asking for God's help: God who had revealed his glory and power out of the bush in Horeb. He also invokes the names of the sick person's ancestors to intervene in his/her favour.<sup>83</sup> He specifies that, sometimes, when he is in the presence of a complicated case of mental disease or a serious case of possession, he takes the Bible, opens it at Exodus 3 and kneels down to meditate on God's power that he associates with the bush being transformed into traditional medicine.

As Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) explains, the aim of his meditation is to come into contact with God's power that he needs to subdue the forces of evil which are making his patient suffer. As far as the laying on of hands is concerned, Rakoto Jean states that it is a necessary ritual gesture, being part of his healing method, and that its purpose is to convey God's power to the sick person. It is also, at the same time, a means to communicate to the patient the ancestors' favour and help. He stipulates that in the Malagasy traditional religion the Supreme Being and the ancestors are believed to collaborate for the well-being of human beings. He understands this working together as follows: the Supreme Being (either the God of the Bible or Zanahary), as creator and master of everything, provides all that human beings need,

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<sup>83</sup> Rakoto Jean points out that although no ancestral spirits are dwelling in him and possessing him he has the right to call them if need be. In his opinion, the helpful services which the good ancestral spirits can provide to human beings are not necessarily dependent on possession.

whereas the ancestors, as sources from whom the human beings are descended, transmit God's gifts and grace to their offspring.

#### 4.3.1.3 *Leviticus 14: 1-8*

14:1 The Lord said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> “These are the regulations for the diseased person at the time of his ceremonial cleansing, when he is brought to the priest: <sup>3</sup> The priest is to go outside the camp and examine him. If the person has been healed of his infectious skin disease, <sup>4</sup> the priest shall order that two live clean birds and some cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop be brought for the one to be cleansed. <sup>5</sup> Then the priest shall order that one of the birds be killed over fresh water in a clay pot. <sup>6</sup> He is then to take the live bird and dip it, together with the cedar wood, the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, into the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. <sup>7</sup> Seven times he shall sprinkle the one to be cleansed of the infectious disease and pronounce him clean. Then he is to release the live bird in the open fields. <sup>8</sup> The person to be cleansed must wash his clothes, shave off all his hair and bathe with water; then he will be ceremonially clean. After this he may come into the camp, but he must stay outside his tent for seven days.” (NIV)

Leviticus 14: 1-8 comprises the second example of the Old Testament texts used by Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) in his practice of traditional healing. It records God's commandment regulating the ritual cleansing that the priest was to perform on a leprous Israelite when he/she was brought to him. The purpose of the ritual was, on the one hand, to confirm and to show that the person had been healed of infectious skin diseases, and on the other hand, to reintegrate him/her into the community.

Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) finds in this text two types of plants such as cedar wood and hyssop. He argues that these plants were used in the Old Testament as medicinal plants or more precisely for ritual purification purposes, although there is a fundamental contrast between them. Asserting his botanical knowledge, Rakoto Jean points out that the scientific name of the cedar is *cedrus* and that it belongs to the family of pines. He describes the cedar as a coniferous giant and long-branched tree, which is native to mountainous parts of North Africa and of Asia. However, Rakoto Jean specifies that the best-known cedar is that of Lebanon that he scientifically calls *cedrus libani*, which is the stateliest and the most majestic tree of Palestine, for it often reaches a height of 30m and more.<sup>84</sup> It is also, he says, this particular cedar which was the tree most frequently used in the Old Testament period, because most important buildings in Jerusalem, such as the palaces of King David and Solomon's

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<sup>84</sup> It is to be noted that sometimes Rakoto Jean, using his botanic knowledge, gives the scientific names of certain plants, but at other times he does not.

temple, were constructed of it. Besides, Rakoto Jean ranks the cedar among the rare trees which are extremely durable. This is probably, he considers, owing to the abundant resinous oil with which it is impregnated.

As far as the hyssop is concerned, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) describes it as an evergreen, humble and small plant. Furnishing botanical information, he states that its scientific name is *hyssopus officinalis* and that it is classified in the division *magnoliophyta*, family *labiatae*. According to Rakoto Jean's description, it is not a tree but just a bushy or somewhat woody herb with square stems and linear leaves, which generally grows between 50cm and 60cm high. It has small violet-blue or sometimes white flowers in whorls. He also explains that the leaves, stems and flowers of the hyssop possess a highly aromatic odour and contain an essential oil with an exceedingly fine scent.

Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) points out that there are apparently various kinds of hyssop growing in different parts of the world and that they can be known or identified by the colours of their flowers. As far as the hyssop of Palestine, which is frequently mentioned in the Old Testament, is concerned, he argues that it may consist of various species, which mostly grow in hilly or even semi-desert areas. However, he notes that the hyssop of the Bible may also grow in valleys such as the Jordan and the Kedron.

Since the hyssop is used in the Old Testament as an instrument in the act of sprinkling (cf. Lv 14: 4-7), Rakoto Jean suggests that this plant has a very flexible stalk. But, referring to the hyssop that served to lift the sponge soaked in the vinegar to Jesus' lips, he contends that there might be another species of this plant with a longer and firmer stalk, like that of some reeds which abound in many parts of Madagascar.

Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) notes that as far as he knows the cedar and the hyssop referred to in the Old Testament do not grow in Madagascar. However, using his scanty botanical knowledge he is able to identify plants related to them. As he explains, he mostly uses in place of cedar the cypress, which is an evergreen coniferous tree belonging to the same family as the latter and which mostly grows in the highlands of Madagascar. As for the hyssop, Rakoto Jean says that in many parts of the island there are related plants, which can substitute for it.<sup>85</sup> What is necessary, he emphasises, is to have a general notion of botany, which is helpful to identify them among other similar plants.

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<sup>85</sup> Rakoto Jean did not reveal to me the name of the plant he uses in place of the hyssop.

As said above, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) recognises both the cedar wood and the hyssop mentioned in Leviticus 14: 4-7 as medicinal plants. However, he points out that they were used in the Old Testament for ritual cleansing purposes only and not for the treatment of leprosy. According to him, leprosy was not considered in the Old Testament period as a disease that could be treated medically. It is, rather, he says, regarded as a terrible punishment from God, as in the case of Moses' sister Miriam (cf. Nm 12: 9-10), or as the negative and fatal consequence of sins committed towards the community. Therefore, when a person is affected with leprosy, he/she is considered to be unclean and is required to live outside the camp or city. Rakoto Jean explains that if the leprosy person is healed of his/her affection, without the help of any medical treatment, he/she is allowed to visit the priest, in order for the latter to ritually cleanse him/her with the blood of purification and reintegrate him/her into the community.

This is the reason, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) argues, why leprosy in the Old Testament is always associated with the verb 'to cleanse', which connotes more ritual significance than curative, while the verb 'to heal' is mostly used for other diseases that necessitate specific treatments. He therefore stresses that the cedar wood and the hyssop were used in the Old Testament as instruments or substances for ritual cleansing and not as medicinal plants in the literal sense of the term. Besides, Rakoto Jean asserts that as far as he knows neither the cedar wood nor the hyssop possesses properties suitable for healing leprosy. To his knowledge, the effective medicinal properties these two plants undeniably contain are intended to cure other diseases.<sup>86</sup>

Consequently, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) argues that the cedar wood and the hyssop were used in the Old Testament because of the symbolism popularly assigned to them, not because of their properties as medicinal plants. In fact, he points out that the cedar was regarded in the Ancient Near East as an emblem of incorruptibility and power, probably because of its luxuriant growth and length of life. As for the hyssop, he remarks that it was considered a sacred plant symbolising at the same time humility, grace and purity.

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<sup>86</sup> As an experienced herbalist, Rakoto Jean claims that the decoction of substances from cedar as well as from some related plants can be used to heal fevers and coughs or to relieve rheumatism. As for the hyssop as well as many of its family plants, he asserts that it exhibits powerful properties including anti-spasmodic, expectorant, diaphoretic and anti-inflammatory uses, to such an extent that it can be used in many types of disease.

As far as the plants that Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) employs as substitutes for the biblical cedar wood and hyssop are concerned, he emphasises that he uses them both for medicinal and for ritual cleansing purposes. In other words, he makes use of them as medicinal plants to heal leprosy and as cleansing instruments to purify the healed leprosy person ritually. As he explains, Rakoto Jean prepares his traditional remedies for leprosy based on other medicinal plants. But, in accordance with his principle of employing Old Testament plants as medicinal plants he mixes the remedy with his substitutes for the biblical cedar wood and hyssop.

Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) notes that the treatment of leprosy with traditional remedies generally takes a long time. He also underlines that the effectiveness of the cure, to some extent, depends on the patient's belief in God's help, in his/her confidence in the remedies and in his/her perseverance. The reason is, in his opinion, that when a person becomes leprosy it is not only his/her physical health which is affected but his/her morale also. Therefore, the duty of a conscientious traditional healer consists of healing the leprosy and at the same time cheering up the patient. Rakoto Jean indicates that it is essentially for this psychological or moral purpose that he mixes the substitutes for the biblical cedar and hyssop with his remedies for leprosy. He affirms that his patient has high hopes of being healed when he makes known to him/her that he is using to treat him/her not only medicinal plants, in terms of human knowledge, but also special plants specifically recommended by God.

As mentioned above, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) also uses his substitutes for the biblical cedar wood and hyssop as instruments for ritual cleansing. According to his explanation, he proceeds as follows: when he sees that the leprosy patient is healed of his/her affection, he places him/her before witnesses he has expressly called together to confirm that the disease is totally cured. Thereafter, he asks the healed patient to bath with water in which are placed some fragrant leaves, a silver coin and broken eggs.<sup>87</sup> Then, Rakoto Jean asks him/her to shave off all his/her hair and to put on new clothes in order to show that he/she is henceforth starting a new life. Likewise, he puts on his traditional priestly garment, which is a long red robe. After this, he ties the substitutes for the biblical cedar wood and hyssop together with a scarlet yarn, and takes a container into which the blood of a red cock has been poured. He asks the patient to kneel down before him and at the same time face the witnesses. He dips the tied instruments into the blood and uses them to sprinkle the healed patient seven times with

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<sup>87</sup> Rakoto Jean explains the meanings of these items as follows: the water and fragrant leaves as well as the silver coin serve to symbolise purification, while the eggs are used to illustrate that the evil force of the bad disease has been shattered and that the patient is born again.

the blood, while accompanying each sprinkling with a potent word: '*Madio!*', which literally means: clean. Rakoto Jean ends the ritual for cleansing with a prayer which is intended to express thankfulness and gratefulness to God and the ancestors, without whose providence and help the remedies would not have been effective and the patient not healed.

Discussing the significance of the ritual gesture described above, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) explains that when his role as healer is fulfilled he plays the role of priest, to whom the healed leprous person should come or should be brought, according to God's recommendation in Leviticus 14: 2. This priestly role, he says, consists mainly of showing that the patient is, simultaneously, physically healed and ritually cleansed. The ritual for cleansing is, therefore, aimed at helping the patient to get rid of his/her shame and bitterness, and at making him/her believe and trust that he/she is completely healed of his/her infectious skin disease. It is also intended to reintegrate the healed and cleansed patient into the community. Rakoto Jean specifies that this ritual for reintegration is important because without it, it is psychologically or morally difficult for the healed person to start again and build his/her new life among the community.

As mentioned earlier, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) states that the laying on of hands is part of his healing method. But he specifies that the healing of leprosy, which is a long process, is an exception, for the reason that it ends with the cleansing ritual. According to his explanation, the laying on of hands in this case is not necessary because the cleansing ritual, which consists of using the substitutes for the biblical cedar and hyssop to sprinkle the healed leprous person with blood, takes its place.

Like other Malagasy traditio-practitioners, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) uses a shrine to perform the ritual part of his healing process. He explains that there are two kinds of shrine in the Malagasy traditional religion: the outdoor shrine and the indoor or domestic shrine. The outdoor shrine that he terms a 'natural temple' is used in the open air, such as on a hill or in a deep valley or in a spring.<sup>88</sup> As Rakoto Jean makes clear, these places are regarded as sacred because they are believed to be particularly sensitive to spiritual beings. To protect these outdoor shrines from desecraters, they are often constructed quite far from villages and some of them are almost inaccessible. As far as the indoor shrine is concerned, Rakoto Jean calls it a 'natural altar' and he points out that it is specifically used inside the house.

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<sup>88</sup> Rakotomalala et al. (2001: 566-567) mention that there are two other types of outdoor shrines, such as the ancestral tomb and the central part of the village that is popularly called *kianja* (the common or public place).

As I have observed myself, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) has caused to be transformed into a domestic shrine the northeast corner of the room in which he receives and consults his followers.<sup>89</sup> He states that the northeastern place is for the Malagasy people sacred because it is the ancestors' favourite place. Therefore, it is called *zoro firarazana*, which literally means 'the corner of the ancestors' or 'the corner of prayers', because the Malagasy traditionalists and some Christians as well, he observes, turn towards the northeast when they pray. Besides, Rakoto Jean notes that the northeast is believed by Malagasy people to be the direction from which God, escorted by celestial bodies, the sun, the moon and stars, comes when he visits the human beings. This is, he stresses, why most traditio-practitioners transform this place into a domestic shrine.<sup>90</sup>

Rakoto Jean's (DTL 2) explanation regarding the sacredness of the northeast corner or place could complement Razovelo's opinion and Ruud's report. According to Razovelo (1994: 56), the northeast place is sacred for two reasons: firstly, because it is believed to be the dwelling place of the ancestors in the family home; secondly, because the Malagasy's original ancestors are supposed to have travelled to Madagascar from the northeast. Ruud (2002: 151) records that Malagasy people regard the northeastern corner in the house as the place where the spirits sojourn when they come to pay a visit to their living children or relatives, with whom they eat, drink and talk. Believing deeply in this ability of the ancestors to eat and drink, many Malagasy people, he points out, used to place in the northeast corner of their principal rooms portions of rice and meat as well as bowls of clear water or rum.

Rakoto Jean's domestic shrine is constituted by a circular altar-stone with a flat top. He built it, he says, as an imitation of the altar that had been used in the Old Testament, especially in the patriarchal period (cf. Gn 12: 8; 28: 18-22) and in the era of the prophets (cf. 1 Ki 18: 30-32). He emphasises that the stone-altar is the proper and official place of sacrifice

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<sup>89</sup> According to Rakoto Jean's explanation that is confirmed by Rakotomalala et al. (2001: 223), most Malagasy traditio-practitioners use the term 'office' for the room where the followers come to consult them. Generally, one can find in this 'office' diverse materials such as a mirror hung on the wall, a cupboard to store the traditio-practitioner's clothes and other sacred materials, a table on which are put cultic objects and a chair where the traditio-practitioner sits for listening to the followers. There are also baskets and bottles, which contain respectively medicinal plants and traditional medicines. Rakoto Jean also explains that most of these 'offices' are decorated with photos of ancestors (Kings, Queens or other chiefs) whose spirits possess the traditio-practitioners working there.

<sup>90</sup> Molet (1979a: 350) mentions that in the houses of Christians the northeastern corner is still believed to be sacred. This is attested, according to him, by the fact that Christians regard it as a suitable place for keeping objects of piety such as the Bible, the hymnbook, the cup for Holy Communion and so forth.

because God since the beginning of Israel's history has valued it.<sup>91</sup> It is, therefore, on his stone-altar that Rakoto Jean slaughters sacrificial animals such as cocks, chickens and sheep whose blood serves to perform various religious rituals, among which is the ritual cleansing described above. It is also before this altar (e.g. with his face to the northeast) that Rakoto Jean often kneels down to meditate and pray.

#### 4.3.1.4 Jeremiah 8: 22

Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people? (NIV)

Referring to God's word recorded in Jeremiah 8:22, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) declares that among trees and plants mentioned in the Old Testament, balm is the most precious medicinal plant, or the medicinal plant *par excellence*. The reason is, in his opinion, that it is God in person who regards it as a suitable medicine to restore the health of his people. Therefore, Rakoto Jean uses balm to heal several kinds of diseases.

As Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) states, the word 'balm' is an abbreviation of balsam, which refers to a short and small plant whose botanical name is *Melissa officianalis*. He explains that balsam is a plant with a square and branching stem. It possesses white or yellowish flowers and crenate or toothed leaves which emit a fragrant lemon odour when bruised and which also have a distinct lemon taste. Regarding the longevity of the plant, he comments that it dies away in winter, but that the root is perennial.

Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) points out that balm grows freely in any soil and can be propagated by seeds, cuttings or by the division of its roots in spring or autumn. Therefore, it can be found in many parts of the world. But he emphasises that the best-known is the balm or the balsam of Gilead mentioned in Jeremiah 8: 22, whose botanical name is *commiphora opobalsamum*. What makes it so precious, in his opinion, is its rarity and especially its aromatic odour as well as the quality of its juice. Rakoto Jean also argues that the balm of Gilead is different from the common balm growing in Palestine, for the reason that it is not native to this country but imported from abroad. According to his theory, it was believed to have been taken from Africa to Jerusalem by the Queen of Sheba as a present to Solomon,

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<sup>91</sup> Rakoto Jean's opinion is in accordance with what Ruud (2002: 150) writes about the Malagasy forest people's belief in and use of stone shrines.

who ordered his servants to cultivate it on the mount of Gilead.<sup>92</sup>

As mentioned above, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) uses balm to treat several diseases. According to his explanation, the balm that botanists rank among the common balm (*Melissa officinalis*) grows in Madagascar, especially in its highlands. However, he considers that it is not native to the island but has been imported from Europe or more precisely from England, because the Malagasy people call it *balsama*, a name derived from the English word 'balsam'.

Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) specifies that he especially uses balm juice which exudes spontaneously during the heat of summer, in resinous drops, the process being helped by a small incision in the bark. According to his experiences, the quantity of juice that can be collected depends on the condition of the air: the more humid the air, the greater the quantity collected. Regarding his method of using this balm juice, Rakoto Jean mentions that sometimes he uses it alone, without additional remedies, while at other times, he combines it with others as the chief component, according to the kind of disease he is to heal.

What follows are some examples illustrating how Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) uses the traditional medicines he prepares from balm. He explains that balm exhibits multiple medicinal properties. Balm is, he says, very useful for improving digestion, especially in a case of distension of the stomach or bowels by the gases formed during digestion. He points out that he also uses it to promote sweating, especially for a person who wants to reduce weight. Balm is also, he states, useful to drive off fever. In addition, Rakoto Jean emphasises that balm leaves and blooms contain antiseptic and antibiotic compounds that can be used, with lard or oil, as an external application in bruises, swellings and some skin diseases. Finally, he notes that balm is useful for complaints of the chest and kidneys, and also for rheumatism.

Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) specifies that Jeremiah 8: 22 is very important for him because he understands it as God's word addressed to traditional healers, urging them to use Old Testament plants as medicinal plants. In other words, this passage, he argues, shows that God not only appreciates herbalists' or healers' endeavours to use traditional medicines obtained from medicinal plants but also encourages them to do so. This signifies, he states, that the use of medicinal plants to heal people of their diseases is in accordance with God's will; contrary to the Christians' condemnation of it as part of the devilish practice of sorcery.

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<sup>92</sup> Rakoto Jean reveals that he derived this theory from an article he read some years ago and affirms that he entirely agrees with it because, in his opinion, it is the most adequate explanation of the existence of this singular balm in Gilead.

### **4.3.2 Religious slogans: Exodus 3:5b; Job 33: 6a; Psalm 121: 8a**

This case serves to show how a woman traditio-practitioner whom her followers call Raneny (the Mother) uses Old Testament texts as religious slogans in her traditional religious practices. As stated in the heading, my discussion will focus on the texts of Exodus 3: 5b, Job 33: 6 and Psalm 121: 8a. Actually, Raneny uses other passages such as Genesis 12: 3a, Jeremiah 23: 23 and so forth, but I have chosen those referred to above by way of example.<sup>93</sup>

#### *4.3.2.1 Raneny's background*

Raneny (DTL 3), whose real name is Razanamparany, stems from the Merina ethnic group and lives in Ambatlamby, a town located about 60km to the south of Antananarivo. She relates as follows how she became a traditio-practitioner: unlike many of her colleagues, she was not a traditio-practitioner's granddaughter or daughter and none of her relatives has fulfilled this function. Her parents were just ordinary followers of traditionalism and since her childhood, she has been, together with them, a faithful follower of a traditio-practitioner working in a small village located 12km to the west of Ambatolampy.

However, Raneny (DTL 3) points out that her life altered completely from the beginning of the year 1981. She suffered from a strange headache, which often made her dizzy or even caused her to fall unconscious like an epileptic. After a few months of suffering, Raneny says, she began to see visions. An old man dressed in fine red and black silks and carrying a long stick came to her in successive visions. He was revealed to her as King Rivoekembahoaka II, who ruled over the north Betsileo people from 1800-1810. The capital of his kingdom was Kiririoka, a rocky hill with steep sides located about 5 km to the west of Fandriana, the main town of north Betsileo today.<sup>94</sup> The royal spirit then told Raneny that it was his presence within her which caused her to suffer from a terrible headache. He also explained to her that he had chosen her as an intermediary agent to transmit his messages to his people, to heal his *vahoaka* (people/followers) of their diseases and to teach them to respect and venerate him. In other words, Raneny affirms that the royal spirit made her a

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<sup>93</sup> It should be noted that Raneny also uses New Testament texts: e.g. Luke 18: 42b (cf. Photo 21); 1 Corinthians 15: 10a; 13: 13.

<sup>94</sup> Fandriana is the capital of north Betsileo today; it is located about 200 km to the south of Antananarivo.

priestess who would henceforth be the main person responsible for all religious and practical activities connected with him.

Raneny (DTL 3) notes that after having expressed to her other recommendations concerning practical matters and diverse taboos the royal spirit asked her to call him *Dada* (Father). In her opinion, this name has been given her for two purposes: firstly, it is to make their relationship easier and closer (like a father-daughter relationship); secondly, it aims at making her faithfully obedient and respectful (as a daughter has to behave towards her father).

According to Raneny (DTL 3), unlike other traditio-practitioners she did not need to be initiated before starting her work; the royal spirit told her everything he wanted her to do. In addition, he indicated the place where her office should be. As Raneny mentions, this is situated on the top of Kiririoka, where unknown people had built a tomb in which the bones of King Rivoekembahoaka II, his wife as well as four of his bodyguards were supposed to be buried. According to Raneny's description, the tomb, in the shape of a flat-topped platform, is made from sculptured stones. To express its great value and sacredness the royal spirit requires that it should be called *volamena*, which literally means 'gold'.

Understanding what the royal spirit wanted her to do, Raneny (DTL 3) erected a shrine on the top of the tomb, which she dedicated to him. As I saw myself, the shrine is quite simple because it merely consists of a rectangular table of stone supported on four legs made from stones as well.<sup>95</sup> On the shrine are placed two candlesticks, a wooden cross put between them, a container serving to store blood for blessing followers and a large basket for receiving offerings (sweets, honey, bananas, and especially money) from them. Apart from all these, the Malagasy national flag is erected on the northeastern corner of the shrine in order to demonstrate the power and the kingliness of *Dada* (the royal spirit), as Raneny explains. She also emphasises that the Bible, which forms part of these sacred materials, is therefore sometimes placed on the centre of the shrine, but at other times it is kept within reach so that she can use it if need be. In fact, she declares that she often combines her speech, as well as *Dada's* message to his followers, with some biblical passages in order to give added weight to their importance. Raneny points out that *Dada* so far has not exhibited any hostility to this use of the Bible; rather, he feels comfortable with this sacred book because it is very helpful to

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<sup>95</sup> Raneny explains that the royal spirit possessing her ordered her to build a shrine more or less similar to the Christians' altar.

make the followers, who include Christians from different denominations, trusting and faithful.

As Raneny (DTL 3) explains, *Dada* (the royal spirit) requested that the shrine must be inaugurated by means of the *famadihana* (turning of the dead). His request was subsequently met on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of September 1981. A general meeting, gathering all *Dada*'s followers and traditio-practitioners led by Raneny, is therefore held annually on the top of Kiririoka during these days.<sup>96</sup> Likewise, the *famadihana* that *Dada* required Raneny to perform in order to inaugurate the shrine became an annual rite performed on these two dates.<sup>97</sup>

The annual rituals of this *famadihana* take place as follows, according to Raneny's report. The remains or the bones of the six persons mentioned above are taken out of the tomb *volamena*, wrapped up in new shrouds and laid down near the shrine, according to the importance of their respective rank. The day of 28th September and the night following it are spent in prayer and singing. The prayers, led by Raneny and other traditio-practitioners assisting her, consist mainly of thanking God/Zanahary and *Dada* for their blessings and of asking them for favours such as protection, prosperity, health and fertility. The songs generally consist of traditional folk songs, Christian songs from Protestant and Catholic hymnbooks as well as gospel songs. In between these prayers and songs the multitude of followers present at the ceremony approach the tomb in groups to bow down before *Dada* and the other ancestors and to give them honey, sugar and sweets as offerings (cf. Photos 23 and 24). It is at that moment of offering that each of the followers makes his/her personal requests.

Raneny (DTL 3) indicates that the very climax of the rituals and ceremonies takes place on September 29. What follows is the progress of the event, according to Raneny's description. Early in the morning the entry to the place and the royal tomb *volamena* as well as the shrine are decorated with national flags. Likewise, streamers displaying religious slogans are erected everywhere, in the entry to the place, all along the hedge enclosing the area surrounding the tomb and on the tomb itself. When the time to begin the ceremonies and

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<sup>96</sup> According to what I observed myself when I arrived at the top of Kiririoka to interview Raneny, thousands of followers, traditionalists and Christians, with about one hundred traditio-practitioners from different parts of the central area of Madagascar, had gathered round *Dada*'s tomb and shrine. It should be noted that the general meeting of the Christians from the Lutheran Regional Synod of Fandriana (the town close to Kiririoka) is also annually held on 28-29 September and people told me that the numbers of participants attending the two meetings are almost identical.

<sup>97</sup> Actually, people generally travel to Kiririoka four or three days previously, but the celebration reaches its climax on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of September.

rituals arrives, Raneny as the priestess and the one responsible for the religious practices at the royal shrine stands and faces the bodies laid down on the top of the tomb. She bows down before *Dada*'s body while saying a short prayer and then she calls upon his spirit to attend the ceremonies and rituals specially dedicated to him and to his family and to take delight in the *famadihana* performed in his honour. She also asks him to accept the sacrifice of oxen and red cocks offered to him on behalf of all the followers present.<sup>98</sup> In return for the sacrifices, she requests *Dada* to provide his faithful followers with all good things, protection and blessings.

Thereafter, Raneny (DTL 3) gives her assistants the order to slaughter two oxen, to put the blood in a container consecrated to that purpose and to bring it to her. Assisted by some traditio-practitioners, she pours part of the blood into the sacred stone erected on the northeastern corner of the tomb, while asking *Dada* to forgive all the followers present for their guilt towards God/Zanahary and him, as well as for their lack of respect for both God/Zanahary and him. Subsequently, Raneny and her assistants sprinkle the audience with blood to cleanse them of their sins and to give them the assurance that they have been completely forgiven. Afterwards, each of the followers comes to the tomb and places his/her offering, which consists mainly of money, in a big basket placed beside the shrine.<sup>99</sup>

Continuing her description, Raneny (DTL 3) specifies that when the rituals and ceremonies have been carried out, all the followers, led by her and other traditio-practitioners, once again bow down before *Dada* and his family, while singing. Afterwards, Raneny and her assistants, helped by traditio-practitioners, proceed to advise their followers, to provide them with traditional medicines, to strengthen their trust in God/Zanahary and *Dada*, and to heal those who are ill. The ceremonies end with the replacing of the bodies into the tomb. Before the multitude of followers and traditio-practitioners return home, Raneny advises them to take water from a spring flowing not too far from the royal tomb and to keep it for their daily needs. This water, that Raneny calls '*Dada*'s water', is believed to be sacred and very helpful for cleansing purposes as well as for protection against evil spirits and witchcraft.

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<sup>98</sup> As Raneny explains, the two oxen that are to be slaughtered at this time and the red cocks are given by followers whose prayers and requests were answered and granted.

<sup>99</sup> It should be noted that contrary to the normal *famadihana* this special *famadihana* of Kiririoka does not involve the usual meal of rice and meat. Followers say that the meat of oxen is given to Raneny to be shared between her and her personal assistants as well as other traditio-practitioners who have assisted her during the performance of the rituals and ceremonies. Likewise, the money collected from the offerings is also given to Raneny as the followers' contributions to the upkeep of *Dada*'s tomb and shrine, and to buy the necessary oxen for the next celebration.

It should be noted that Raneny, as a priestess, generally wears a red garment. According to her explanation, the colour red in the Malagasy traditional religion symbolises the royal character and the sovereignty of the spirit dwelling in her. However, she says that in 2002 *Dada* ordered her to wear a white garment, which illustrates his sacredness; and in 2003 the royal spirit told Raneny to dress in coloured robe in order to symbolise that he is in communion with his followers. She reveals that apart from *Dada*'s requirements this use of clothes of different colours in the sacred place of Kiririoka is to some extent an imitation of the Christian liturgical colours.

Expressing her opinion concerning the relation between the Malagasy traditional religion and Christianity, Raneny (DTL 3) does not agree with Christians who regard the Malagasy traditional religion as an enemy and consider that it has nothing in common in Christianity. To her, on the contrary, Christianity and the traditional religion do not clash at all; rather, they are compatible and complementary, for the reason that they share a fundamental principle, which is the belief in a unique Supreme Being, creator of everything and father of all human beings, living and dead. Besides, Raneny points out that the Malagasy traditional religion and Christianity have something in common because, since the beginning of their contact until now, they have continued to interact. When Christianity was introduced in Madagascar, she remarks, it made use of materials from the traditional religion (names, cultures etc.), while nowadays it is the traditional religion which makes use of materials from Christianity (biblical texts, moral principles etc.)

I have discussed, in general, how Raneny (DTL 3) became a famous tradition-practitioner and how she carries out her sacred duties. It is now appropriate to consider how she uses Old Testament texts as religious slogans in the sacred place of Kiririoka. As mentioned above, Raneny uses various such texts, but only three of them: Exodus 3: 5b, Job 33: 6a and Psalm 121: 8a, which serve as examples, will be investigated here. It is to be pointed out that Raneny's way of using these Old Testament texts, which consists of applying them as sacred texts to enhance her religious practices, is an example showing tradition-practitioners' use of the Old Testament as a 'closed book'.

#### 4.3.2.2 *Exodus 3: 5b*

Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. (NIV)

As already mentioned, the top of Kiririoka, and *Dada*'s tomb and shrine, are decorated with flags and banners displaying religious slogans among which are passages taken from the Old Testament. One of these passages is Exodus 3: 5b quoted above, which is rendered in the Malagasy Protestant Bible as follows: *esory ny kapanao fa masina ny tany ijoroanao*. Raneny (DTL 3) writes this passage in block capitals on the entrance to the sacred place, so that everyone entering this place can see it, and learn it by heart (cf. Photo 22).

As Raneny (DTL 3) explains, she uses this passage as a religious slogan because it displays an order that everyone, including followers, traditio-practitioners and visitors, has to carry out before they enter the sacred place of Kiririoka. She emphasises that all places of worship, especially the shrines and royal tombs, are sacred. Consequently, she makes it clear that access to them is always governed by taboos, some of which consist of the prohibition of spitting and of wearing hats, shoes and sandals. According to Raneny's explanation, those taboos are mostly connected with the sacredness of the places; but, they may also be issued by the ancestral spirits that are invoked and worshipped there.<sup>100</sup>

Raneny (DTL 3) specifies that regarding the royal tomb and the shrine of Kiririoka as well as the area surrounding them, it is forbidden to walk on them with shoes or sandals. Consequently, everybody who desires to enter the area and visit the tomb and shrine must, she emphasises, take off his/her shoes or sandals and leave them outside the entrance. Hence all people, without exception, who wish to enter the sacred place, should be barefoot. Raneny mentions that ever since she started practising, possessed by *Dada*, on the top of Kiririoka she had continually been obliged to remind followers of this taboo because of newcomers who ignored the rule. However, Raneny (DTL 3) affirms that from the time she displayed the passage from Exodus 3: 5b on the entrance to the sacred area she has no longer needed to remind anyone. The holy text, she says, states clearly and infallibly what everybody must do vis-à-vis the sacred place and what it contains: clearly, because this passage, as she argues, indicates that it is Zanahary-Andriamanitra (Creator-God) in person who emphasises the sacredness of the place and gives everyone the order to hold in the greatest respect the tenant of this place or the royal spirit; infallibly, because the divine order, in her opinion, is given

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<sup>100</sup> Raneny's explanation accords with information given by Rakotomalala et al. (2001: 71), which points out that these interdicts connected with sacred places are of different kinds: food, temporal, gestural, linguistic and so forth.

with such authority that there is no place for discussion: one is faced only with the alternatives of complying with it or returning home.<sup>101</sup>

Previously, as Raneny (DTL 3) admits, when she was obliged to tell the crowds of followers to take off their shoes or sandals, some of them were always reluctant to comply. But, she notes that now, when they see the divine order displayed they just read the holy inscription,<sup>102</sup> sit down to pray, take off their shoes and sandals, wash their feet in water permanently kept there in containers and enter the place, led by traditio-practitioners and Raneny's assistants.

Raneny (DTL 3) indicates that Zanahary-Andriamanitra's command makes a strong impression on her followers. Obviously, assistants and traditio-practitioners report to her that some of these followers, whom they presume stem from Protestant churches, appear to be visibly shocked when they see the biblical passage for the first time. But Raneny assures one that they now feel comfortable with it. As far as the traditionalist followers are concerned, she points out that they are not surprised at all to see this divine order. This is, she explains, because for most of the Malagasy traditionalists the God of the Bible and Zanahary refer to the same Supreme Being, the creator of everything, the source of life and the provider of all good things for human beings. Besides, Raneny makes it clear that in Madagascar Christianity and the traditional religion go hand in hand because the Malagasy, whose relationship is based on and bound by their kinship to each other, used to share everything, even their beliefs, in their lives. Accordingly, she points out that most of her followers are used to hearing about the biblical God and his Word from Christian relatives or fellows.

Raneny (DTL 3) gives her reasons for having selected Exodus 3: 5b as follows: Firstly, because she believes that throughout the Old Testament, or even the whole Bible, it comprises the only statement of God which specifically and positively attests the existence and the importance of a sacred place in this world. As she recognises, other sacred places, such as the place of Bethel where Jacob laid down and slept when he fled from his brother, and the mount of Moriah where God sent Abraham to offer up his son Isaac, are mentioned in the Old Testament. But she contends that their sacredness was of human origin, for God did

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<sup>101</sup> Raneny combines the names 'Zanahary-Andriamanitra' (Creator-God) to refer to the God of the Bible.

<sup>102</sup> Raneny notes that some followers, who are probably Christians from the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church, always make the sign of the cross over their heads every time they arrive at the entrance and see the inscription ordering them to take off their shoes and sandals.

not publicly proclaim any of them a sacred place as he did with the place of Horeb, which was specifically called the mountain of God.

Secondly, Raneny (DTL 3) has selected this passage because, in her opinion, it serves as a solid criterion for making a place sacred. This criterion is, according to her, the unlimited divine presence of God. Arguing for the omnipresence and the universal fatherhood of God, she states that his presence, activities and goodness cannot be restricted to the limited realms of the Christian Church. Relying on this argument, she stresses that God can be present in every place in the world and therefore that every place where God makes his presence known, especially where his name is called upon, is sacred. Raneny, therefore, emphasises that the Malagasy people can meet God not only in the Church, as Christians claim, but also in sacred places outside it where people worship him of their free will, not in formal religion.<sup>103</sup>

Thirdly, Raneny (DTL 3) has displayed Exodus 3: 5b on the entrance to the sacred place of Kiririoka because it clearly states the proper manner of behaving towards the sacredness of such a locality: the removing of one's shoes and sandals. Raneny supposes that the custom of doing so before entering certain areas like houses, royal palaces and temples was common to people in the oriental context. Therefore, she argues, Moses understood well what God meant when he ordered Moses to put off his sandals before walking onto the sacred place. In her opinion, Raneny explains that the reasons for this custom are as follows: 1) to prevent the sacred place from being soiled. The shoes and sandals are, for her, symbols of uncleanness because they are in permanent contact with unclean things on the soil; 2) to show respect for the owner of the sacred place. In Raneny's opinion, removing footwear is, simultaneously, a sign of humility and a deep mark of respect; 3) to display faithfulness and belief in the Super Being and the ancestral spirits worshipped and venerated in the sacred place.

Summing up her use of Exodus 3: 5b, Raneny (DTL 3) makes it clear that this passage is very helpful, in the sense that it expresses the value of a sacred place. Therefore it also

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<sup>103</sup> Raneny claims that in the Malagasy traditional religion the object of worship is Zarahary-Andriamanitra (God), not the ancestors, as Christians and foreign observers think. She emphasises that the Malagasy people never consider the ancestors to be equal to God; they are, rather, regarded as *Raiamandreny* (parents) who continue to care about and watch over their offspring. The fact that the name of God is always mentioned in the first place, before the ancestors, in the traditional prayers and speeches, she points out, attests that the Malagasy traditionalists do not confuse God with the ancestors.

affirms the followers' belief and trust in Zannahy-Andriamanitra and *Dada* and, at the same time, makes this belief relevant and meaningful.

#### 4.3.2.3 *Job 33: 6a*

I am just like you before God. (NIV)

The second instance of an Old Testament text that Raneny (DTL 3) uses as a religious slogan is Job 33: 6a. This passage is rendered in the Malagasy Protestant Bible from which Raneny took it as follows: '*Indro, izaho koa mba an'Andriamanitra tahaka anao ihany*', which literally means 'Behold, I too belong to God like you'.

Raneny (DTL 3) displays this passage in black and white on a banner near *Dada*'s tomb, on the top of which is the shrine. She explains that this Old Testament passage serves to emphasise that everything in the sacred place of Kiririoka, including the royal spirit (*Dada*), belongs to Zannahy-Andriamanitra (God). As Raneny states, this emphasis on the pre-eminence and mastery of God is indispensable because it aids the followers to understand and accept the hierarchical order of the divinities worshipped and venerated in this sacred place. She stresses that according to this hierarchical order, worship as such is reserved for Zannahy-Andriamanitra; as for *Dada*, he is simply held in veneration and respect. Therefore, Raneny is emphatic that what Christians refer to as 'ancestor worship' or the 'cult of the dead' does not exist in the sacred place of Kiririoka because *Dada* has never required that he should be the object of any worship, such as is accorded to God/Zannahy.

Raneny (DTL 3) stresses that some Christians have the completely mistaken idea that the Malagasy traditional religion consists only of the practice of worshipping the ancestors. She also argues that the Christian teaching denying the existence of ancestral spirits and condemning the relationship between them and the living while holding to the doctrine of life after death is illogical and self-contradictory. Reinforcing her point of view, she indicates that the traditionalists, who consider the ancestors to be their parents, do not worship them but respect them in the same way as they respect, honour and revere their living parents. In return, the spirits of their ancestors protect them in the same way as their parents protect them. As Raneny notes, the Malagasy ancestors are not beatified or declared to be saints as is done to western ancestors in some Christian churches. They are simply, she states, our parents and

grandparents, or the spirits of beloved persons who, though they have gone before us, are still with us and continue to exert an influence upon our daily lives.

Therefore, Raneny (DTL 3) stresses that, in the sacred place on Kiririoka, *Dada* plays the role of a forefather, interceding with Zanahary-Andriamanitra (Creator-God) for his offspring or followers, in the same way as living parents always serve as intercessors for their children. That is, she says, why he has insisted on being called *Dada* (Father). As Raneny explains, this name *Dada* shows that the royal spirit experienced in Kiririoka and with whom the followers are in contact is regarded as a person, not a deity. She then points out that the relationship between *Dada* and the followers is natural: father with children; and the interaction between them is normal: being with being. Accordingly, Raneny argues that the word 'worship' is not appropriate to refer to the service or duties that are performed in relation to *Dada*. It is true, Raneny notes, that this service may consist of sacrifices and offerings, *famadihana*. But she emphasises that, in Kiririoka, sacrifices and offerings are, in the first place, addressed to Zanahary-Andriamanitra and, in the second place, rendered to *Dada* as well as to his family in order to provide them with necessities like foods, clothes etc., just like those rendered to all parents.

Therefore, for Raneny (DTL 3) Job 33: 6a serves to show that *Dada* does not compete with Zanahary-Andriamanitra since he is not a god. As she reveals, he, rather, acknowledges Zanahary-Andriamanitra's uniqueness, divinity and power. Raneny then confides that *Dada* feels comfortable with this Old Testament passage for two reasons: firstly, it shows his followers where his right place (*vis-à-vis* God) is; secondly, it makes him much closer to his followers, because like them he belongs to God/Zanahary whom he recognises as the Master of both worlds, the visible and the invisible. But Raneny adds that, at the same time, this passage displays *Dada* as charged with the divine mission to provide his followers with protection and blessings as well as with all they need in their daily lives. There is nothing at all astonishing in this, she considers, because like the saints in the Roman Catholic Church who are still requested to bless and protect their offspring in faith, *Dada* simply continues to take care of his people as he used to do during his reign. She even emphasises that he is able to carry out this mission better than he did in his lifetime, for after having been purified by death and having transcended human nature and knowledge he has become perfectly moral, just and impartial.

#### 4.3.2.4 Psalm 121: 8a

The Lord will watch over your coming and going. (NIV)

Psalm 121: 8a constitutes the third example of an Old Testament text used by Raneny (DTL 3) as a religious slogan. The Malagasy Protestant Bible that Raneny uses renders it as follows: '*Jehovah hiaro anao, na miditra na mivoaka*', which literally means 'Yahweh will protect you as you come in and go out'. For the name of God Raneny uses Zanhary instead of 'Jehovah' (Yahweh). Raneny argues that the creator God is unique, but that his name varies with the people who address him: for the children of Israel he is 'Jehovah' (Yahweh); as for the Malagasy people, they call him 'Zanhary' or 'Andriamanitra', and she would guess that every people in the world, especially in the African continent, uses a national name for God. In her opinion, the reason for the mention of 'Jehovah' (Yahweh) in the Malagasy translation of the Old Testament is to demonstrate that the God whom the Jews call by this name, and 'Zanhary/Andriamanitra', simply refer to the same Supreme Being.

As she did with the first two Old Testament texts considered above, Raneny (DTL 3) has written Psalm 121: 8a in capitals on a white banner that she has placed prominently between the entrance and the royal tomb. According to her explanation, this passage is aimed at reminding the followers that it is only Zanhary-Andriamanitra (God) who possesses the power and the ability to keep and protect them. More explicitly, Raneny elaborates that the creator is the only protector of his creatures because he knows them perfectly. Therefore, he also knows their problems as well as the solutions to each of these. However, she points out that God, who created the human beings in his image and endowed them with his spirit and knowledge, bequeaths part of his abilities and power to them so that they can properly take care of and protect their own children or families.

In Raneny's view (DTL 3), since these abilities and power are connected with the immortal spirit and not with the perishable flesh, the ancestral spirits continue to use them for protecting their living offspring and relatives. She notes that these abilities and power as well as knowledge increase considerably after the spirit is freed from the weakness of the human flesh and purified from its imperfection by death. This is why the ancestral spirit can perform miraculous works, which no living human being whose spirit is still trapped in the flesh is able to do. It is this point, Raneny emphasises, that some followers, and especially Christians, do not understand.

As Raneny (DTL 3) stresses, the purpose of Psalm 121: 8a being displayed in this manner is to remind the followers that the only source of protection, as well as of the blessings, good health, prosperity, fertility etc. that are inseparable from it, is Zanahary-Andriamanitra (God). *Dada* as well as the other ancestors merely uses, with his permission, that with which God has endowed him.

#### 4.3.3 Traditional sacrifices and offerings: Leviticus 1-6

1:1 The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting. He said, <sup>2</sup> “speak to the Israelites and say to them: When any of you brings an offering to the Lord, bring as your offering an animal from either the herd or the flock. <sup>3</sup> If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect. He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the Lord. <sup>4</sup> He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him. <sup>5</sup> He is to slaughter the young bull before the Lord, and then Aaron's sons the priests shall bring the blood and sprinkle it against the altar on all sides at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. <sup>6</sup> He is to skin the burnt offering and cut it into pieces. <sup>7</sup> The sons of Aaron the priest are to put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. <sup>8</sup> Then Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, including the head and the fat, on the burning wood that is on the altar. <sup>9</sup> He is to wash the inner parts and the legs with water, and the priest is to burn all of it on the altar. It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. <sup>10</sup> If the offering is a burnt offering from the flock, from either the sheep or the goats, he is to offer a male without defect. <sup>11</sup> He is to slaughter it at the north side of the altar before the Lord, and Aaron's sons the priests shall sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides. <sup>12</sup> He is to cut it into pieces, and the priest shall arrange them, including the head and the fat, on the burning wood that is on the altar. <sup>13</sup> He is to wash the inner parts and the legs with water, and the priest is to bring all of it and burn it on the altar. It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. <sup>14</sup> If the offering to the Lord is a burnt offering of birds, he is to offer a dove or a young pigeon. <sup>15</sup> The priest shall bring it to the altar, wring off the head and burn it on the altar; its blood shall be drained out on the side of the altar. <sup>16</sup> He is to remove the crop with its contents and throw it to the east side of the altar, where the ashes are. <sup>17</sup> He shall tear it open by the wings, not severing it completely, and then the priest shall burn it on the wood that is on the fire on the altar. It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord”.

‘2:1 When someone brings a grain offering to the Lord, his offering is to be of fine flour. He is to pour oil on it, put incense on it <sup>2</sup> and take it to Aaron's sons the priests. The priest shall take a handful of the fine flour and oil, together with all the incense, and burn this as a memorial portion on the altar, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. <sup>3</sup> The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the offerings made to the Lord by fire. <sup>4</sup> If you bring a grain offering baked in an oven, it is to consist of fine flour: cakes made without yeast and mixed with oil, or wafers made without yeast and spread with oil. <sup>5</sup> If your grain offering is prepared on a griddle, it is to be made of fine flour mixed with oil, and without yeast. <sup>6</sup> Crumble it and pour oil on it; it is a grain offering. <sup>7</sup> If your grain offering is cooked in a pan, it is to be made of fine flour and oil. <sup>8</sup> Bring the grain offering made of these things to the Lord; present it to the priest, who shall take it to

the altar. <sup>9</sup> He shall take out the memorial portion from the grain offering and burn it on the altar as an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. <sup>10</sup> The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the offerings made to the Lord by fire. <sup>11</sup> Every grain offering you bring to the Lord must be made without yeast, for you are not to burn any yeast or honey in an offering made to the Lord by fire. <sup>12</sup> You may bring them to the Lord as an offering of the firstfruits, but they are not to be offered on the altar as a pleasing aroma. <sup>13</sup> Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings. <sup>14</sup> If you bring a grain offering of firstfruits to the Lord, offer crushed heads of new grain roasted in the fire. <sup>15</sup> Put oil and incense on it; it is a grain offering. <sup>16</sup> The priest shall burn the memorial portion of the crushed grain and the oil, together with all the incense, as an offering made to the Lord by fire’.

‘3:1 If someone’s offering is a fellowship offering, and he offers an animal from the herd, whether male or female, he is to present before the Lord an animal without defect. <sup>2</sup> He is to lay his hand on the head of his offering and slaughter it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Then Aaron’s sons the priests shall sprinkle the blood against the altar on all sides. <sup>3</sup> From the fellowship offering he is to bring a sacrifice made to the Lord by fire: all the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, <sup>4</sup> both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys. <sup>5</sup> Then Aaron’s sons are to burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offering that is on the burning wood, as an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. <sup>6</sup> If he offers an animal from the flock as a fellowship offering to the Lord, he is to offer a male or female without defect. <sup>7</sup> If he offers a lamb, he is to present it before the Lord. <sup>8</sup> He is to lay his hand on the head of his offering and slaughter it in front of the Tent of Meeting. Then Aaron’s sons shall sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides. <sup>9</sup> From the fellowship offering he is to bring a sacrifice made to the Lord by fire: its fat, the entire fat tail cut off close to the backbone, all the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, <sup>10</sup> both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys. <sup>11</sup> The priest shall burn them on the altar as food, an offering made to the Lord by fire. <sup>12</sup> If his offering is a goat, he is to present it before the Lord. <sup>13</sup> He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it in front of the Tent of Meeting. Then Aaron’s sons shall sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides. <sup>14</sup> From what he offers he is to make this offering to the Lord by fire: all the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, <sup>15</sup> both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys. <sup>16</sup> The priest shall burn them on the altar as food, an offering made by fire, a pleasing aroma. All the fat is the Lord’s. <sup>17</sup> This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live: You must not eat any fat or any blood.’

‘4:1 The Lord said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> “Say to the Israelites: When anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord’s commands-- <sup>3</sup> If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, he must bring to the Lord a young bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed. <sup>4</sup> He is to present the bull at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the Lord. He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it before the Lord. <sup>5</sup> Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull’s blood and carry it into the Tent of Meeting. <sup>6</sup> He is to dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle some of it seven times before the Lord, in front of the curtain of the sanctuary. <sup>7</sup> The priest shall then put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense that is before the Lord in the Tent of Meeting. The rest of the bull’s blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. <sup>8</sup> He shall remove all the fat from the bull of the sin

offering-- the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them,<sup>9</sup> both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys--<sup>10</sup> just as the fat is removed from the ox sacrificed as a fellowship offering. Then the priest shall burn them on the altar of burnt offering.<sup>11</sup> But the hide of the bull and all its flesh, as well as the head and legs, the inner parts and offal--<sup>12</sup> that is, all the rest of the bull-- he must take outside the camp to a place ceremonially clean, where the ashes are thrown, and burn it in a wood fire on the ash heap.<sup>13</sup> If the whole Israelite community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord's commands, even though the community is unaware of the matter, they are guilty.<sup>14</sup> When they become aware of the sin they committed, the assembly must bring a young bull as a sin offering and present it before the Tent of Meeting.<sup>15</sup> The elders of the community are to lay their hands on the bull's head before the Lord, and the bull shall be slaughtered before the Lord.<sup>16</sup> Then the anointed priest is to take some of the bull's blood into the Tent of Meeting.<sup>17</sup> He shall dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle it before the Lord seven times in front of the curtain.<sup>18</sup> He is to put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is before the Lord in the Tent of Meeting. The rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.<sup>19</sup> He shall remove all the fat from it and burn it on the altar,<sup>20</sup> and do with this bull just as he did with the bull for the sin offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven.<sup>21</sup> Then he shall take the bull outside the camp and burn it as he burned the first bull. This is the sin offering for the community.<sup>22</sup> When a leader sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the commands of the Lord his God, he is guilty.<sup>23</sup> When he is made aware of the sin he committed, he must bring as his offering a male goat without defect.<sup>24</sup> He is to lay his hand on the goat's head and slaughter it at the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered before the Lord. It is a sin offering.<sup>25</sup> Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar.<sup>26</sup> He shall burn all the fat on the altar as he burned the fat of the fellowship offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for the man's sin, and he will be forgiven.<sup>27</sup> If a member of the community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord's commands, he is guilty.<sup>28</sup> When he is made aware of the sin he committed, he must bring as his offering for the sin he committed a female goat without defect.<sup>29</sup> He is to lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and slaughter it at the place of the burnt offering.<sup>30</sup> Then the priest is to take some of the blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar.<sup>31</sup> He shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar as an aroma pleasing to the Lord. In this way the priest will make atonement for him, and he will be forgiven.<sup>32</sup> If he brings a lamb as his sin offering, he is to bring a female without defect.<sup>33</sup> He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it for a sin offering at the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered.<sup>34</sup> Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar.<sup>35</sup> He shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the lamb of the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar on top of the offerings made to the Lord by fire. In this way the priest will make atonement for him for the sin he has committed, and he will be forgiven.

5:1 If a person sins because he does not speak up when he hears a public charge to testify regarding something he has seen or learned about, he will be held responsible.

<sup>2</sup> Or if a person touches anything ceremonially unclean-- whether the carcasses of unclean wild animals or of unclean livestock or of unclean creatures that move along the ground-- even though he is unaware of it, he has become unclean and is guilty.<sup>3</sup>

Or if he touches human uncleanness-- anything that would make him unclean-- even though he is unaware of it, when he learns of it he will be guilty. <sup>4</sup> Or if a person thoughtlessly takes an oath to do anything, whether good or evil-- in any matter one might carelessly swear about-- even though he is unaware of it, in any case when he learns of it he will be guilty. <sup>5</sup> When anyone is guilty in any of these ways, he must confess in what way he has sinned <sup>6</sup> and, as a penalty for the sin he has committed, he must bring to the Lord a female lamb or goat from the flock as a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin. <sup>7</sup> If he cannot afford a lamb, he is to bring two doves or two young pigeons to the Lord as a penalty for his sin-- one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. <sup>8</sup> He is to bring them to the priest, who shall first offer the one for the sin offering. He is to wring its head from its neck, not severing it completely, <sup>9</sup> and is to sprinkle some of the blood of the sin offering against the side of the altar; the rest of the blood must be drained out at the base of the altar. It is a sin offering. <sup>10</sup> The priest shall then offer the other as a burnt offering in the prescribed way and make atonement for him for the sin he has committed, and he will be forgiven. <sup>11</sup> If, however, he cannot afford two doves or two young pigeons, he is to bring as an offering for his sin a tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering. He must not put oil or incense on it, because it is a sin offering. <sup>12</sup> He is to bring it to the priest, who shall take a handful of it as a memorial portion and burn it on the altar on top of the offerings made to the Lord by fire. It is a sin offering. <sup>13</sup> In this way the priest will make atonement for him for any of these sins he has committed, and he will be forgiven. The rest of the offering will belong to the priest, as in the case of the grain offering.”

‘5:14 The Lord said to Moses: <sup>15</sup> “When a person commits a violation and sins unintentionally in regard to any of the Lord’s holy things, he is to bring to the Lord as a penalty a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value in silver, according to the sanctuary shekel. It is a guilt offering. <sup>16</sup> He must make restitution for what he has failed to do in regard to the holy things, add a fifth of the value to that and give it all to the priest, who will make atonement for him with the ram as a guilt offering, and he will be forgiven. <sup>17</sup> If a person sins and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord’s commands, even though he does not know it, he is guilty and will be held responsible. <sup>18</sup> He is to bring to the priest as a guilt offering a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value. In this way the priest will make atonement for him for the wrong he has committed unintentionally, and he will be forgiven. <sup>19</sup> It is a guilt offering; he has been guilty of wrongdoing against the Lord.”

6:1 The Lord said to Moses: <sup>2</sup> “If anyone sins and is unfaithful to the Lord by deceiving his neighbor about something entrusted to him or left in his care or stolen, or if he cheats him, <sup>3</sup> or if he finds lost property and lies about it, or if he swears falsely, or if he commits any such sin that people may do, <sup>4</sup> when he thus sins and becomes guilty, he must return what he has stolen or taken by extortion, or what was entrusted to him, or the lost property he found, <sup>5</sup> or whatever it was he swore falsely about. He must make restitution in full, add a fifth of the value to it and give it all to the owner on the day he presents his guilt offering. <sup>6</sup> And as a penalty he must bring to the priest, that is, to the Lord, his guilt offering, a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value. <sup>7</sup> In this way the priest will make atonement for him before the Lord, and he will be forgiven for any of these things he did that made him guilty.” (NIV)

This case study illustrates how Malagasy traditio-practitioners use the text of Leviticus 1-6 in traditional sacrifices and offerings: it records definite laws prescribed by God regarding the sacrifices that were to be offered and the manner in which the offering was to be made. It is to

be mentioned that this use, which will bring out how traditio-practitioners interpret and apply the Levitical sacrifices and offerings as scriptural foundation for the Malagasy traditional sacrifices and offerings, is the second example showing the use of the Old Testament as an 'open book'.

Rasamoelina (DTL 4), a traditio-practitioner working in Antanifotsy, specifies that sacrifices and offerings occupy a central and essential place in the Malagasy traditional religion because they are regarded as comprising the chief and most perfect function of this religion. He also points out that, in his opinion, the Malagasy traditional religion, like the traditional religions of other countries, is a religion of sacrifice.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, Rasamoelina outlines that his colleagues (the other traditio-practitioners who use the Old Testament) and himself use Leviticus 1-6 because they regard these chapters as the basic texts concerning sacrifices and offerings.

The Malagasy words for sacrifice and offering are, respectively, *sorona* and *fanatitra*. But, when the British missionaries sent by the LMS (London Missionary Society) translated the Bible into the Malagasy language they used the term *fanatitra* instead of *sorona* for sacrifice, and the other missionaries, Norwegian and French, who arrived later on, as well as Malagasy translators, concurred. However, it should be emphasised that, according to anthropologists, it is the term '*sorona*', which properly corresponds to 'sacrifice' (Molet 1979a: 376; cf. Photo 18). In Jaovelo-Dzao's view (1985: 104) the reason for this omission of the term '*sorona*' from the Malagasy Protestant Bible is probably because the British missionaries considered that it expressed so strongly the absurd and the superstitious or the heathenish side of the Malagasy traditional religion. On the other hand, he asserts that the word 'sacrifice' is correctly rendered into '*sorona*' in the Malagasy Roman Catholic Bible and Mass (Jaovelo-Dzao 1985: 104).

As Magessa (1997b: 201; see also Mbiti (1969: 58) indicates, sacrifice and offering are closely interconnected in African religion: to such an extent that it is sometimes, in practice, difficult to distinguish the one from the other. Nevertheless, he points out that it is important to make a clear distinction between these two practices. According to him, sacrifice in African religion generally consists of killing or destroying the item by ceremonial immolation, by fire or by abandonment. On the other hand, offerings, which especially consist

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<sup>104</sup> Rasamoelina's opinion accords with Mbiti's argument (1969: 58), which posits that 'sacrifices and offerings constitute one of the commonest acts of worship among African people'.

of inanimate items like foodstuffs and coins that are to be directly dedicated to the recipient, do not need to be destroyed (1997: 201). But although sacrifices and offerings are distinct in practice it should be noted that they are employed in African religion for the same purpose: they are performed, as Mbiti says (1969: 59), with the intention ‘to make and renew contact between God and man, the spirits and man, i.e. the spiritual and the physical worlds’. Elsewhere, Mbiti (1978: 57) contends that sacrifices and offerings are acts marking the point where the visible and the invisible worlds meet, and marking human beings’ intention to project them [sacrifices and offerings] into the invisible world.

In accordance with the rule pointed out above, the distinction between *sorona* (sacrifices) and *fanatitra* (offerings) in the Malagasy traditional religion is clear. Referring to the definition provided by Jaovelo-Dzao (1985: 105), the term *sorona* specifically designates all living items or victims that are offered and immolated as sacrifices (cf. Photos 19 and 20). More explicitly, Molet (1979a: 376) understands this term as the action of taking life away from living animals (especially cattle and fowl) that are to be sacrificed in a bloody ritual. As far as *fanatitra* are concerned, Molet refers to them as bloodless items like agricultural products and many other things that followers are allowed to offer directly. He assumes that, as in the African religion, *sorona* and *fanatitra* in the Malagasy traditional religion are quite distinct but they perform the same function: they are aimed at establishing, or restoring, or perpetuating a sacred contact between human beings and the deity (1979a: 376).

Rasamoelina (DTL 4) emphasises that the essential idea which the word ‘*sorona*’ (sacrifice) contains and expresses is *solo*, which in English literally means ‘substitute’ (cf. Bloch 1971: 28). He also stresses that the most valuable and sacred element in *sorona* is the blood. As he explains, the blood is believed in the Malagasy traditional religion to constitute the material vehicle of life, and in contrast with flesh and bones, it represents the immaterial principle, which survives death. For Rasamoelina (DTL 4), therefore, given this sacred and indestructible character of the blood, a purifying and atoning force is attributed to the bloody sacrifices, and the idea of substitution is clearly expressed. As he indicates, it is believed in the Malagasy traditional religion that all offences against the Supreme Being, Zanahary, as well as against the ancestors (for instance violation of taboos and religious rules) inevitably result in sickness or even in death and that the offender’s life can only be saved by means of blood being shed in order to substitute for him/her. In other words, the life of the sacrificial victim is given to the afflicting Supreme Being or ancestors in exchange for the lives of the

persons or the community on whose behalf it is offered. Slaughtering sacrificial animals in the Malagasy traditional religion, according to Rasamoelina's explication, is thus offering life to save and enhance life (cf. Parrinder 1974: 63 and Ray 1976: 86). This is, he stresses, why the chief efficacy of the sacrifice of animals is regarded as located in their blood, which is believed to possess a supernatural power.

According to Rasamoelina's (DTL 4) description, the animal (ox or cow, or cock) that should be sacrificed for this purpose of substitution is presented by the officiating tradition-practitioner as an offering of great value, which is worthy to be accepted by Zanahary and the ancestors in the place of the offender who implores their forgiveness. Therefore, the animal is usually, he indicates, of the male sex, without defect, strong and fat.<sup>105</sup> He also mentions that the victims for the bloody sacrifice must be taken from the personal possessions of the offerers, and should be classified as domestic and clean animals, because fish and wild animals as well as pigs, which are regarded as unclean, are forbidden as sacrifices. The Malagasy traditionalists believe that the sight of the precious victim offered in the place of the offender quietens Zanahary's and the ancestors' anger and makes them lenient and merciful towards him/her (DTL 4; cf. Molet 1979a: 375). However, Rasamoelina points out that although the name of the Supreme Being Zanahary is always invoked in the first place when performing sacrifices and offerings, the main recipients are the ancestors. He suggests two reasons: firstly, because the ancestors, who are counted as still part of their families, are closer to the living; secondly, because, being believed to act as intermediary agents between Zanahary and the living, they are the most often approached to do so.

In addition to Rasamoelina's explanation, Randriamanantena (DTL 1), a tradition-practitioner working in the eastern part of Antananarivo, remarks that sacrifices and offerings in the Malagasy traditional religion are not only used for substitution purposes. As he points out, they are also performed as a means to ask Zanahary and the ancestors for specific favours such as blessings, health, progeny, long life, protection and prosperity (cf. Bloch 1971: 145). He declares that the supernatural beings, especially the ancestors, become generous and helpful when they are sufficiently nourished by sacrifices and offerings. For Randriamanantena, therefore, sacrifices and offerings are of great value in the Malagasy traditional religion because they guarantee the successfulness and the equilibrium of the

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<sup>105</sup> Still, Rasamoelina notes that female and defective animals can be accepted, but only in the rites of purification or in the lesser ceremonies in which substitution is not involved.

relationship between both the offerers and the recipients. Besides, he emphasises that sacrifices and offerings are for the Malagasy traditionalists the ultimate means of expressing praise, thanksgiving, gratitude, satisfaction and joy to Zanahary and the ancestors, who are respectively the source and the sustainers of their lives.

It is to be mentioned here that Malagasy Christians generally criticise the practice of traditional sacrifices and offerings as an insult to God who, they say, already gave his Son, Jesus Christ, as a sacrificial victim to substitute the sinners and to redeem them. Responding to such a criticism, an anonymous traditio-practitioner, working in Ambohimandroso (DTL 6), replies that the Malagasy traditionalists just do what God says and orders in Leviticus 1-6.<sup>106</sup> As he emphasises, the God of the Bible who ordered his people to practise sacrifices and offerings is the same as Zanahary who is believed and worshipped in the Malagasy traditional religion. He even argues that before instituting the practice of sacrifices and offerings in the Old Testament, God had already inspired it in the hearts of human beings. The irrefutable example proving this point, in his opinion, is Abel's sacrifice (a bloody sacrifice) and Cain's offering (an inanimate offering) that were performed just after the fall of the first human beings. This traditio-practitioner, therefore, stipulates that by inserting his sacred laws about sacrifices and offerings into the Old Testament and by ordering his people to perform them God simply confirmed the value of what the other peoples had already universally known and practised.

In addition, the anonymous traditio-practitioner (DTL 6) posits that by using in the Bible the two words '*sorona*' and '*fanatitra*', respectively, for sacrifice and offering, the first missionaries themselves had acknowledged the validity of the traditional sacrifices and offerings,<sup>107</sup> because, he supposes, these missionaries had first investigated and studied the Malagasy traditional religion before preaching and teaching the Bible. Therefore, they certainly knew what these words meant and referred to when they translated the Bible and

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<sup>106</sup> One can say that this reply echoes the Zionists' response, 'Because the Bible says so' when they are asked about their appropriation of the Old Testament in a symbolic and ritual way or in dancing out their theology (cf. Van Zyl 2000: 429).

<sup>107</sup> It should be noted that the anonymous traditio-practitioner uses the Malagasy Catholic Bible, in which the terms 'sacrifice' and 'offering' are respectively rendered *sorona* and *fanatitra*.

decided to use these terms for sacrifice and offering. This implies, the anonymous traditio-practitioner argues, that the missionaries were persuaded of undeniable similarities between both the Levitical and the Malagasy sacrificial systems; otherwise they would not have translated sacrifice and offering into '*sorona*' and '*fanatitra*'. He thus deduces that in appropriating these two words the Old Testament, namely Leviticus 1-6, supports and guarantees the positive nature and value of the practice of sacrifices and offerings in the Malagasy traditional religion.

As for Rakoto Jean (DTL 2), a traditio-practitioner working in the west of Antananarivo, he emphasises the importance of the sacrifices and offerings practised in the traditional religion by arguing that they are not merely the results of human imaginations and inventions; rather, they originated in the positive command of God. Referring to the offering and sacrifice performed by Cain and Abel (Gn 4: 3-5), he adds that sacrifices and offerings, which are as old as the world, are religious practices that God has appreciated from the beginning. In his opinion, God's positive command regarding sacrifices and offerings, after the disastrous fall in Eden, has been preserved by tradition among Adam's descendants and has spread among the traditional religions of the world. This divine command, Rakoto Jean points out, becomes more definite and specific in the book of Leviticus, especially in chapters 1-6, in which God's laws ordering and regulating the practice of sacrifices and offerings are recorded. Moreover, he states that, on the material, practical and functional levels, sacrifices and offerings in the Malagasy traditional religion accord with and fulfil these divine laws.

Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) admits that God's laws concerning sacrifices and offerings were exclusively given to Israel as the chosen people. But he considers that God has chosen Israel not only as a favourite people but also as a representative of all peoples in the world, and furthermore as the custodian and transmitter of his sacred laws and religious instructions. Besides, Rakoto Jean argues that, given the universal character and fatherhood of God, his laws concerning sacrifices and offerings take on a universal aspect by which sacrifices and offerings in the other religions, including those practised in the Malagasy traditional religion, are inspired. He thus finds no wrong in the traditional sacrifices and offerings as long as their practice accords with God's will and his laws, written in his sacred book, namely Leviticus 1-6. In addition, for Rakoto Jean a religion entirely without sacrifice is unnatural and seems psychologically impossible since one of the special characteristic features, which the history

of religions places before us is the wide diffusion or the universality of sacrifice among the human race.

Expressing his opinion about possible similarities between Levitical and Malagasy sacrificial systems, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) affirms that they are specifically viewed on the levels of material, form and meaning. On the material level, the two sacrificial systems are similar, according to Rakoto Jean's explanation, in their preference for domestic animals as the main and most valuable materials of bloody sacrifices. In his view the reason is that these domestic animals are close to the life and affections of the offerers and that most of the former, such as cattle, sheep and fowl, belong to the category of clean animals. On the other hand, he notes that pigs, horses and wild animals are regarded as unclean in both kinds of sacrifice, Levitical and Malagasy.

As far as the form is concerned, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) argues that some aspects of similarity may be observable in the method of performing the sacrifices. He suggests the following examples from bloody sacrifices demonstrating this similarity:

<b>Animal sacrifice</b>	<b>Sacrificial acts</b>	<b>Levitical</b>	<b>Malagasy</b>
(Ox, sheep, fowl)	Bringing the animal (Lv 1:4)	near the altar; laying a hand on its head	near the shrine; laying a hand on its body while praying that Zanahary and the ancestors accept it.
	Killing the animal (Lv 1: 5)	at the northern side of the altar	at the northeastern side of the shrine
	Sprinkling the blood (Lv 1: 5, 11)	on the side/horns of the altar (the remains of the blood were poured out at the foot of the altar)	on the side of the shrine and towards the offerers (the remains of the blood are emptied out at the sacred stone on the

			northeast of the shrine)
	Cutting up the slaughtered animal (Lv 1: 6)	by the offerers (sometimes by priests)	by the offerers assisted by the traditio-practitioner and his/her assistants
	Cooking and eating the victim or burning it entirely (Lv 1: 8-9; 7: 6)	by the priests (the victim had to be entirely/partly burnt on the altar and the rest was eaten by the priests or by the priests along with the offerers)	shared between the traditio-practitioner and the offerers after some fat has been taken and entirely burnt on the shrine

In addition, Rakoto Jean stresses that in both sacrificial systems, the Levitical and the Malagasy, the handling of the blood must be performed with precision because of its sacredness and potency.

On the meaning level, for Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) similarities are also observable between the Levitical and Malagasy sacrificial systems. The most important similarities, he considers, reside in the intention of the offerer to enter into communion (fellowship) with God (Levitical)/Zanahary (Malagasy) and the use of the animal sacrifice's blood as a substitute for his/her life. Other similarities, he contends, are seen in the use of sacrifices and offerings as a means to worship God (Levitical)/Zanahary (Malagasy), to show devotion to him and to ask him for forgiveness, blessings and good things. Rakoto Jean adds that the aim of the offerer to make amends for specific unintentional guilt and to become clean after becoming ritually unclean also partly illustrates the similarity between both sacrificial systems.

#### **4.3.4 References for morals: Psalm 113: 5-6; Genesis 2: 18, 22**

The intention of this case study is to bring out the ways in which Malagasy traditio-practitioners use the Old Testament as a reference book for morals. Examples displaying these

methods are the texts of Psalm 113: 5-6 and Genesis 2: 18, 22 that these practitioners use, respectively, to cause their followers to fear the Supreme Being, Zanahary, and respect the sacred value of marriage. It is to be pointed out that this case, which will present how traditio-practitioners interpret these texts and apply them as moral instructions and advice for their followers, is the third example showing the use of the Old Testament as an ‘open book’.

#### 4.3.4.1 Psalm 113: 5-6

<sup>5</sup> Who is like the Lord our God, the One who sits enthroned on high,  
<sup>6</sup> who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth? (NIV)

This Old Testament text is used by Nenibe (Grandmother; DTL 7), a traditio-practitioner working in a suburb located 18 km to the north of Antananarivo, to cause her followers’ hearts and consciences to be filled with the fear of Zanahary (the Creator). Actually, she uses other passages, but she argues that Psalm 113: 5-6 is the most relevant of them.

Nenibe (DTL 7) explains that, as both Zanahary’s representatives and *Raiamandreny* (Father-and-Mother), Malagasy traditio-practitioners conscientiously feel responsible for their followers’ well-being: physically, spiritually and morally. They assume this responsibility by advising, instructing, correcting, and even rebuking the latter. Their goal, she points out, is to lead and keep their followers in sound morality and behaviour before Zanahary.

For Nenibe (DTL 7), the fear of the Supreme Being, Zanahary, constitutes the fundamental principle on which the Malagasy traditional religion and its morality are based. But she acknowledges that many people today, especially young ones, who are more and more attracted by foreign ways of life, begin to neglect or forget this good principle. It is, therefore, she points out, urgently necessary to remind them of the vital importance of this fear of Zanahary and to lead them to behave in accordance with Malagasy traditional morality.

According to Nenibe (DTL 7), Zanahary is to be feared for three reasons: firstly, because he is the same creator as the God of the Bible, with whom he shares the same name, ‘Andriamanitra’. Therefore, he deserves to be feared, as with God in Christianity, for it is he who gave the human beings lives and souls. Secondly, Zanahary must be feared since he is holy and perfect. This perfection, as Nenibe indicates, which is especially seen in his

goodness, justice, and righteousness, requires his believers to fear him and to carry out his good will. Thirdly, and the most important, she emphasises, is that Zanahary is omnipresent. Nenibe explains that from a geocentric view, Zanahary, who dwells beyond the sky, is invisible to human eyes; but the Malagasy traditionalists believe that he always turns his face towards the world, with the result that he sees and knows what every human being is doing.

As far as Zanahary's will is concerned, Nenibe (DTL 7) mentions that it is not recorded in a book like the Ten Commandments which the Christians have at their disposal in the Bible; Zanahary's will is, rather, written on the Malagasy traditionalists' hearts and consciences. Consequently, they do not need, she notes, either a catechism or any written doctrine for acquiring a notion and knowledge of Zanahary; it is simply necessary to remind them how they should behave appropriately towards him and towards the community.

The main material and resource from which Nenibe (DTL 7) draws her instructive advice comprises Malagasy proverbs. To emphasise her educational message, she complements these proverbs with biblical texts that she mostly selects from the Old Testament. One of these Old Testament texts that Nenibe prefers to the others is Psalm 113: 5-6. The Malagasy proverb that Nenibe uses in combination with this passage is: *Avo fipetraka Zanahary/Andriamanitra fa miondrika mijery ny ety an-tany*, which literally means: 'Zanahary/Andriamanitra sits on high but he bends down to look on the earth'.

Nenibe (DTL 7) argues that Psalm 113: 5-6 and this Malagasy proverb, which are quite similar, convey the same message, making human beings aware that nothing on earth can be hidden from God's/Zanahary's eyes. She stresses that the Supreme Being is even able to know and read the deep thought that everybody conceives and keeps in his/her heart. Nenibe confirms this divine omniscience by quoting another Malagasy proverb: *Aza ny lohasaha mangina no jerena fa Zanahary ao an-tampon'ny loha mahita ny ratsy miafina ataonao*, which can be translated as follows: 'Do not take advantage of the silent valley to do evil because Zanahary is above your head knowing the secret sin you are going to commit'.

Nenibe (DTL 7) stresses that, given the degradation of the moral life of some Malagasy people today, this text of Psalm 113: 5-6 is very helpful in making them aware of the permanent presence of Zanahary above their heads, from where he sees and knows whatever they do, bad or good. As she mentions, this awareness is very important for Malagasy traditionalists because not only does it lead them to fear Zanahary but it also causes them to think of his will before doing anything. To reinforce this awareness Nenibe used to

remind her followers that it is utter folly to think that Zanahary neither exists nor is able to see what happens on the earth. She then quoted Psalm 14: 1 to them, which is rendered as follows: ‘The fool says in his heart, “There is no God”’ (NIV), in addition to Psalm 113: 5-6. The Malagasy proverb she uses in combination with it is: *Izay manao an’i Zanahary ho tsy misy dia toy ny adala mitsambiki-mikimpy amin’ny hantsana*, which literally means: ‘The one who denies the existence of Zanahary is like a foolish person who is blindly jumping into the precipice’. According to Nenibe’s explanation, an individual who does not fear or respect Zanahary is regarded in the Malagasy traditional religion as the worst of people and is consequently pointed out as a danger to society.

According to Nenibe (DTL 7), she also uses Psalm 113: 5-6 to make her followers aware that Zanahary, who is holy and just, is an infallible judge. She explains that contrary to the Last Judgment in the Christian faith, which will take place at the end of the world, Zanahary judges human beings every day and punishes or rewards them for their evil or good deeds. In her view, Zanahary punishes the evildoers by returning against them the evil they did. On the other hand, the rewards he offers to anyone for his/her good deeds comprise blessings, peace and well-being. Nenibe then emphasises that knowing Zanahary to be an infallible judge is even more reason to fear him and to behave well according to his will.

Summing up her instruction and moral advice, Nenibe (DTL 7) reminds her followers that wisdom and true knowledge are only gained from the fear of Zanahary. Consequently, the Malagasy people, especially those who follow the traditional religion, she declares, must be filled every day with the fear of him.

#### 4.3.4.2 Genesis 2: 18, 22

<sup>18</sup> The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” [...] <sup>22</sup> Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. (NIV)

This text is used by Rajaonasy (DTL 5), a traditio-practitioner working in Antsirabe, as moral advice and the foundation of traditional marriage. As he explains, marriage in the Malagasy traditional context is regarded as a sacred institution because it guarantees the extension and the continuity of the generations. Therefore, Malagasy traditionalists regard as insane a person who refuses or rejects marriage. Likewise, to break down a marriage is to commit a major mistake and serious sin in life. Thus, in order to avoid all the problems and obstacles which might lead the marriage to failure, most Malagasy traditionalists consult traditio-practitioners.

Furnishing essential information about the Malagasy traditional marriage, Rajaonasy (DTL 5) emphasises that from the times of the *ntaolo* (ancient) Malagasy until now, it has practically and ritually remained almost unchanged. In principle, the marriage is concluded at the instigation of the two persons – man and woman – who wish to marry. However, Rajaonasy specifies that its fulfilment is not possible without the parents' consent and blessings. The man or the son should, therefore, inform his parents of his intention to marry and tell them about the family, as well as the behaviour, of the woman he wants to marry. If the parents find that the woman is a suitable candidate for their son, they give their consent and blessing, and they (parents and son) take the decision to proceed to the marriage.

According to Rajaonasy's (DTL 5) description, preparation for a Malagasy traditional marriage is not always easy. According to the custom, the man's parents first, and discreetly, contact the woman's mother who, always discreetly, informs her husband. The latter, as head of the household, must express his agreement or disagreement. If he agrees, his wife keeps the man's parents informed and invites them to come. The man and his parents, accompanied by some senior relatives, then visit the woman's parents 'to knock at the door' and to discuss in private the terms of the marriage as well as its procedure.<sup>108</sup> Most important, they try to fix the amount and value of the dowry and the *vodiondry*, which literally means 'the backside of a sheep'.<sup>109</sup> The discussion regarding the date and the form of the ceremonies also takes place at this stage (cf. Molet 1979b: 147).

As Rajaonasy (DTL 5) emphasises, such a preliminary discussion about practical subjects, which the Malagasy call *dinidinika* (a careful examination) demonstrates that the Malagasy traditional marriage constitutes a type of true bargaining. The final discussion of these matters, which will take place during the actual marriage, is simply to display publicly what has already been decided between the man's and the woman's parents at the *dinidinika* (cf. Bloch 1971: 178). Sometimes, this discussion or *dinidinika* inevitably results in failure because the two parties are not able to reach agreement. If this is the case, the parents merely comfort their children and ask them to cancel their intention to marry. The children in

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<sup>108</sup> 'To knock at the door' is the literal translation of the Malagasy term *mandom-baravarana* (*mandona* means 'to knock' and *varavarana* is 'door'). This term is especially used in the Malagasy context to express how a man, accompanied by his parents and relatives, comes to the woman's parents to ask for her hand (in marriage).

<sup>109</sup> The *vodiondry*, which literally means 'the backside of a sheep', is the sum of money that the groom, in a Merina traditional marriage, should give to his bride's parents as the expression of his respect for them. It is called *vodiondry* because it is said to have been in the past literally that.

question, who have only been passive subjects during the discussion, should accept this parental decision and advice, whatever their love for each other, because in terms of the Malagasy traditional customs, the children are required to respect their parents and submit to their authority.

Rajaonasy (DTL 5) explains that this final submission to the parents constitutes one of the bases maintaining the stability of the Malagasy traditional society. Hence, any failure of a marriage is rarely a cause of suicide or madness among traditionalist young people. Moreover, those who experience such a failure often think that it is not destined that they should marry. Thus, there is no reason for them to insist on continuing the marriage.<sup>110</sup>

As already said, a traditional marriage may be doomed to be a failure from its start. But Rajaonasy (DTL 5) notes that, in general, most of the traditionalists' marriages succeed because the parents, having met no major obstacles, consent to their union, wish them a happy conjugal life filled with love and bless them to give birth to 'seven sons and seven daughters'.<sup>111</sup> Having gained this parental agreement and blessing, the man and the woman hurry to the traditio-practitioner in order to consult him and ask his advice.

As Rajaonasy (DTL 5) emphasises, the first measure a traditio-practitioner must take, when future couples come to him/her, is to calculate their destinies. According to his explanation, every Malagasy traditionalist is born under a zodiacal sign predicting his/ her future (cf. Molet 1979a: 74). Consequently, the first step that the traditio-practitioner should take is to know the month and the day of birth of the person in question. This is not difficult to do at all because most Malagasy people have birth certificates. Moreover, many Malagasy, even those who do not possess such certificates, are able to remember their date of birth because that represents for them an important event on which their destiny and life depend. This first step is very necessary because the traditio-practitioner, from this information, can determine the fundamental fate of the person consulting him/her.

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<sup>110</sup> According to this explanation, one can easily see that Malagasy traditionalists believe in fate and fear it. Moreover, it should be noted that even many Malagasy Christians still live under the influence of this fear of fate.

<sup>111</sup> In Madagascar, especially in the highlands, this is the custom. It is however to be noted that the number 'seven' is not understood in its numerical sense but rather in its spiritual sense. In the Malagasy concept, the number 'seven' is a sacred figure, which represents both protection and fullness. Accordingly, this expression is generally understood as wishing the future household to be full of grace, peace, and success. But, even though the numerical sense of the number 'seven' is not literally considered, some Malagasy traditional couples do have more than fourteen children.

The second measure, Rajaonasy (DTL 5) indicates, is to determine whether the fates of the man and the woman who wish to get married are compatible or opposed. If they are compatible, the traditio-practitioner simply adjusts and links them so that they will be really complementary. A special rite which requires offerings such as alcohol (especially rum), coins etc. from the couple is planned for this purpose. In general, the ritual simply consists of calling upon Zanahary and the ancestors to bless and protect the future partners who will get married in terms of the same destiny.

On the other hand, Rajaonasy (DTL 8) emphasises that if the two fates contrast, the traditio-practitioner should proceed to change them. This solution is ultimately necessary because, without resorting to it, the marriage will be impossible. The Malagasy traditionalists believe that the incompatibility of fates in a marriage inevitably results in disastrous consequences such as barrenness, premature death, destruction and loss of wealth or ruin, and illness. It is therefore unthinkable and even dangerous to marry two persons with opposite destinies. Rajaonasy emphasises that the fundamental question here is the belief in the power of the fate. Consequently, the sacrificial rite the traditio-practitioner should perform, on the one hand, is intended to make the partners' fates compatible, and on the other hand, to cause them to believe and trust that they are now and forever linked by only one destiny.

The third measure, as Rajaonasy (DTL 5) points out, is to give the partners appropriate advice. This generally consists of reminding them to fear Zanahary, to venerate the ancestors, to love each other, to behave according to Malagasy wisdom and to work hard while saving money. The traditio-practitioner also warns them of negative factors, which could cause the household to break down, such as lovelessness, unfaithfulness towards the partner, laziness, alcohol and drug abuse, associating with bad people, jealousy, covetousness and avarice.

As Rajaonasy (DTL 5) indicates, obviously such advice and warnings have already been repeatedly addressed to the partners before they consult the traditio-practitioner. He emphasises that, as a representative of the *Masina* (the Holy/Zanahary), a traditio-practitioner takes his speeches and advice directly from Zanahary and the ancestors. Thus, all of his advice and instructions are believed and accepted by the followers, as being addressed to them from the *Masina* in person. As a result, the advice and warnings which have already been heard gain new value for the couple when they are emphasised by the traditio-practitioner. In other words, one can say that the traditio-practitioner, according to Rajaonasy, is like a mirror enabling the followers to see, to confirm and to adjust their belief and behaviour. Hence it is,

he points out, clear that the traditio-practitioners play an important role in the Malagasy traditional marriage as well as in the Malagasy traditionalists' life in general.

Rajaonasy (DTL 5) underlines the point that Malagasy traditio-practitioners take their responsibilities regarding the preparation of young people for their marriages seriously. To illustrate their convictions concerning marriage, he says that some of them, including him, combine biblical words with the traditional proceedings and customary instructions.

One example of a biblical text which Rajaonasy (DTL 5) uses is Genesis 2: 18, 22: 'The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him"' (v 18). 'Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man and he brought her to the man' (v 22). Every time couples visit him to receive advice and instruction, Rajaonasy uses these two verses that he knows by heart to remind them of three important things: the sacredness of the marriage, the importance of love, and the most fitting behaviour which every couple should exhibit in their conjugal relationship as well as in the household.

Emphasising the sacredness of marriage, Rajaonasy (DTL 5) stresses that, according to God's words in Genesis 2: 18 and 22, it was God in person, the creator of the heaven and the earth as well as all existing things, who had instituted it by making human beings male and female.<sup>112</sup> Marriage, in this case, is believed to stem not from a human being's will but is, rather, according to God's divine plan. Rajaonasy points out that Genesis 2: 18 and 22 also refers to marriage as a sacred gift from God to humankind. Consequently, all couples must remember that to be married means to receive a precious and sacred thing from God. He then stresses that if the partners do not take the sacredness of the marriage into account, it will inevitably end in failure.

By employing the same Old Testament text, Rajaonasy (DTL 5) emphasises the primary importance of love in marriage. He argues that one of the reasons why God created human beings as male and female is to make them live in love. Love is thus the essence of marriage, which causes it to be a source of life, peace, and success. Love is also, according to him, the unbreakable rope which links the couple forever. Rajaonasy, therefore, considers that

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<sup>112</sup> There is a Malagasy myth, which almost exactly parallels this biblical narrative about creation. According to it, Zanahary has created a man and put him on the top of Ankaratra (a dominant mountain in the highlands of Madagascar which stretches from Ambatolampy to Antsirabe). Being conscious of the man's loneliness, Zanahary has then created a woman whom he brought to the man. Seeing that the man and the woman love each other and that the woman is suitable for the man, Zanahary marries them and blesses them to give birth to many children.

love should be considered not only as a sentiment animating the couple's sexual life; it should, rather, be regarded as a fundamental basis on which marriage and conjugal life are founded, because in his view God, who instituted and gave us marriage, is the God of love. To help his clients to understand how love functions, Rajaonasy makes use of Paul's letter in 1 Corinthians 13:4-13 in addition to Genesis 2: 18, 22. He particularly stresses verses 4-7, and 8a, in which Paul describes love in detail. In order to emphasise the greatness of love, he draws attention to the last sentence of verse 13, which reads as follows: 'But the greatest of these is love'.

Rajaonasy (DTL 5) makes it clear that the conjugal life which every couple must live and experience daily in the household, from the marriage on, constitutes the fundamental basis of society. Therefore, the man and the woman should behave well in their household so that they will become a model couple in society. To demonstrate this ideal behaviour, they must always complement each other in their conjugal life. They must also be faithful to each other; and each of them has to assume his/her duties according to custom.

To reinforce his instruction regarding the importance of the complementarity of the couple, Rajaonasy (DTL 5) again refers to Gen 2: 18, 22. These words, he states, clearly indicate that, as seen by God himself, it is not good for a man to be alone. According to Rajaonasy, man's life, without a suitable helper, is merely a failure for it cannot fulfil its reason for existence. A woman is such a helper, whom God expressly made for this purpose. Speaking to the woman, Rajaonasy emphasises that the same applies to her because a woman should not be alone either. Referring to Genesis 2: 18, 22, he reminds one that it is because of the man that the woman was called into existence. Therefore, he contends that the woman's existence, as well as her life, originally depends on the man's existence and life. In this way he demonstrates that a man and a woman on their own cannot be self-sufficient.

#### **4.3.5 Function of the use of Old Testament texts in the Malagasy traditional context**

Having reflected on the interviews I have conducted with traditionalists, especially with traditio-practitioners, I am convinced that the latter make use of Old Testament texts with the aim of legitimising the Malagasy traditional religion and practices, on the one hand, and of accommodating these texts in their religious practices, on the other. What follows is, therefore, an investigation into these functions of the traditionalists' employment of Old Testament texts in this context. The investigation will also reveal traditio-practitioners' gaining of popularity as consequence of their use of the Old Testament.

#### 4.3.5.1 Legitimation

I use the term 'legitimation' here to express the traditio-practitioner's intention of making the Malagasy traditional religion more relevant to and popular amongst most Malagasy people. The main question that is to be answered in this part is, therefore: Why does this religion need to be legitimised?

To answer this question adequately, it is necessary to return to the historical source of the problem. As mentioned in 1.1.1, the first European missionaries working in Madagascar took the name of Andriamanitra (the second name of Zanahary) and used this name for God when they translated the Bible into the Malagasy language (cf. Bloch 1971: 27).<sup>113</sup> Raherisoanjato (DCF 14), an informant from Antananarivo, reports that the Malagasy traditionalists probably appreciated such a use of material that originally belonged to the Malagasy traditional religion in the new [Christian] religion. Therefore, they thought that there might be points of similarity between both religions and they would have expected that the two faiths could complement each other (DCF 14).

However, Raherisoanjato (DCF 14) points out that the traditionalists' expectation was merely an illusion because the missionaries had planned differently. In fact, having adopted from the Malagasy traditional religion materials and concepts which they supposed were relevant, they turned against it. The missionaries certainly thought that Christianity as the only true religion should not have to compete with the traditional religion which was, in their eyes, nothing but idolatry and thus was worth abolishing. Therefore, they undertook to eradicate the traditional religion completely, as well as the customs and practices attached to it, in order to make Christianity the unique religion of the Malagasy people (DCF 14; see also Bloch 1971: 27).

I have observed that Malagasy Christians still continue to adopt this attitude towards the traditional religion. The total rejection of it is seen especially among the revival movement which has emerged from the Protestant Churches, namely the Lutheran and Reformed Churches. For this charismatic movement, the traditional religion is nothing but a cult of possession or of darkness or even a demonic cult. Thus, the *mpiandry* (shepherds), who

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<sup>113</sup> The missionaries also used other terms such as *fanahy* (spirit), *masina* (holy), *lanitra* (heaven), *fahotana* (sin), *famelankeloka* (forgiveness), *fanatitra/sorona* (sacrifices) etc. that they took from the Malagasy traditional religion.

constitute the department of the revival movement in these churches, undertake strong efforts to abolish it.

The main strategy that the *mpiandry* (shepherds) use to achieve their objective is the *tafika masina* (holy army), by means of which they undertake evangelisation campaigns throughout Madagascar, especially in areas where the traditional religion is still dominant. The programme generally consists of singing, preaching, casting out the evil spirits, and healing by praying and laying hands on the heads of sick persons. At the end of the programme, the *mpiandry* invite the listeners to repent of their sins and to convert to Christianity so that they can benefit from Jesus' redemption and grace.

Randriamanantena (DTL 1), a traditio-practitioner working in the eastern part of Antananarivo, admits that this *tafika masina* (holy army) has caused great loss, quantitatively and qualitatively, for the Malagasy traditional religion. The quantitative loss is specifically observed in the considerable decrease in the number of traditionalist followers. On the other hand, Christian Churches of different denominations are being constructed in almost all the main villages of Madagascar, especially in the central part. Randriamanantena reveals that many traditionalists even attend church on some occasions like Christmas Day, or for the weddings of relatives. He also specifies that it is particularly the young people, who represent the majority of the population, who convert from the traditional religion to Christianity. According to Randriamanantena, its number of followers plays a significant role in every religion because this figure serves as a barometer of its extent or importance. When the followers increase in numbers, the religion attains a certain stature. On the other hand, when the number of followers decreases, the religion is declining. Applying this point of view to the case of the Malagasy traditional religion, Randriamanantena estimates that, continuing to lose its followers in favour of Christianity, it goes into an inexorable decline (DTL 1).

The qualitative loss, Randriamanantena (DTL 1) maintains, is mostly seen in the decrease in the value and credibility of the Malagasy traditional religion. As he explains, this is the logical result of the fall in the numbers of people following it. He points out that the Malagasy traditional religion is above all a religion of satisfaction in which followers expect to find relevant solutions to their daily spiritual and social problems. This implies that when they experience doubt concerning the value and the relevance of the traditional religion they will no longer be satisfied and, as a result, they will gradually cease to follow it, no longer trusting in its credibility. This represents, Randriamanantena says, the situation in which the Malagasy traditional religion is placed after Christianity has confronted it.

According to Randriamanantena (DTL 1), the doubt that troubles many followers results from the incessant attacks made by Christians, especially by the revival movement, on traditional religion. In fact, he points out that, following the missionaries' example, generations of Christians have successively described the traditional religion as a wrong and deceptive religion. Therefore, they proclaim that God will everlastingly punish all of those who follow it and that the latter will suffer forever with the devil in hell. On the other hand, they assert, those who renounce the traditional belief and ancestral customs and convert to Christianity will not perish for they are saved by Jesus Christ and have everlasting life. Randriamanantena reveals that, affected by these repeated attacks and threats, many followers became doubtful about the relevance of the traditional religion. He then declares that Malagasy traditionalists, namely the traditio-practitioners, urgently need to find effective measures to stop its decline and to make it more relevant (DTL 1).

As Rakoto Jean (DTL 2), a traditio-practitioner working in the west of Antananarivo, argues, the major factor that weakens the Malagasy traditional religion is the lack of an elaborated religious doctrine, by which he means abstract concepts regarding the nature of the Supreme Being, Zanahary, as well as the eschatological destiny of the followers who believe in him. When the traditionalists refer to these subjects, they use the language of images and symbols in particular. Consequently, one finds, instead of religious doctrine, myths or a collection of tales transmitted from generation to generation. As a logical result, the traditionalists' belief in the Supreme Being, Zanahary, is handicapped because they only possess a very vague knowledge of him. Likewise, they have no notion of the afterlife though they believe in the immortality of the soul (DTL 2).

Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) emphasises that the lack of doctrine concerning the nature of Zanahary creates a wide fissure in the Malagasy traditional religion. As the creator of all things and the father of all human beings, Zanahary should constitute the centre of worship and the object of the belief as well as the rites and practices of the Malagasy traditional religion. But, because of this fissure, he has become almost unrecognised or neglected by his followers, who consider him too distant and inaccessible. On the other hand, the *razana* (ancestors) are very close to the living, especially to the traditionalists, because they are regarded as still active members of their families or society. Furthermore, they are believed to be endowed with supernatural powers that they use for the good of their living relatives or those who faithfully invoke them. Consequently, the *razana* become greatly respected, since most aspects of the traditional religion as well as various customs and practices attached to it,

like sacrifices and offerings, thanksgiving and prayers or invocation, are addressed to them. As a result, Rakoto Jean points out, the Malagasy traditional religion is reduced almost to an *ancestrocentric* religion, which makes it weak and vulnerable: features which, in his opinion, are confirmed when it is confronted by the Christian religion, which is not only the dominant religion in Madagascar but is also a strong revealed religion based on the Word of God recorded in the Bible (DTL 2).

Therefore, as Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) suggests, the traditio-practitioners must take their responsibility seriously in discovering urgent and effective measures to tackle the weakness and vulnerability he has mentioned. He recognises that the time for these traditio-practitioners to sit together and elaborate an appropriate doctrine for the Malagasy traditional religion has not yet arrived. However, Rakoto Jean posits that what they can do, for the moment, is at least to try to maintain a good balance between the beliefs in Zanahary and the ancestors as well as between their respective roles vis-à-vis human beings. He even expects that the traditio-practitioners will eventually be able to accord top priority and the leading place to the belief in and the worship of the Supreme Being Zanahary, as the Christians do with their God. This would surely, Rakoto Jean speculates, enhance the Malagasy traditional religion in value and relevance, and at the same time, cause its followers' belief and trust to become firm and lasting.

The above arguments adduced by Randriamanantena and Rakoto Jean demonstrate the traditio-practitioners' determination to bring a new value and relevance to the Malagasy traditional religion, as well as the practices attached to it, which are placed in permanent danger by the Christians' incessant attacks. Their common aim is to restore its credibility and to make it a source of satisfaction for its followers.

Raherisoanjato (DCF 14) mentions that, to achieve their goals, these traditio-practitioners, on the one hand, urge their followers to resist the influence of Christians while standing firm in their belief and considering all the positive benefits gained from the traditional religion or from the ancestors. But, on the other hand, they counterattack Christians by accusing their religion of being the cause of the Malagasy people's suffering, because it forces them to abandon their traditional belief and customs and to break the ancestral taboos. By such an accusation, the traditio-practitioners imply that the Christian religion merely causes trouble for the Malagasy people. Therefore, if the latter desire to find wellbeing and prosperity they should abandon Christianity, which is a foreign religion, and follow the traditional religion (DCF 14).

What Raherisoanjato (DCF 14) reports above is the common method used by the traditio-practitioners to defend the Malagasy traditional religion against the Christians' attacks and to express its indispensability and value to the Malagasy people. However, as discussed in 4.3.1, 4.3.2, 4.3.3 and 4.3.4, some of them have discovered a new method, which consists of using the Old Testament. Obviously, Christians from the Protestant churches have energetically criticised and condemned this method as Satan's way of distorting the Word of God and using it wrongly in order to tempt and deceive people as he did when he tempted Jesus (cf. Mt 4:1-11; Lk 4:1-13). But, in my opinion, what these traditio-practitioners attempt to do in using the Old Testament is to legitimise the Malagasy traditional religion. Considering their understanding of the Old Testament as well as their argument for the universality of God presented in 4.2.2, the legitimisation they intend consists, to a certain extent, of making this part of the Bible the sacred book for the Malagasy traditional religion.

This traditionalists' use of the Old Testament does not accord with Mbiti's argument (1978: 15) which emphasises that there is no need of scriptures or holy books for African religion because it is 'written in the history, the hearts and experiences of the people'. Obviously, the Malagasy traditional religion, as part of the African religion, has survived from earlier times without the help of any scriptures. But, seeing that a holy book reinforces a religion which makes it, as in Christianity, infallible, strong, dominant and legitimate, traditio-practitioners are certainly persuaded that their religion, too, needs to be based on a sacred text. Therefore, for lack of a specific traditional sacred book, they make use of the Old Testament, with which most of their followers are already familiar and in which they find contexts and practices they consider similar to what they possess in the Malagasy traditional context. This enables them, at the same time, to reconstruct the fundamental principles of this traditional religion. As Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) argues above, traditio-practitioners need to shift the centre of the Malagasy traditional religion from the cult of the ancestors to the belief in and the worship of the Supreme Being Zanahary, whom they believe to be the same as the God of the Old Testament.

Answering my question about the necessity for them to reconstruct the Malagasy traditional religion and to base it on a Christian holy book, traditio-practitioners emphasise that they are merely doing what is necessary to defend their religion against Christians' attacks and to make it more relevant and credible. However, in my opinion, what they actually intend to do is to legitimise the Malagasy traditional religion by putting it on equal terms with Christianity. More explicitly, they seek to convince Christians of the equality of Christianity

and the Malagasy traditional religion because both are founded on the same sacred book, namely the Old Testament, and refer to the same Supreme Being.

It should be pointed out that the legitimisation of the Malagasy traditional religion by means of the Old Testament puts traditio-practitioners in a position that enables them to face Christians and deliver a suitable riposte to their attacks. Randriamanantena (DTL 1), for instance, energetically criticises some Christians, whom he considers too fanatical and intolerant about their negative and hostile attitude towards the Malagasy traditional religion as well as the customs and practices attached to it. He stresses that it is quite senseless for Christians and traditionalists to fight each other since they use the same holy book and believe in the same God, which means that both religions, Christian and traditional, enjoy the same legitimacy. Therefore, Randriamanantena emphasises that whenever Christians and traditionalists persecute each other and whatever the reasons of their conflicts, the greatest harm resulting is that which is done to their common Supreme Being and their common sacred heritage, the Old Testament.

Concerning Christian criticism of the traditionalists' use of the Old Testament, Raneny (DTL 3), a traditio-practitioner working in Ambatolampy, responds that Christians should not regard the Old Testament as their private property because it is a universal sacred book containing holy words that God, as father of human beings, addresses to everyone in every place. Consequently, for Raneny Christians are utterly wrong in making the Old Testament their exclusive holy book and their churches the only proper places for its use. Likewise, she declares that Christians misunderstand God's will and plan if they think that they are the only persons to allow, enjoy and benefit from his sacred and powerful words. Referring to the Old Testament, which she calls 'the holy history of God', Raneny notes that God, who was claimed by the people of Israel as exclusively theirs, in many circumstances spoke to non-Israelite peoples and even used some of them. This shows, she declares, that God, who is the same forever, is free to be revealed in a non-Christian context and to work outside the realm of the Church, as he did in the past, in the non-Israelite context. Therefore, in her opinion, since in the eyes of God the Malagasy traditional religion is as legitimate as Christianity, traditionalists too, like Christians, possess the right to use the Old Testament.

Besides, Rasamoelina (DTL 4), a traditio-practitioner working in Antanifotsy, explains that the traditio-practitioners do not use the Bible for bad or satanic purposes as Christians wrongly accuse them of doing. They rather use it, he specifies, only for the well-being of their followers as well as of whoever requests their services. Giving examples, he

remarks that traditio-practitioners especially use the Old Testament, or more precisely Old Testament texts, for healing followers, protecting and blessing them, guiding them to good morality and behaviour, and making traditional religious practices (e.g. sacrifices and offerings) meaningful and relevant. Rasamoelina even notes that traditio-practitioners use Old Testament texts more relevantly and fruitfully than Christians who limit their use to reading and preaching only. Thus, he points out that Christians have no reason for attacking the Malagasy traditional religion and attempting to abolish it.

To close this discussion, it is worthy of note that the traditio-practitioners' use of Old Testament texts to legitimise the traditional religion and practices attached to it is, to a certain extent, a logical consequence of the MRCC's way of inculturating her faith. As described in 2.3, the MRCC takes a specific religio-cultural rite (e.g. the *famadihana* [the turning of the dead]), legitimises it by means of biblical texts and practises it with the aim of making the Catholic faith more relevant, meaningful and genuine to her adherents, who cannot live without their culture. Almost all the traditio-practitioners working in the highlands of Madagascar know this principle and method of inculturation very well and some of them, as good imitators, do not hesitate to follow this example. As a result, Rakotomanga (DTL 4), a Roman Catholic priest, makes it clear that most of the Christians attracted by the Malagasy traditional religion and practices which these traditio-practitioners legitimise by means of Old Testament texts come from the MRCC.

The above survey indicates that one of the traditio-practitioners' purposes in using the Old Testament, or more precisely Old Testament texts, is to legitimise the Malagasy traditional religion and practices, which run the risk of being abolished because of the Christians' incessant attacks. The following presentation will offer another answer to the question concerning the function of these practitioners' employment of Old Testament texts.

#### *4.3.5.2 Accommodation*

Another function of this particular use of Old Testament texts by Malagasy traditio-practitioners is accommodation. I have already mentioned that the Roman Catholic Church, which previously used this term, abandoned it for the reasons explained in 1.1.4. Therefore, I take the liberty of using it as an appropriate term to designate Malagasy traditio-practitioners' purpose in applying Old Testament texts in their religious practices.

According to Christians' criticism, Malagasy traditio-practitioners appropriate the Bible and blaspheme against it in using Old Testament texts in their religious and cultural practices. By this, Christians indirectly argue that the traditionalists, especially the tradition-practitioners, have no right or are not worthy to use the Old Testament or the Bible, which is a Christian private holy book that should exclusively be used by Christians, within the Church.

Responding to Christians, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2), a traditio-practitioner working in the west of Antananarivo, replies that their criticism and accusation are not at all founded. According to his understanding, using the Old Testament for blasphemous purposes is using the name of God lightly, carelessly and without regard to its significance and holiness. In other words, blaspheming, in his mind, is showing contempt or irreverence for God and sacred things related to him. Therefore, Rakoto Jean asks Christians about blasphemy of which they accuse traditio-practitioners in using the Old Testament. Did they already hear or see traditio-practitioners using the Old Testament for these blasphemous purposes? Rakoto Jean specifies that, on the contrary, their use of this sacred book, which basically consists of providing people with good health, protection and good moral guidance, is in accordance with God's will.

Regarding the appropriation of the Old Testament of which Christians also accuse tradition-practitioners, Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) declares that is a wrong accusation. In his knowledge, the term 'appropriation' expresses an illegal use of something because the user has not the permission to utilise it. As far as the Old Testament is concerned, he emphasises that it constitutes the Word of God universally revealed to the human beings. In other words, Rakoto Jean argues that in addressing his Word in the Old Testament to the human beings God put it at their disposal so that everyone who believes in him could use it freely for good purposes. Rakoto Jean thus states that traditio-practitioners in suing the Old Testament do not appropriate it at all; they just utilise what God put at the human beings' disposal. Consequently, he points out that they do not need to ask Christians' permission because what they utilise belongs to God, and not to Christians.

As presented above, Malagasy traditio-practitioners do not agree with the terms 'blasphemy' and 'appropriation' Christians employ to designate their attempt to apply Old Testament texts in their religious practices. Therefore, in my opinion, the term which is more appropriate for this particular application, as mentioned above, is 'accommodation'.

The term ‘accommodation’, as explained in 1.1.4, has been considered by the Roman Catholic Church as a synthesis or a bridge in the encounter between Christianity and local cultures. It is also said that the Catholics employed it as a synonym for adaptation and assimilation, which are two terms that express the idea of an extrinsic contact between the biblical message and a given culture (cf. Pobee (1992: 31). To this I add that ‘accommodation’ also expresses the idea of adjusting something so that it fits with something else, or of making something suitable for a new situation or a new use. Applying this definition to Malagasy traditio-practitioners’ use of the Old Testament, the ‘something’ that is adjusted indicates Old Testament texts, whereas the ‘new situation’ for which they are made suitable is the Malagasy traditional religion as well as the customs and practices related to it.

Therefore, it is, in my mind, more appropriate to say ‘traditio-practitioners accommodate the Old Testament in their religious practices’; instead of ‘they appropriate the Old Testament and blaspheme against it in using it in their religious practices’. As they claim, the reasons for this ‘accommodation’ are to make the Malagasy traditional religion more or less acceptable to Christians and more relevant and meaningful to Traditionalists followers. Rakoto Jean (DTL 2) even declares that traditio-practitioners apply/accommodate Old Testament texts in traditional contexts just as the Catholic Christians do in their inculturation.

It should be mentioned here that one of the consequences of this traditio-practitioners’ accommodation of Old Testament texts in traditional contexts is their gaining of popularity. In the Malagasy understanding, a person who enjoys popularity is a person whom people call *mamy hoditra*, which literally means a person with sweet skin (*mamy*: sweet, *hoditra*: skin). What causes a person to be *mamy hoditra* is the fact that he/she spends her time, energy and wealth for the good of the people. As far as a traditio-practitioner is concerned, he/she becomes *mamy hoditra* (popular) when all of his/her followers or, at least, a large number of them gain satisfaction from his/her work.

As explained in 4.2.1, the traditio-practitioners occupy a central position in the Malagasy traditional religion, because they are not only specialists but are also considered as religious intermediaries. They play a representative role or the role of a bridge between Zanahary, the ancestors and the followers. Because of this position of great responsibility, they are at the same time feared and respected, and the followers call them *ny masina* (the holy). This seemingly implies that all the traditio-practitioners are already popular among their followers; so what kind of popularisation do they still need? Randriamanantena (DTL 1)

reveals that, as in other professions, there is always strong competition between Malagasy traditio-practitioners. This competition, which sometimes turns into rivalry, he says, is especially perceived in the different ways they attract followers as well as in the different styles and methods by means of which they carry out their professions.

As Randriamanantena (DTL 1) explains, the ground for such competition is, in general, the thirst for prestige. According to his experience, traditio-practitioners understand prestige as credibility based on competence and success, on full respect acquired by a good reputation, and on authority guaranteed by a great quantity of followers. Consequently, the assertion of one's prestige consists of perfecting competence, increasing one's success, creating a solid reputation and attracting as many followers as possible. In other words, every traditio-practitioner must make his/her profession fruitful and satisfying. The one who is able to do so is undeniably regarded as the most credible, which means that he/she is also the most prestigious or popular.

Rasamoelina (DTL 4) emphasises that traditio-practitioners who become popular enjoy at least three advantages. Firstly, their followers increase in numbers. He reminds one that the Malagasy traditional religion is a religion of satisfaction. Therefore, it is quite logical to see followers consulting traditio-practitioners whom they consider satisfying. Secondly, these practitioners enjoy special privileges. They become, for instance, sources of reference regarding the traditional religion and customs. Hence their opinions and advice are the most frequently requested and their methods are considered as the most effective. Thirdly, they are regarded as the most sacred and powerful traditio-practitioners. Consequently they are more feared and respected than the others.

I have observed that one of the more effective ways of earning success and popularity for some traditio-practitioners is the use of Old Testament texts. Raneny (DTL 3) herself confirms that the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, assists her and her colleagues to fulfil the necessary conditions for being good and popular traditio-practitioners. To illustrate the extent of her popularity, Raneny points out that a number of her followers stem from different places in Madagascar as well as from different denominations of churches. She also reveals that other followers from the neighbouring islands, such as Seychelles, Mauritius and Reunion, visit her from time to time. She emphasises that the sight of the Old Testament being used, but not within the church, by a traditio-practitioner causes her followers to be,

simultaneously, fascinated by and trusting towards the Malagasy traditional religion and its practices.

The above survey demonstrates that traditio-practitioners use Old Testament texts with the aim of consolidating their credibility and gaining popularity. I can confirm from my own observation that their followers like and trust the traditio-practitioners who use or accommodate the Old Testament more than those who remain conservative.

The following section will offer a critical analysis of the Old Testament texts that certain traditio-practitioners, as described in 4.3, have been using. These relevant texts, as critically analysed, will be compared to the same texts as interpreted and used by the aforementioned traditio-practitioners.

#### 4.4 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE RELEVANT TEXTS IN RELATION TO MALAGASY TRADITIONALISTS' USE OF THESE TEXTS

Cases showing how Malagasy traditio-practitioners interpret and use Old Testament texts in various ways have been described in the preceding section (4.3). What I am attempting to do in this section is to provide a more scientific survey of these Old Testament texts, to which the Malagasy traditio-practitioners' interpretations presented in 4.3.1, 4.3.2, 4.3.3 and 4.3.4 will be compared. These texts are:

Exodus 3: 1-3; Leviticus 14: 1-8; Jeremiah 8: 22;

Exodus 3: 5b; Job 33: 6a; Psalm 121: 8a;

Leviticus 1-6;

Psalm 113: 5-6; Genesis 2: 18, 22.

##### **4.4.1 Exodus 3: 1-3; Leviticus 14: 1-8; Jeremiah 8: 22**

###### *4.4.1.1 Exodus 3: 1-3*

3:1 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup> There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. <sup>3</sup> So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight, why the bush does not burn up." (NIV)

Exodus 3: 1-3 is part of the long text including Chapter 3 - 4 that are usually designated 'The mission of Moses' or 'The call of Moses'. However, referring to the text, the call of Moses is

specifically mentioned only in Exodus 3: 7-10. Therefore, some commentators term Chapters 3 -4 ‘God’s speeches’ because in reading these two chapters it is evident that God speaks at length (over about thirty-five verses) concerning his plan to free the children of Israel from the Egyptian bondage. On the other hand, Moses is only given eight short verses (cf. Gowan 1994: 25).

Ashby (1998: 18) points out that the Old Testament usually ‘takes notice of places where encounters with God happen’. These encounters, he notes, tend to be associated with mountains, solitary trees, wells or other salient features of the landscape. Exodus 3:1-3 shows one of these encounters: Yahweh appeared to Moses on Mount Horeb, the northern part of the Sinaitic range.

Childs (1974: 71) understands this encounter as ‘the interaction between the human and the divine’ in which Moses ‘the discoverer of God’, in the local etymology, becomes ‘the discovered by God’, in the call. It should be pointed out that at the end of Exodus 2, Yahweh has just been introduced as an actor in the story, after the author has recounted a long series of sufferings and disasters befalling the children of Israel in Egypt without any intervention on Yahweh’s part. However, the book of Exodus shows that, once introduced, Yahweh who has heard the groaning of Israel about whom he is concerned and has remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Ex 2: 24), will dominate the history of his people by acting on their behalf. And the first action embodying his redemptive intervention was the calling of Moses.<sup>114</sup>

As mentioned in the text, the encounter between Yahweh and Moses reflects a remarkable mixture of ordinary elements of human experience with the extraordinary. The human experience comprises Moses’ arrival at Mount Horeb or the mountain of God, shepherding the flock of his father-in-law Jethro. The extraordinary consists of Yahweh’s appearance to Moses in the burning bush. In Exodus 3: 2, it is written: ‘the angel of the Lord (hwh̄y & a.lm) appeared unto him in a flame (hB̄l) of fire (vāe) out of the midst of

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<sup>114</sup> As specified by the text, Moses became the shepherd of his father-in-law Jethro. According to Ashby (1998: 20), to be a shepherd in the ancient Near East was a responsible profession, not a job given to small boys, as people do today. He points out that in the Old Testament kings were referred to as shepherds of their people, and God himself has that title (Is 40: 11; 44: 28; as has Jesus in John 12: 14). Moses thus has this calling in common with others called by God (e.g. King David and the prophet Amos). In the book of Exodus, he is pictured as a man who, from being a shepherd in the literal sense of the word, became, in the figurative sense, the shepherd of God’s people.

a bush (חֲנֹכַח), while in 3: 4 Yahweh in person is pointed out as the one who speaks: God called him and said)...’ As Gispén (1982: 51) argues, the ‘angel of the Lord’ was a revelation of the Lord himself. He explains that this angel of the Lord, who appeared to Moses as ‘flames of fire’, had already appeared to Abraham (Gn 16: 7; 22:11), to Gideon (Jdg 6:11) and to Manoah’s wife (Jdg 13: 2) in human form. Stressing Gispén’s argument, Houtman (1993: 336) indicates that no careful distinction is made between Yahweh and his messenger because the passages in which a messenger of Yahweh appears more than once give the impression that Yahweh himself is present and speaks. As for Ashby (1998: 8) specifies that the ‘angel of the Lord’ is a device used to designate Yahweh himself ‘particularly when he goes into action and communicates himself in a special way’.

Childs (1974: 72) emphasises that this encounter of the extraordinary with ordinary human elements, or more precisely, the interaction of Yahweh with Moses, conveyed a new experience because the initiative is shifted from him to Yahweh. As a result, ‘the ordinary experiences emerge as extraordinary’, transforming the old (Moses as shepherd) into the new (Moses as Yahweh’s messenger).

According to Gispén (1982: 49), Yahweh’s appearance to Moses, which Childs (cf. 1974: 72) understands as ‘Yahweh’s theophany’, is very important. The reason, he argues, is that the previous time Yahweh appeared was in a vision to Jacob at night, repeating the promise that he, who at that time travelled to Egypt with his family, would become a great nation (cf. Gn 46: 2-4). That was four centuries previously and Exodus 1-2 indicates that Yahweh’s promise had been fulfilled because the children of Israel had increased so much in number. They also, at the same time, underwent terrible sufferings under the Egyptian rulers who kept them in bondage and oppressed them. However, Yahweh did not again appear in a personal revelation or a theophanic way until the current event, when the situation worsened and became critical (Gispén 1982: 49).

Regarding the bush (חֲנֹכַח) that Moses saw on fire but which was not consumed by the flames and which he called a ‘great sight’, Gispén (1982: 51) argues that it is not possible to specify what kind of bush it was. Nevertheless, he suggests that it was probably a bramble bush, according to Jewish tradition. According to Bromiley (1980: 561), there is but little doubt that it could be a shrub of one of the various thorny acacias, or allied plants, which grew in the Sinaitic peninsula. Houtman (1993: 339) seems to attest Bromiley’s view in confirming exegetes’ arguments for the similarity between חֲנֹכַח (ceneh), the Hebrew name

of bush, and *ynys* (Sinai), another name of Mount Horeb. Relating these arguments to Deuteronomy 33: 16, which refers to Yahweh as ‘the one who lives in the burning bush’, he suggests that one could change *hns* in Deuteronomy 33: 16 into *ynys*, or at least understand *hns* there as a designation for Sinai: Yahweh lives on Mount Sinai.<sup>115</sup> Concerning one of the characteristics of this kind of bush, Houtman suggests that it might be very flammable because of a volatile, easily ignited vapour which escapes from it. Such a particular feature, therefore, demonstrates that this plant cannot stand fire for it is consumed in a few moments. It was certainly this feature which made the burning bush described in Exodus 3:2 so remarkable and strange, as Moses saw it.

Regarding the fire (*va'e*) which blazed without burning the bush, Houtman (1993: 338) argues that fire is often used in the Old Testament to symbolise the presence of Yahweh. He remarks that:

Because of its awesome devastating power and capriciousness, fire can make one shudder with fear and is a singularly suitable metaphor for denoting the irresistibility, sovereign power and holiness of God before which nothing impure can stand (cf. Is 6: 5ff).

Concurring with Houtman, Gowan (1994: 26) emphasises that fire is regularly associated with God for, on the one hand, it represents his holiness, constitutes both the peculiarity and the essence of his presence, and on the other hand, it serves as a warning, as Moses himself had experienced.

In terms of these arguments, one can suggest that the bush and the fire may be understood respectively as the place of revelation or ‘medium of the theophany’ (Houtman 1993: 340) and the sign of the presence of Yahweh. According to Gispén (1982: 52), ‘the bush that did not burn up drew attention to the special nature of this fire that was not of earthly origin’. He points out that what should be emphasised here is that the bush could encounter the heavenly fire without being consumed. This attests, he argues, the peaceable purpose in terms of which Yahweh chose to appear: Yahweh could descend on an

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<sup>115</sup> Houtman (1993: 339) notes that it is the view that the two terms, *hns* and *ynys* are identical, because presumably based on the bi-consonantal word *!s*, which has led most exegetes to conclude that they are similar. He also mentions that, according to many commentators, the word *hns* is an allusion to Sinai, which is also described as: ‘covered with thornbushes’.

insignificant plant, symbol of that which is most humble and even despised, tempering his all-consuming blaze. This is to indicate, Gispén explains, that Yahweh, taking into consideration the weakness of the children of Israel, would deal with them as the fire with the bush: sanctify them and recognise them as his people without destroying them.

In comparing the analysis of Exodus 3: 1-3 given above to Rakoto Jean's interpretation of the same text (see 4.3.1.2), I perceive both similarities and dissimilarities. These will be considered in the following discussion.

The first similarity resides in the identification of the burning bush as a thorny and thickly wooded plant with several stems emerging from the roots, the size of which is between that of a tree and that of a shrub. Both the analysis and Rakoto Jean's interpretation argue that it is difficult to specify the species of the burning bush because various plants of this kind grew abundantly in the desert area of Sinai. However, biblical scholars and Rakoto Jean suggest that, according to botanists, it can be identified with the thorny acacia or allied plants.

The second similarity is to be observed in the fact that biblical scholars and Rakoto Jean do not consider the burning bush to be a medicinal plant, since it is not assumed to possess healing properties. They consider it as an ordinary plant. As discussed in 4.3.1.2, Rakoto Jean uses a plant that he claims, from his botanical knowledge, to be one of the plants related to the burning bush. However, he affirms that he uses it not as a medicinal plant but as a sacred plant that he mixes with traditional medicines for healing mental diseases.

The third similarity is displayed by the fact that the burning bush is considered a sacred plant. Obviously, biblical scholars do not say expressly that this plant is sacred. But they point out that the bush (and the fire) can be understood as the place of revelation and the sign of the presence of Yahweh (Gispén 1982: 52) or the medium of Yahweh's theophany (Houtman 1993: 340) during his appearance to Moses in Mount Horeb. In terms of these biblical scholars' arguments, one can deduce that they regard the burning bush as sacred because of its association with Yahweh's holiness and glory. Likewise, Rakoto Jean recognises that the sacredness of the burning bush is due to Yahweh's use of it, which indicates that Rakoto Jean, too, believes in Yahweh's holiness and glory as the cause of its sacredness.

As far as the dissimilarities are concerned, they are especially noticeable in the understanding of Yahweh's appearance, the divine choice of the burning bush and its use. As

explained in the traditional historical-critical interpretation, Yahweh's appearance was a special manifestation occurring in a particular situation, the call of Moses. Therefore, the divine appearance lasted for a short moment only, merely during the time which Yahweh needed to speak to Moses, to give him his instructions and to send him on his mission. As soon as Yahweh's words were finished, the appearance also ended and the fire, which manifested it, disappeared, leaving the bush in its normal state.

On the other hand, Rakoto Jean seemingly believes that Yahweh's appearance in the bush has lasted permanently. He apparently thinks that although Yahweh's appearance, together with his holiness and glory, vanished after he had finished addressing Moses his sacral power remained in the bush. It should be noted that this thought, which contradicts the ancient Israelite concepts, accords with the Malagasy traditional concept, which holds that everything touched by a divine or sacred presence becomes sacred and remains permanently so.

The second dissimilarity is discerned in the divine choice of the burning bush. As specified in Exodus 3: 2, 'the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in flames of fire from within a bush'. This signifies that Yahweh simply selected a single bush and not any others, and that it was in this bush only that his holiness and glory were revealed during his appearance to Moses. Besides, there is no mention of the other bushes growing on Mt Horeb or in other places.

As for Rakoto Jean, who is imbued with the Malagasy traditional concept mentioned above, he considers that once the burning bush had been touched by Yahweh's sacral power all the other bushes became sacred. Furthermore, he believes in the transmissibility of this sacredness, which is able to make all the bushes in the world and their related plants sacred. Hence Rakoto Jean considers the plant which he uses, as a family plant related to the burning bush, to be sacred despite the great distance and the thousand years separating Mt Horeb and the event of Exodus 3: 1-3 from Madagascar and its context.

The third dissimilarity is constituted by the use of the burning bush. As commented above, the burning bush was left in its natural state after Yahweh's appearance. After this special event, no further mention of this bush is made anywhere in the Old Testament, except for Deuteronomy 33: 16; but as explained in the above analysis, this may be due to the confusion of the words *hnS* (bush) and *ynYS* (Sinai). Any further utilisation of the bush is not referred to.

On the other hand, Rakoto Jean makes use of the bush as a necessary accompaniment to his traditional medicines. Obviously, he, as a traditio-practitioner, can freely use it as he does with the other plants. According to the rule governing the practices of the traditio-practitioners in Madagascar, they are allowed to utilise whatever plants they regard as endowed with healing properties. The problem here is that Rakoto Jean employs the plant related to the bush not because he knows it as a plant with healing properties but because he regards it as a biblical plant. Therefore, it is to be pointed out that Rakoto Jean relates his utilisation of this plant to the Bible, or more precisely to the Old Testament, rather than to the Malagasy traditional practice, while the Old Testament says nothing about using the burning bush in this particular way.

#### 4.4.1.2 *Leviticus 14: 1-8*

14:1 The Lord said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> “These are the regulations for the diseased person at the time of his ceremonial cleansing, when he is brought to the priest: <sup>3</sup> the priest is to go outside the camp and examine him. If the person has been healed of his infectious skin disease, <sup>4</sup> the priest shall order that two live clean birds and some cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop be brought for the one to be cleansed. <sup>5</sup> Then the priest shall order that one of the birds be killed over fresh water in a clay pot. <sup>6</sup> He is then to take the live bird and dip it, together with the cedar wood, the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, into the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. <sup>7</sup> Seven times he shall sprinkle the one to be cleansed of the infectious disease and pronounce him clean. Then he is to release the live bird in the open fields. <sup>8</sup> The person to be cleansed must wash his clothes, shave off all his hair and bathe with water; then he will be ceremonially clean. After this he may come into the camp, but he must stay outside his tent for seven days.” (NIV)

Leviticus 14 records the prescribed ritual for a person’s restoration after disease and uncleanness arising from leprosy. This lengthy chapter contains three distinct units: the purification ritual for a person who has recovered from  $\tau [ \text{rC}$  (leprosy) disease (vv. 2-32); instructions for identifying leprosy in a house and the purification ritual for an unclean house (vv. 34-53); and a kind of summary that serves as a conclusion to Chapters 13 and 14 (vv 54-57). However, as in the heading, I will deal with Leviticus 14: 1-8 only, which, according to this division, belongs to the first unit.

The ritual process for a person who has recovered from an unclean skin disease, namely  $\tau [ \text{rC}$  (leprosy), is complex and reflects elements of older practices (Gorman 1997: 85). According to Leviticus 13: 46, the person with leprosy must live alone outside the

camp, and as a result of this expulsion, he/she experiences social death. This ritual expulsion functions not only to protect society from impurity but also ‘to enact and embody the contact with death associated with leprosy in lived experience’ (Gorman 1997: 85). The death associated with leprosy is made a social reality through one’s expulsion from the community; the ritual process, then, must restore the banished person to a place within society.

The text records that the complete ritual process covers eight days and specific ritual actions take place in three distinct locations on three specific days. The purification ritual for a person who has recovered from  $\tau$  [  $\tau\mathcal{C}$  ], recorded in Leviticus 14: 1-8, takes place during the first day. The priest performs it outside the camp (or city) from which the diseased person has been banished performs this (first-day) ritual.

According to Leviticus 14: 4-5, the necessary materials which the priest must order for the purification ritual comprise two live clean birds ( $\tau\mathcal{P}\mathcal{C}$ ), some cedar wood ( $\#$  [  $zra$  ], scarlet yarn ( $\gamma n v$ ), hyssop ( $bwza$ ), an earthen vessel ( $vrx-\gamma lk$ ) and spring water ( $\sim\gamma x \sim\gamma m$ ). The purification ritual is described in Leviticus 14: 5-8 as follows: the person healed of the leprosy disease comes to the examining priest to seek his approval and then presents two live birds. One bird should be killed and, in its blood which is mixed with living or spring water and placed in an earthen vessel, are dipped the live bird, together with the cedar wood, the scarlet yarn and the hyssop. Using the hyssop tied together with the cedar wood, the priest is required to sprinkle the cured person seven times with some of this mixture while pronouncing him/her clean. Thereafter, the live bird that has been dipped in the mixture of blood and living water is set free. The cured person then launders his/her clothes, shaves all his/her hair and bathes so that he/she is clean enough to be admitted into the camp (or city). But he/she is only allowed to enter his/her residence on the seven day, after shaving, laundering and bathing again and also after presenting the required sacrifices and offerings at the entrance of the tent.

It should be emphasised that the rituals performed by the priest are not intended to effect the cure, since they commence only after the disease has passed. Healing comes from Yahweh alone, either directly (cf. Ex 15: 26) or through his surrogate, the prophet (e.g. Moses, Elijah, Elisha and Isaiah) and the diseased person can receive it by means of prayer (cf. 1 Ki 8: 37-38; 2 Ki 20: 2-3) and fasting (cf. 2 Sm 12: 16). Therefore, Milgrom (1991: 888) emphasises that ‘Israel’s priest is a far cry from the pagan physician or magician’. He

also notes that, in ancient Israel, the leprosy disease was not regarded as a demonic entity independent from God, nor the ritual an intrinsically effective agency of healing, because it was not a therapeutic but a religious act of which the purpose was a symbolic purification.

A discussion now follows, regarding the functions of the materials used in the purification ritual for this disease. Concerning the two birds (רָפָּע), they are not specified. Therefore, it is not possible to determine whether they are pigeons or turtledoves. Theoretically, they are included among the birds appropriate for this rite since they are chosen not only because of their wildness but also because of their purity. According to Milgrom (1991: 834), the function of the birds is to convey the impurity away, as far as possible. For Ross (2002: 288), the two birds represent the two possible fates, death or life, of the diseased person. The bird flying away after being dipped in the mixture of blood and water, as he explains, indicates that the individual now enjoys life and new energy, and is released from the fetters of disease. Ross posits that this symbolism is similar to that of the Day of Atonement, when one goat dies and the other goat carries the sins away from Israel.

As far as the spring or living water (מַיִם חַיִּים) is concerned, Milgrom (1991: 837) argues that, besides its purificatory function, it is obviously needed because the blood of the bird would provide insufficient liquid for dipping the required materials plus the living bird into it. According to Gorman (1997: 86), living water constitutes an image of the overall function of the ritual, which is to move the individual into life. For Ross (2002: 289), fresh living, or running, water may have signified the new and fresh start accorded to the cured person.

With regard to the functions of the cedar wood (עֵצֵי אֶרְזָא), the hyssop (בַּזְּזָא) and the scarlet yarn (שָׁרְבִית), Milgrom (1991: 835) suggests that the cedar wood might have been selected because of its colour, red. He explains that the power of the blood, symbol of life, needed to be aided by the addition of two red materials, the scarlet yarn and the cedar, in order to counter and reverse the death process, represented by the deterioration of the diseased person's body. Concerning the hyssop, Milgrom points out that this plant is a popular spice and herb in the Near East that is used, throughout the Bible, as an instrument for sprinkling. He notes that the liquid into which it is dipped adheres to it in the form of droplets. Concerning the scarlet or the crimson yarn, Milgrom notes that its literal rendering is 'the red of the worm' and that the red colouring-matter extracted from the female worm is used to dye

wool. Ross (2002: 289) mentions that, according to Jewish tradition, the cedar (a tall tree) indicates that leprosy (ט [רC]) was caused by pride; whereas hyssop (a small bush) and scarlet (coming from a worm) indicate that the cure takes place through humility (see 1 Ki 4: 33). But he offers a more plausible idea in arguing that the cedar is probably chosen because of its durability and its aromatic value. He adds that the cedar, known for its strength, symbolises resistance to future disease, the principle of acquired immunity. Concerning the scarlet yarn, Ross points out that, besides its function in binding cedar and hyssop together, its red colour might have been regarded as symbolic, for the purpose of purification by sacrificial blood.

Regarding the final ritual actions, shaving, laundering and bathing, Milgrom (1991: 840) argues that they are prescribed in order to prevent the cured person from being infected again by his/her impure clothes and hair and also to prevent him/her from transmitting impurity. For Gorman (1997: 86) they embody the state, declared by the priest, into which the healed person is now moved. Sharing Gorman's view, Ross (2002: 289) emphasises that these ritual actions signify that the purified person has removed all the trappings and effects, physical, social and psychological, of the disease.

In comparing the analysis of Leviticus 14: 1-8 given above to Rakoto Jean's interpretation of the same text (see 4.3.1.3), it is again to be acknowledged that they show similarities and dissimilarities, which are presented in the following discussion.

The first similarity is observed in the use of the cedar wood and the hyssop. It should be noted that for lack of the cedar wood and the hyssop mentioned in Leviticus 14: 1-8, which do not grow in Madagascar, Rakoto Jean uses plants that he claims to be related to the latter. Therefore, he makes use of these plants as substitutes for the biblical items. Concerning the employment of these plants, both biblical scholars and Rakoto Jean indicate that the cedar and the hyssop are not applied for healing purposes, for they do not figure among the medicinal plants. They are, rather, used for a ritual purpose; they serve as instruments for sprinkling.

The second similarity is displayed by the use made of the blood. According to biblical scholars and Rakoto Jean, the blood as specified in the text of Leviticus 14: 1-8 constitutes the indispensable ingredient required in the ritual purification of a person who is healed of skin disease, namely leprosy. When the healed person comes to the priest or is brought to him he/she should be sprinkled with blood. Both biblical scholars and Rakoto Jean affirm that the

function of the blood in this ritual is to purify the person of the spiritual, social and psychological effects of the disease so that he/she can be re-admitted to the community from which he/she has been banished. It should be noted that in Leviticus 14: 1-8 the blood is mixed with the water, whereas Rakoto Jean uses blood without water. However, it has been explained in the traditional historical-critical interpretation that one of the reasons for the water is the insufficient quantity of the blood of a single bird for dipping the necessary materials, which include the cedar and hyssop plus the living bird.

The third similarity is observable in the function of the ritual acts of shaving, laundering and bathing. Both the analysis and Rakoto Jean's interpretation point out that, according to Yahweh's instructions in Leviticus 14: 1-8, a person who has recovered from leprosy has to shave his/her hair, launder his/her clothes and bath thoroughly. Biblical scholars and Rakoto Jean explain that these ritual actions are aimed at showing that the healed and purified person is now free from the trappings and the effects of the disease and is starting a new life. It is true that in Rakoto Jean's practice, these ritual actions take place before the utilisation of the blood, but their functions in the two contexts are the same.

With regard to the dissimilarities, the first is evident in the authority under which the person responsible for the purification ritual is acting. In the text of Leviticus 14: 1-8 this authority is revealed to be Yahweh, who gave Moses the law or the ritual to be applied to the leprous person on the day of his ceremonial cleansing. The analysis specifies that the purification of the person who has recovered from this disease is Yahweh's responsibility, and not Moses', and the plant in this context has absolutely nothing to do with healing. Moses or the priest is merely designated to carry out the necessary ritual acts.

On the other hand, in Rakoto Jean's practice, he is acting on his own initiative. He receives neither from God/Zanahary nor from the ancestors any regulations for leprous persons; he just imitates what is ordered in Leviticus 14: 1-8, without claiming, however, that he is under Yahweh's authority. This signifies that Rakoto Jean is the one responsible for the purification of the patients that he has been healing of these diseases.

The second dissimilarity is constituted by the materials required for the purification ritual. In Leviticus 14: 1-8, the materials simply consist of cedar wood, hyssop, living water, two wild birds and the blood of one of them which the meanings and purposes have been presented in the traditional historical-critical interpretation. In addition, the water with which the purified person has to bath is also indispensable.

Rakoto Jean, however, uses a red cock from the domestic fowl instead of wild birds. The red cock's blood, in the Malagasy traditional religious practice, is used mostly in various ritual purifications. Therefore, in making use of it in the ritual purification of a patient who has been healed of leprosy, Rakoto Jean applies the Malagasy traditional practice instead of what is ordered in Leviticus 14: 1-7. In addition, Rakoto Jean adds other ingredients, such as fragrant leaves, a silver coin and broken eggs, to the water with which the healed patient should bath. These materials, too, are frequently used in the Malagasy traditional religious practice for various purposes. Therefore, it is to be said that Rakoto Jean has failed in his attempt to closely imitate what is ordered in Leviticus 14: 1-7 in using these additional materials.

The third dissimilarity resides in the function of the purification ritual. It has been explained in the traditional historical-critical interpretation that the function of this ritual is similar to that of the Day of Atonement (Lv 16), where one goat is slaughtered as a sin offering and the other set free to carry sin away from Israel. Likewise, the first bird in Leviticus 14: 1-8 should be killed so as to provide the necessary blood for the purification ritual, whereas the second one is released after it has been dipped in the mixture of water and blood, to show symbolically that the impurity is being carried away as far as possible.

In Rakoto Jean's purification ritual, I consider that the idea of atonement does not exist. I adduce three reasons: firstly, because he did not mention anything about atonement when I interviewed him; secondly, because he is acting not under divine or supernatural authority but on his own initiative; thirdly, because though he attempts to imitate what is recorded in Leviticus 14: 1-8, his practice is dominated by the Malagasy traditional concept. Therefore, Rakoto Jean's purification ritual is aimed at providing not atonement but a psychological form of comfort, which is necessary for the reintegration of the healed person into the community.

#### *4.4.1.3 Jeremiah 8: 22*

Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people? (NIV)

Before starting the explanation of this verse, I consider that it is necessary to offer a summary of the whole chapter, in order to describe the circumstances under which the people of Judah were living when Jeremiah addressed them and wrote his book. The prophet proceeds in

Chapter 8 to anticipate, to magnify and to justify the destruction that Yahweh is about to bring upon the people of Judah. His objective is to make this people aware of this imminent disaster, in showing them how grievous it would be, but how righteous also. Jeremiah represents the judgements coming as so very terrible that death will appear to be at the same time both dreaded and desired (vv. 1-3). He aggravates the wretched stupidity and the wilfulness of this people, which inexorably lead them to their ruin (vv. 4-12). He describes the confusion and the consternation as so great that the whole nation would feel fear (vv. 13-17). The prophet himself is deeply affected by the disaster and expresses the sorrow and despair that break his heart (vv. 18-22).

According to the above summary, Jeremiah 8: 22 belongs to the section which deals with the prophet's grief. In fact, this verse is included in the passage (vv. 18-22) that consists of a lament by Jeremiah into which is incorporated a prophetic anticipation of Judah's dispersal in exile (v. 19), and in which the words of the despairing exiles are reproduced (vv. 19b and 20). However, the prophet does not content himself with lamenting the situation or blaming Judah's people for their stubbornness and hardened wickedness; he becomes the voice of this people. He bewails their wounded condition and intercedes with God on their behalf (Stulman 2005: 100). McKane (1986: 93) argues that the brokenness of the people of Judah is not a condition of which they have a spectator's view; it is a suffering and sickness in which they are immersed. More explicitly, he points out that Judah's heart is sick and her spirit has dissolved; she is shattered, enveloped in darkness and seized with desolation.

The desperate situation in which the nation of Judah finds herself makes her cry out, although she is far from being conscious of its cause. Her cry of helplessness reaches Jeremiah's heart. If Yahweh's people are broken, the prophet, who is spiritually responsible for them, is broken too. He is overcome by mourning and dismay, and even at that late stage searches for a remedy (Thompson 1981: 306). Therefore, the discovery of Judah's sickness and desolation leads Jeremiah to ask questions that express, at the same time, his despair and astonishment: 'Is there no balm (YRC) in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is not healing for the wound of my people (nation)?' (8:22). According to Jones (1992: 165), the word 'healing' here expresses the making of new skin, which can be understood as regeneration. Accordingly, the last question can be rendered as follows: 'Why has no new skin grown over their wound'?

Gilead was famous from the patriarchal period onwards for its balsamic resin (Gn 27: 25); but the type of balm mentioned in this verse is not specified. As Douglas (1962: 129) points out, balm (יָרֵחַ), which is a product of Gilead, was famous for its healing properties and was often used for cosmetic purposes. He also mentions that it was probably an aromatic gum or spice, but the original meaning of the word is not clear and cannot be identified with any plant in Gilead. Some understand, he notes, the יָרֵחַ of Genesis 37: 25 as the *mastich* (mastic), a product of the *pistacia lentiscus*, which is common in Palestine and used for healing purposes, while classical authors applied the name 'balm' to what is now known as Mecca balm, imported into Egypt from Arabia.

Nicholson (1973: 90) argues that the balm associated with Gilead was an aromatic resin derived from a tree or shrub, but though it was used widely in ancient times its identity has not been established with certainty. As he points out, there are no plants in the territory of what was ancient Gilead from which such balm could have been derived, unless a plant that grew there in ancient times has subsequently become extinct in this area. Nicholson then argues that the association of balm with Gilead arose because caravans from the east bearing supplies of it passed through Gilead.

Since balm from Gilead is famous because of its healing properties, it is not difficult to suppose that there were, in this place, famous and experienced physicians too. These physicians, as experts in the matter, accorded balm special treatment which transformed it into effective medicine so that it could be used to heal various illnesses and exported (Jones 1992: 165).

As confirmed above, balm is a famous medicinal plant with particular healing properties that people from Egypt to Palestine used successfully. It is thus logical for Jeremiah to pose the question: 'Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there?' (Jr 8: 22a) This question, which is more spiritual than medical, can be interpreted as follows: Is there no medicine proper for a sick and dying kingdom? Is there a skilful hand to apply the medicine? The response is 'no', because there could be no regeneration of Judah's health when her spirit remained rebellious and sinful. There is, in Gilead, no balm that can cure the disease of sin, no physician there that can restore the health of a nation which rebels against its creator and father, Yahweh (Thompson 1981: 306).

Alternatively, this verse may be understood affirmatively. Is there no balm in Gilead, no physician there? One can respond: 'yes, certainly there is'. Yahweh is able to help and

heal his people; he possesses the capacity to redress all his people's grievances. Besides, they had among them Yahweh's law and prophets, with the help of which they might have been brought to repentance and their ruin might have been prevented (cf. Wiseman 1973: 90).

The last question is 'Why then is not healing for the wound of my people?' Certainly the answer was not related to Yahweh, but to themselves; it was not for want of balm and physician, but because they would not admit Yahweh's remedy (his word) nor submit to his method of cure. This signifies there had been no regeneration of Judah's health because her spirit was still unregenerate (cf. Wiseman 1973: 90).

In comparing the analysis of Jeremiah 8: 22 given above to Rakoto Jean's interpretation of the same text (see 4.3.1.4), I can identify one similarity and a single, but a fundamental, dissimilarity. The similarity is observable in the identification of balm as a medicinal plant. Although biblical scholars do not specify the type of the balm and the kind of sickness for which this balm can be used, they assume that balm, especially the balm of Gilead, was famous for its healing properties from the patriarchal period onwards. Similarly, Rakoto Jean affirms, from his experience, that balm is an effective medicinal plant, which can be used either alone or in combination with other traditional medicines for healing various types of sickness.

Regarding the dissimilarity, it is to be observed in the function of balm. As pointed out in the above analysis, balm in Jeremiah 8: 22 is not used to cure a physical disease. Besides, there is in the text no mention of any type of physical sickness. Biblical scholars rather underline that balm serves to symbolise the incurability of Judah's spiritual sickness, though they have a balm (Yahweh's law and prophets) at their disposal and a doctor (Yahweh) to apply the remedy. The reason for Judah's sickness, as pointed out in the traditional historical-critical interpretation is her stubbornness that pushed her to rebel against Yahweh. This stubbornness and rebellion will, fatally, lead Judah both to destruction and to captivity. Therefore, it should be noted that biblical scholars put the emphasis on this particular symbolism, not on the use of balm as a medicinal plant.

On the other hand, Rakoto Jean emphasises the medicinal function of balm. Two possible reasons can be adduced. The first is that Rakoto Jean may have read the text without understanding its context. In this case, the mistake is owing to the insufficiency of his knowledge of the Old Testament. The second reason is that he may have read the text and knows its context but does not consider it. In this case, the mistake is deliberate and one can

say that Rakoto Jean uses Jeremiah 8: 22 merely to serve his purpose, which is to convince his patients of the reliability of the medicinal plants that the Old Testament provides for him.

#### 4.4.2 Exodus 3: 5b; Job 33: 6; Psalm 121: 8a

##### 4.4.2.1 Exodus 3: 5b

Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. (NIV)

Exodus 3: 5 is the verse that describes how the call of Moses began. When Moses saw the bush that burned up but was not consumed (Ex 3: 2), he gave into curiosity and, turning aside, approached it in order to enquire into this extraordinary sight. This is quite natural. However, when Yahweh observed that Moses took notice of the burning bush, and turned aside to see it, he called to him (Ex 3: 5). This can be understood as implying that if Moses had neglected the burning bush as a thing not worth taking notice of, it is probable that Yahweh would have departed without saying anything to him. But, when he turned aside, Yahweh called to him. And Yahweh's call to Moses is intended to prevent him from drawing near (Ex 3: 5a) and to require him to put off his sandals (ל [ n]), for the place where he is standing is holy ground (hmda vđq; Ex 3: 5b).

Although it is specified that the text to be investigated in this sub-section is Exodus 3: 5b, I think that it is necessary to say a few words about the first part of the verse, 5a. Dennet (1992: 25) points out that Yahweh in Exodus 3: 5a, which records his first call to Moses, furnished Moses with a necessary caution against rashness and irreverence in his approach. As he explains, Moses must keep his distance: he can draw near, but not too near; so near as to hear, but not so near as to pry. Dennet argues that it is Moses' conscience which is to be satisfied, but not his curiosity; and care must be taken that familiarity does not breed contempt. For Houtman (1993: 352), not only Moses but also almost all peoples must maintain their distance in their encounter with the deity, because coming closer is regarded as a violation of the sacred, which spells calamity. In his opinion, this maintenance of one's distance vis-à-vis the sacred embodies the ancient sentiment that on earth a distinction ought to be made between holy and profane.

Regarding the removal of his sandals mentioned in Exodus 3: 5b, the focal point of this discussion, Gispén (1982: 52) points out that Moses was enjoined to take them off in order to show reverence for the ground that bore this manifestation of Yahweh. Those sandals, he says, 'carried the dirt from his journey, and man must be pure when he approaches God'. As for Dennet (1992: 25), he suggests that Moses must put off his sandals to express

both his total reverence for Yahweh's appearance and his readiness to obey Yahweh's commands. Removing one's shoes or sandals in the Old Testament, he notes, there constitutes a token of respect and submission, such as a servant was obliged to display to his master.

As far as the holy ground is concerned, in Dennett's view (1992: 25) the reason for its holiness was the manifestation of the divine presence, during the continuance of which it had to retain this character; thus, it should not be trodden on by soiled sandals. Considering Dennett's opinion, one has to note that the ground in question had not previously been regarded as holy. However, Houtman (1993: 353) explains that Sinai, in the time of Moses, was regarded as a holy mountain. It was the highest of the mountains in that area and very suitable as pasture, but owing to the belief that the deity resided there, it had not been grazed previously; the shepherds did not dare to go there; Moses, however, did (1993: 353). Considering this explanation, one tends to believe that Moses was not the first person to whom the true nature of the place was revealed. In other words, it was already an existing sacred place when he accidentally arrived there. As Houtman (1993: 353) reports, modern exegetes hold that supposedly according to a 'sanctuary legend', a tradition connected with a specific holy place, 'a man (a shepherd) once discovered the presence of a divine being, and so the holiness of the place was discovered'. Some of them even argue that Moses innocently entered the area of an existing sanctuary, sacred to the service of the god Jahu. Thus, modern exegetes think, according to Houtman, that the legend mentioned above became linked to Moses and applied to the revelation of Yahweh. As a result, the discovery of this holy place, as well as of Yahweh as its God, was attributed to Moses in order to accord him a status and value that were appropriate to him as the first leader and legislator of Israel (1993: 353).

As Houtman (1993: 351) suggests, it was necessary to put off one's footwear when one enters a sacred place because this was believed to allow a more direct contact with the deity, or perhaps the practice was a remnant of the custom to appear completely naked before that deity.<sup>116</sup> Offering another suggestion, Houtman argues that 'by removing one's clothing, one removes one's uncleanness, making a more immediate contact with the deity possible'.

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<sup>116</sup> Houtman (1993: 351) points out that the prohibition of entering the sacred area or place with shod feet is found in almost identical language in Joshua 5: 15 ('Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy'), but does not occur elsewhere in the Old Testament. Therefore, he stresses that what we have in Exodus 3: 5b is 'a very ancient custom, familiar from many peoples and cultures and still in vogue among the Samaritans on Mount Gerizim, among the Muslims upon entering the mosque, and the Buddhists when they enter the pagoda'. Houtman admits, however, that the origin as well as the significance of the custom is uncertain.

Besides, a number of commentators argue that leather sandals, made from the skin of dead animals, were regarded as unclean and thus should not be allowed to come in contact with the holy place; taking them off is, therefore, a precaution against defilement (1993: 351).

Expressing his opinion concerning Exodus 3: 5b, Houtman (1993: 352) makes it clear that Moses' being commanded to put off his sandals is quite different from situations involving other people mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament, who removed their sandals too and walked barefoot. For instance, there is no obvious connection between Exodus 3: 5b and Ruth 4: 7f; Psalms 60: 10 and 108: 10. It is not likely, Houtman notes, that the act of Exodus 3: 5b showed that the trespasser on the holy ground intended to take possession of it. Likewise, the reason for Moses to remove his sandals has nothing to do with Old Testament people who walked barefoot as sign of mourning and humiliation (cf. 2 Sm 15: 30; Is 20: 2ff; Ezk 24:17, 23; Mi 1: 8). According to Houtman, the act of Exodus 3: 5b is 'probably best regarded as an act of laying aside one's dignity and expressing one's reverence and subjection to the one whom one wants to meet'.

For Ashby (1998:20), to remove one's sandals was 'a sign of respect shown on entering someone else's home or territory'. According to him, Yahweh in Exodus 3: 5 had marked out his presence and territory by means of the burning bush; Moses must respect this by taking off his sandals.

In comparing the analysis of Exodus 3: 5b given above to Raneny's interpretation of the same text (see 4.3.2.2), it is obvious that they display similarities and dissimilarities. These will now be discussed.

The first similarity is observable in the fact that both the above analysis and Raneny's interpretation recognise the existence of holy ground. The holy ground, as mentioned in the text, is the place on Mount Horeb where Moses was an eyewitness of Yahweh's appearance, which was manifested in the burning bush. Therefore, considering biblical scholars' arguments, ground is regarded as holy if an eyewitness can attest to any divine presence that has been revealed there. In Raneny's case, she claims to be the witness of the presence of King Rivoekembahoaka's spirit, that she calls *Dada* (father), in the place that this spirit has showed her. Therefore, she regards this place as holy ground and has erected there a tomb with a shrine for this king.

The second similarity is constituted by the act of putting off one's sandals. Both biblical scholars and Raneny affirm that anyone standing on or entering a holy place must

remove his/her sandals or shoes. On the one hand, this is a ritual gesture aimed at showing deep respect, humility, and honour for the divine beings (God [in Exodus 3: 5b] and the royal spirit *Dada* [in Raneny's religious practice]), to whom the holy grounds (Mt Horeb [in Exodus 3: 5b] and Kiririoka [in Raneny's religious practice] belong. On the other, this act is intended to prevent the holy ground from being soiled. According to biblical scholars and Raneny, the sandals/shoes are regarded as symbols of uncleanness because they are in permanent contact with unclean things on the ground.

The third similarity concerns the use of the holy ground as a place of worship. Obviously, the text of Exodus 3: 5b does not mention that Moses, after having received Yahweh's instructions and message, had erected an altar and sacrificed a goat or a lamb to Yahweh in the place where Yahweh was revealed to him. However, according to the analysis carried out above, Mount Horeb was possibly a sacred place where a 'sanctuary' to the worship of a certain god Jahu had already been erected before Moses accidentally arrived there. Therefore, one can suggest that it was in this location, already used as a place of worship, that Yahweh appeared to Moses and that it was the same place that he declared to be holy ground. Besides, if one continues the reading of Exodus 3, one finds in verse 12 that Yahweh, in his promise to Moses, says, 'I will be with you; and this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship/serve God on this mountain.' This promise was fulfilled when, later on, the children of Israel who had been freed by Yahweh from their Egyptian bondage and were being led by Moses met Yahweh at the foot of the mountain of Sinai, worshipped him there and received from him the Ten Commandments and other laws concerning religious, social and juridical matters (Ex 19-20).

Similarly, Raneny uses as a place of worship the holy ground of Kiririoka on which *Dada* was supposed to have been revealed to her. She has erected a shrine on the top of his tomb. She annually organises there a large gathering, attended by a multitude of followers, which consists mainly of worshipping *Dada*, and strengthening the followers' faith and trust in him. She also takes advantage of the occasion to take care of these followers by healing them and providing them with charms and traditional medicines.

Concerning the dissimilarity, the only one that I am going to bring out here is evident in the fundamental differences between the natures of the two divine authorities which declare the places on Mt Horeb and on Kiririoka holy grounds. As Exodus 3: 5b clearly states, Yahweh is the supreme and divine authority, who told Moses that the place from where he

called him was holy ground. Obviously, it is mentioned in the analysis of the text that, according to biblical scholars' arguments, the place previously might serve as a sanctuary for the worship of a certain god Jahu. But, in the context of Exodus 3: 5b, it is God who declares to be the Lord of the Israelites as well as their fathers (ancestors; v 15-16), who claims ownership of the place on Mt Horeb and states that it is holy ground because of his appearance and presence there.

On the other hand, Raneny claims that it is the *razana* (ancestor), or more precisely *Dada's* spirit, who told her that the place on Kiririoka is holy ground. The reason for this holiness is, as Raneny explains, the presence of the tomb erected to this king whose spirit appeared to her, possessed her and assigned her the responsibility for his veneration and worship. In this case, the divine authority that has declared the place on Kiririoka to be holy ground is an ancestor. It should be emphasised, however, that the supreme and divine authority in the Malagasy traditional religion is Zanahary, the creator of all things, who is regarded by the Malagasy people as to be identical to the God of the Bible. According to the traditional belief, the ancestors, who are part of Zanahary's creatures, are just his auxiliary agents. That means all the ancestors whatever the supernatural power they are supposed to be endowed with are under Zanahary's authority.

Considering the explanation given above, what make the two authorities declaring the two places on Mt Horeb and on Kiririoka fundamentally different from themselves are the natures of the super beings from whom stem these authorities. The God of the holy ground on Mt Horeb who is called Yahweh, which means 'I am who I am' or 'the God who has always been and shall be' (Ex 3: 14), is the eternal and almighty God, the creator, by whom all things have their being. He is also the God of mercy, mindful of his promise (cf. vv 6-8).

As for *Dada*, the ancestor venerated or worshipped in the holy ground on Kiririoka, he was a mere created human being whose existence like that of all the human beings was limited to death. Obviously, the Malagasy traditionalists as well as many Christians believe in the immortality of the soul according to which the deceased persons who become *razana* (ancestors) after death continue to live spiritually in an invisible world. But, they also consider these *razana* to be still members of the families and the communities they had left behind. That means an ancestor in the Malagasy traditional context is regarded as still having his/her status or human nature and, at the same time, benefiting from the immortality of the soul in the spiritual or invisible world. One example showing this is *Dada's* case: Raneny as

well her followers venerates and worships him as ancestor (super being), but at the same time, she declares that he is ‘just like you [human beings] before God/Zanahary’ (cf. 4.3.2.3).

The above discussion shows the fundamental differences between Yahweh and the ancestor *Dada* as far as their natures are concerned. And it is on these differences that Christians base one of their criticisms of Raneny’s use of biblical or Old Testament texts as slogans in her religious practices. In fact, they consider that Raneny misuses the Word of God or even blasphemes against it in using it to emphasise the sacredness of a place she dedicates to worshipping an ancestor. According to these critics, she should rather refer to and make use of *Dada’s* words or instructions for this purpose (religious slogan) because it was *Dada*, as she claims, who appeared to her and declared that this place is holy ground.

#### 4.4.2.2 Job 33: 6a

I am just like you before God (NIV)

Job 33: 6a belongs to the long section that is entitled ‘The speeches of Elihu’ (Job 32 - 33). This section narrates that Job has protested that he does not deserve his terrible fate because he is a good person and his conduct is irreproachable. Such a self-justification or declaration of innocence leaves three of Job’s friends, the oldest ones, speechless because they are not able to answer him (Job 32: 1-4). Then Elihu, who is the youngest of the comforters, arises and apologises for speaking, but, at the same time, claims as his authority the Spirit of understanding, which is independent of age (vv 8-9). Taking advantage of the silence, he asks Job to listen to his words and to pay attention to what he is going to say (Job 33: 1). Possessed by a compelling need to defend God’s honour, he is convinced that he can instruct Job, though the others have failed. Elihu confronts Job with a barrage of legal rhetoric and a series of substantive arguments designed to refute Job’s claim that God never answers human beings (Habel 1985: 459). One might say that, objective and wise, Elihu assumes the role of the mediator in spite of his age.

Concerning Job 33: 6a, Habel (1985: 465) argues that Elihu’s protestation of commonality to Job intensifies here the patronising tone of the previous verse. Elihu, he points out, contends that their oneness is based on a common spirit from God and bears the same mortal frame. As Habel posits, Elihu apparently seeks to put Job at ease and promises not to overwhelm him with an awesome personality and presentation; they can debate the case man-to-man.

Habel (1985: 465) explains that the creation motif cited by Elihu (v 6b) is part of a widespread ancient Near Eastern mythic tradition about the formation of the primal human from earth or clay at the hands of a divine potter. He reminds one that Job, too, had used the same image to describe his own origin (10: 8). The specific motif of being ‘nipped from clay’, he mentions, is found in the Gilgamesh Epic where Aruru, the goddess of creation, forms Enkidu to be the equal of Gilgamesh. Habel then emphasises that a similar special act of God makes Elihu and Job equals – at least according to Elihu.

As Simundson (1986: 126) points out, in Job 33: 6, with verse 7, ‘we have Elihu at his best’ because in declaring that he is a human being like Job he assumes that ‘they are equal as they participate in the struggle to make sense out of life’s misfortunes’. According to him, Elihu implies that he does not know any more than Job, that they are in this mess together, that Job does not need to regard Elihu as an authority who is trying to impose his own rationalisations about suffering on him. Simundson notices that Elihu, it seems, shows a kind of humility before Job and the mysteries of life. But, in reality, his speech is aimed at condemning Job and justifying God, and claims superiority for his word over what Job has been saying.

In Hartley’s opinion (1988:438), so as to add authority to his speech Elihu affirms his own origin in terms that allude to the account of the creation of the first man, recorded in Genesis 2: 7. As he explains, just like Adam, Elihu was created by the spirit of God ‘when the breath of *Shaddai* gave him, a lump of clay, life’. As Hartley stresses, the thought here is that God is personally involved in his own creation, not just in that of the first man or pair. As he points out, Elihu, in referring to his origin in this way, claims two things: he is equal to both Job and the older comforters, and his words are worthy of careful attention for they are inspired.

In comparing the analysis of Job 33: 6a given above to Raneny’s interpretation of the same text (see 4.3.2.3), I notice one major similarity and one major dissimilarity. The similarity is observable in the fact that both biblical scholars and Raneny recognise human beings as belonging to God. As mentioned in the analysis, biblical scholars specify that they [human beings] belong to God because he formed them from clay, which is an allusion to how God, in Genesis 2: 7, created the first human beings. In the Malagasy belief, also, all the people, Christians and traditionalists, believe that the human beings are *Zanahary*’s creation; thus all of them are *Zanahary*’s children and are equal before him. Some foreign observers argue that

the Malagasy people derived this belief from the influence of Christianity. However, Malagasy anthropologists emphasise that the Malagasy had believed *Zanahary* to be the creator and father of human beings long before the introduction of the Christian religion into Madagascar.

The dissimilarity is evident in the use of the words 'I am just like you before God' or 'I too belong to God like you' (according to the literal translation of the passage that Raneny took from the Malagasy Protestant Bible; cf. 4.3.2.3). As biblical scholars argue, these words are used by Elihu to claim that he is the equal of Job as far as intelligence is concerned, for the spirit of understanding is independent of age. In addressing Job like this, he placed him in a position (before God) in which all human beings should be viewed on the same level. In other words, Elihu used these words to claim his freedom of speech, and in order to add authority to his speech he referred to his divine origin, which might mean that he was made of the spirit of God.

On the other hand, Raneny quotes the words in Job 33: 6a as a religious slogan to legitimise *Dada's* position before both *Zanahary* and her followers. As already said, she claims that *Dada* does not require that he be worshipped, because such worship is the privilege of *Zanahary* alone. What therefore comprises the relationship between *Dada* and *Zanahary*? In response to this question, Raneny replies that *Dada* simply belongs to *Zanahary*, who created him. This response, on the one hand, is intended by Raneny to prevent *Dada* from being accused of usurping *Zanahary's* prerogative and, on the other, to demonstrate that everything *Dada* provides for his followers belongs to *Zanahary* and comes from him through *Dada*. The second question concerns the relationship between *Dada* and his followers. To this Raneny responds that *Dada* belongs to *Zanahary*, like them. However, the meaning of this response is that when an ancestor belongs to *Zanahary* as the living beings do, he benefits from the prerogative of being near *Zanahary* and, at the same time, of being part of the community of the living.

It should be noted that it is to some extent because of these responses which show Raneny's purpose in using Job 33: 6a that Christians accuse her of distorting the Word of God. However, I saw after having conducted interviews with Raneny that her major problem is the lack of knowledge of the Old Testament which inevitably results in the misinterpretation and misuse of the texts she has selected and taken from it. But, one can also suppose that this misinterpretation to a certain extent may have been made deliberately by Raneny, so that Job 33: 6a as well as other texts could serve her purposes, which consist of

showing that she does not worship *Dada*, but at the same time, enhancing the followers' belief and trust in him.

#### 4.4.2.3 Psalm 121: 8a

The Lord will watch over your coming and going [...] (NIV)

Psalm 121 forms part of the collection of psalms including fourteen hymns (Pss 120-134) that is usually called 'The songs of ascents' (Kroll 1987: 367) or 'Processional songs' (Allen 2002:193). It should be noted that almost all these psalms carry the subscription 'A song of degrees', which is sometimes translated as 'a song of steps' or more frequently 'song of ascents' (טַוֵּל [מ]). As Allen suggests, the Hebrew term טַוֵּל [מ, which is used as a designation of the laudatory character of these psalms, is related to the verb הָלַךְ (go up).

Commentators generally argue that pilgrims probably sang this series of songs before beginning, or during, their processional route to the temple in Jerusalem. Mannati (1988: 124) for instance speculates that it is possible to represent matters as follows: when the time for their departure came, the Jewish community from a given place or area of the Diaspora (since the text suggests a long and perilous journey), divided into two choirs, surrounded those who were ready to leave. The ceremony started with a kind of public proclamation of their firm and courageous decision to go up to Jerusalem. Thereafter, they sang Psalm 121 which they might have accompanied with a scenic game, which consists of exploring the horizon, pointing fingers in the direction of Zion and making a first move towards that side (1988: 124).

Allen (2002:193) offers two alternatives. The first alternative, according to him, is that the songs of ascents were certainly used for cultic purposes. A Jewish tradition in the *Mishnah*, he explains, relates this series of songs to the fifteen steps leading up from the court of the women to the court of Israel in the temple complex. Allen suggests that the steps correspond to the songs that the Levites used to sing, especially on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles. To justify his argument, he refers to the Aaronic benediction, mentioned in these songs of ascents, that was pronounced on the steps of the temple porch. Allen also notes that the striking relationship of these psalms (including Psalm 121) to the priestly benediction seems to illustrate the influence of the latter.

The second alternative concerning the use of the songs of ascents, in Allen's opinion (2002:193), is that exiles or groups of exiles returning to Judah to rebuild the temple and the community might sing these songs of ascents, or most of them. In supporting this suggestion, he implicitly agrees with Goulder (1998: 40), for whom the songs of ascents were among the psalms that Israelite exiles used during their return to Jerusalem. To reinforce his argument, Goulder entitles these songs 'The psalms of the return'. He even relates some of these psalms, namely Psalms 121, 123 and 125, to Nehemiah's perilous journey to Jerusalem, his courageous decision to rebuild the temple and its walls, and the necessary measures he had taken against the negative reaction of his adversaries (cf. Neh 1: 1b-2: 9).

Concerning Psalm 121, Horist (1999: 320) points out that we know nothing of its authorship, although its design as a psalm of comfort and consolation is evident. He points out that, according to Luther's argument, 'this is a psalm of consolation wherein the psalmist, from his own experience, exhorts the godly to a constancy of faith and to an expectation of help, and defence from God'. Horist then notices that Psalm 121 offers a remarkable contrast to the preceding hymn, which is a complaint to God.

Kroll (1987: 370) emphasises that Psalm 121 is 'an expression of trust in the maker of earth and the keeper of Israel'. In his opinion, the key to the understanding of Psalm 121 is the Hebrew verb  $\text{רמב}$  (to keep or to preserve), since this verb or one of its forms is used six times in the last five verses of this short psalm. Therefore, he suggests that an appropriate title for it is 'Yahweh: keeper of Israel'; Yahweh, who is the creator of the universe, is also the keeper of the nation of Israel, and of the individual Israelites.

Mannati (1988: 123) entitles Psalm 121, 'Yahweh's promises to whoever stays upon him and relies on his providence and grace'. These promises, he points out, are freely given as a response to obedience to and faith in Yahweh. For Mannati, Yahweh vouches for the fulfilment of his promises since they are bound to his person. Mannati also emphasises that these divine promises are associated with the believer's march (your foot, v. 3), his/her acts (your right hand, v. 5), his/her whole being (your soul, v. 7) and his/her daily duties (your coming and going, v. 8). Concurring with Mannati, Goulder (1998: 42-43) stresses that Psalm 121 is not a thanksgiving but a promise.

With regard to Psalm 121: 8a, for Kroll (1987: 371) the threefold expression 'will keep ( $\text{רמב}$ ) you ... [will keep] your soul' (v.7) ... [will keep] your coming and going' (in this verse) marks the completeness of Yahweh's protection which is vouchsafed to the faithful

pilgrim, extending to all that he is and that he does. Yahweh alone, he suggests, can accomplish this preservation for he is the sole keeper of the soul. Kroll then contends that Psalm 121: 8a expresses Yahweh's promise to preserve his people's lives and movements, from morning to evening. Agreeing with Kroll, Goulder (1998: 43) confirms that this passage shows that Yahweh furnishes assurance to the pilgrim that each of his/her days' travels has been blessed with Yahweh's protection, from the first step out of the tent to the last step back inside.

In addition to the above explanation, Allen (2002: 208), who entitles Psalm 121: 6-8 'A comprehensive promise of safety', indicates that the pair of verbs used in v. 8 refer to daily work as primarily consisting of leaving the town to work in the fields and returning in the evening (cf. Dt 28: 6; 31: 2; Jos 14: 11). However, he also notes that there seems to be an additional nuance, of returning from worship to daily life and in due course returning to the sanctuary at the time of the next festival. Allen specifies that life is full of potential dangers, but the loving care of the creator is well able to keep believers safe. Therefore, 'the pilgrim is bidden Godspeed', he says, and 'leaves with the repeated drumbeats of the message  $\text{למנוח}$   $\text{ה'י$  (Yahweh guards/keeps), resounding in his ears'. In other words, the pilgrim departs from the sacred place (the temple) of Yahweh's special presence with the assurance that Yahweh accompanies him/her, escorts him/her and that he/she will live out his/her 'post-festival' life under Yahweh's care.

If one continues the reading of Psalm 121: 8, one perceives that it ends with a decisive closure to the whole promise: 'both now and forevermore'. According to Kroll (1987: 371), this expression demonstrates that Yahweh is able to keep or to guard the life of his believers from infancy [now] to old age [forevermore]. Concurring with Kroll, Goulder (1998: 43) suggests that this phrase expresses the permanence or the limitlessness of the loving care which Yahweh provides for his people. Going further, Horist (1999: 321) posits that the expression 'both now and forevermore' attests that Yahweh's care is a protection for life, never out of date, because he looks after the pilgrim not only in life but also in death. He preserves his/her going out and going on while he/she lives and his/her coming in when he/she dies. Yahweh will be his/her guide even unto death and Yahweh will preserve the pilgrim in his/her heavenly kingdom (1999: 321).

In comparing the analysis of the text of Psalm 121: 8a offered above to Raneny's interpretation and use of it (see 4.3.2.4), I have noted one major similarity and one major dissimilarity. The similarity is evident because both the above analysis and Raneny's interpretation recognise that the blessing and the protection of human beings is the responsibility of God. As biblical scholars point out in the analysis, Yahweh is praised for being the keeper of Israel and the provider of blessing for his people. By his promise of blessing and protection, Yahweh escorts the believer wherever he/she goes, and is with him/her in his/her daily work and struggle.

Similarly, Raneny affirms in her interpretation that Zanahary alone commands the power to bless and protect human beings. Zanahary who is the creator of the universe knows them perfectly. He also knows their problems as well as the solution to each because he is the provider of all good things for everyone.

With regard to the dissimilarity, it resides in the use of the words of the formula in Psalm 121: 8a. As the above analysis shows, this text is an expression of trust in Yahweh, the maker of the earth and the keeper of Israel as a nation and as individuals. Yahweh promises his blessing and protection to those who rely upon him and on his providence and grace. Yahweh also commits himself to vouching for his promises because they are bound to his person and glory. Furthermore, Yahweh is able not only to keep or to guard the life of his believers from infancy to old age, but also to guide them even unto death and to preserve them in his heavenly kingdom.

On the other hand, Raneny utilises this formula as a religious slogan to strengthen her followers' faith and trust in Zanahary and *Dada*. It was mentioned earlier that the Malagasy people believe in the blessing and protection of Zanahary and the ancestors. Even Christians practise the custom of blessing people in the name of Zanahary/Andriamanitra and the *razana* (ancestors). Taking advantage of this belief and custom, Raneny does not hesitate to quote Psalm 121: 8a. As explained in 4.3.2.4, she uses the name Zanahary for God. Therefore, the formula that she writes in capitals and displays in a prominent place in front of *Dada's* tomb reads as follows: *Zanahary hiaro anao na miditra na mivoaka*, which literally means 'Zanahary will protect your coming in and going out'. But, in reality, this formula is addressed to the followers not by Zanahary but by the ancestor, *Dada*. Hence Raneny explains, as seen in 4.3.2.4, that Zanahary has bequeathed part of his power to bless and protect to human beings or, more precisely, to parents, as living or dead, so that they can protect and bless their own children. This is the reason why the formula is recorded in front of

*Dada's* tomb on top of which Raneny has erected a shrine. But, this is also why Christians criticise Raneny's way of using biblical texts including Psalm 121: 8a. According to them, just as she does with the other texts (that have already been discussed), Raneny misuses the text of Psalm 121: 8a, because she simply uses it, without taking its biblical context into consideration, for her purposes or, more precisely, for the purposes of *Dada's* cult.

#### **4.4.3 Leviticus 1-6**

Leviticus 1-6 presents lists of regulations governing the various kinds of sacrificial offerings, which are described from the standpoint of the person making the offering. In other words, the instructions in these first five chapters of Leviticus are directed at the entire community, who should not come into the presence of Yahweh with empty hands or without some kind of sacrificial gift. As Ross (2002: 73) makes clear, sacrifice occupies an important place in the life of the children of Israel because it is situated at the heart of their worship.<sup>117</sup> He emphasises that

it serves as the consecrating ritual for participation in the holy rites, it forms the appropriate tribute due to the Lord, and it represents the proper spiritual attitude of the worshiper.

Furnishing a definition of sacrifice, Ross (2002: 73) states that sacrifice encompasses the symbolic expression of 'the unworthiness and the dependence of the worshiper as well as the gracious provision of God'. He specifies that it is neither magic nor superstition; rather, it is 'a divinely instituted drama that enacts Yahweh's way of sanctifying those who desire communion with him'. Therefore, Ross notes that the sacrificial rites were valid only if the attitudes and activities of the worshipers were in harmony with 'the spiritual standards of the faith' that Yahweh required of them.

Referring to the text of Leviticus 1-6, the sacrifices may be divided into two groups. The first group comprises the sacrifices made in communion, such as: the burnt offering (Lv 1), the meal offering (Lv 2) and the peace offering (Lv 3). The second group includes sacrifices made for communion, such as: the purification or sin offering (Lv 4) and the reparation or guilt offering (Lv 5-6). For Milgrom (1991: 134) their common denominator is

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<sup>117</sup> As Ross (2002: 73) mentions, the material and literary evidence from the ancient Near East makes it clear that sacrifice played a central role in the religious practices of the Mesopotamians, Egyptians, Hittites and Canaanites.

that ‘they arise in answer to an unpredictable religious or emotional need, and are thereby set off from the sacrifices of public feasts’ that are fixed by the calendar. These sacrifices are now discussed:

#### 4.4.3.1 *The burnt offering (Lv 1: 1-17)*

1:1 The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting. He said, <sup>2</sup> “speak to the Israelites and say to them: When any of you brings an offering to the Lord, bring as your offering an animal from either the herd or the flock. <sup>3</sup> If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect. He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the Lord. <sup>4</sup> He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him. <sup>5</sup> He is to slaughter the young bull before the Lord, and then Aaron's sons the priests shall bring the blood and sprinkle it against the altar on all sides at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. <sup>6</sup> He is to skin the burnt offering and cut it into pieces. <sup>7</sup> The sons of Aaron the priest are to put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. <sup>8</sup> Then Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, including the head and the fat, on the burning wood that is on the altar. <sup>9</sup> He is to wash the inner parts and the legs with water, and the priest is to burn all of it on the altar. It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. <sup>10</sup> If the offering is a burnt offering from the flock, from either the sheep or the goats, he is to offer a male without defect. <sup>11</sup> He is to slaughter it at the north side of the altar before the Lord, and Aaron's sons the priests shall sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides. <sup>12</sup> He is to cut it into pieces, and the priest shall arrange them, including the head and the fat, on the burning wood that is on the altar. <sup>13</sup> He is to wash the inner parts and the legs with water, and the priest is to bring all of it and burn it on the altar. It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. <sup>14</sup> If the offering to the Lord is a burnt offering of birds, he is to offer a dove or a young pigeon. <sup>15</sup> The priest shall bring it to the altar, wring off the head and burn it on the altar; its blood shall be drained out on the side of the altar. <sup>16</sup> He is to remove the crop with its contents and throw it to the east side of the altar, where the ashes are. <sup>17</sup> He shall tear it open by the wings, not severing it completely, and then the priest shall burn it on the wood that is on the fire on the altar. It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord”. (NIV)

The burnt offering comprises the first sacrifice prescribed in Leviticus. It is sometimes called the ‘holocaust offering’ because everything goes up in smoke; but it is especially known as  $\text{חָלַל}$  [ . This term is the root from which derives the Hebrew word  $\text{חָלַלַת}$  [ , which means ‘to go up [on the altar]’ (Péter-Contesse 1993: 37). According to Milgrom (1991: 146),  $\text{חָלַל}$  [ is regarded as the most important sacrifice because it is ‘superior to all sacrifices’ and because ‘no creature partakes of it but all of it ascends ( $\text{חָלַל}$  [ ) to the Holy One who is superior’.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> It should be noted that in Leviticus 7: 8 the skin of any burnt offering became the property of the officiating priest. But here there is no mention of the way in which the offerer disposed of it.

Expressing his opinion regarding the significance of the burnt offering, Ross (2002: 85) contends that the total consuming of the animal on the altar signifies ‘both complete surrender to God by the offerer and complete acceptance by God of the worshiper who brought it’.

The  $\text{חֹלֶבֶת}$  is in nature a voluntary offering and personal. The sacrificial animal, which the offerer takes from his herd or cattle, must be male and without blemish. As Milgrom (1991: 147) points out, the male is preferred because, on the one hand, it is more complete and more dominant than the female, and on the other hand, it is ‘economically expendable, the female being the one to supply milk and offspring’. This accords with Harrison’s remark (1980: 44) that any sacrifice must represent a specific cost to the one who offers it to Yahweh. However poor a person might be, he explains, the sacrificial offering still had to represent some cost incurred by the offerer. Hence, in Leviticus 1: 14-17, even the most humble kind of offering, such as doves or young pigeons, was accepted.

In Leviticus 1: 3, it is stated that the sacrificial animal must be without blemish ( $\sim\text{ym}\tau$ ). As Milgrom (1991: 147) observes, the adjective  $\sim\text{ym}\tau$ , which derives from the verb  $\sim\text{m}\tau$  and which means ‘be complete’, refers to the required physical perfection and blamelessness of the animal. He reports that, according to Philo, the officiating priest carefully checked this requirement. The reason for this strict procedure is that the animal must be perfect in order that ‘it shall be accepted, ‘to be pleased, accepted favourably’) for him’ (v. 4). In other words, the sacrificial animal must be without defect because ‘it is offered in place of the morally and sometimes physically blemished worshiper’ (Ross 2002: 90).

Leviticus 1: 4 specifies that the function of the  $\text{חֹלֶבֶת}$  is to make atonement for the offerer. In Harrison’s view (1980: 45), this atonement consists of nullifying and removing the effects of sin or uncleanness.<sup>119</sup> The burnt offering is, therefore, assigned an expiatory function although Milgrom (1991: 153) states that this function is ‘attested in only a few cultic texts (Lv 9: 7 [with the  $\tau\alpha\dot{\text{j}}\text{x}$ ]; 14: 20 [with the  $\text{ח}\text{x}\text{n}\text{m}$ ] and 16: 24 [the  $\text{חֹלֶבֶת}$  alone].’ In addition to these arguments, Gorman (1997: 23-24) points out that the burnt offering also functions as ‘a daily maintenance ritual’. In referring to Exodus 29: 38-46, he notes that a burnt offering is to be presented every morning and every evening.

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<sup>119</sup> Harrison (1980: 45) notes that a special atonement ritual existed in Mesopotamia, in which the demonic power held responsible for the incidence of illness in a patient was offered a young kid in sacrifice.

Leviticus 1: 4-5 mentions that the offerer shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; slaughter the bullock before the Lord, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar. Gorman (1997: 25) emphasises that the hand-laying rite in the burnt offering ‘does not function to transfer the sins of the offerer to the animal, as it does, for example, in Leviticus 16: 21-22’. It merely functions, he argues, as a ritual act of presentation and identification; i.e. the offerer presents the animal to the priest and identifies it as an offering brought for Yahweh. On the other hand, for Ross (2002: 91) the act of laying a hand on the animal’s head is ‘connected with atonement and forgiveness, showing either transference or substitution’. As he explains, the animal of the burnt offering is regarded as a ransom paid for the offerer; the symbolism thus includes either substitution for the worshipper or transference of the offerer’s sin to the animal.

The offerer shall slaughter the animal before Yahweh (Lv 1: 5a), at the north side of the altar (v. 11). Milgrom (1991: 154) explains that the act of slaughter involves ‘slitting the throat’ (cf. 2 Ki 10: 7). If the sacrificial animal is a bird, the slaughter consists of wringing its neck. In Milgrom’s opinion, the term  $\text{ִיָּשׁוּב}$ , which is rendered ‘slaughter’, would be synonymous with  $\text{שׁוֹבֵט}$ , as both refer to sacred slaughter. As Ross (2002: 91) explains, the animal has to be slaughtered or killed at the hand of the offerer and crumpled at his feet in order to remind him that it should have been his blood that was shed and his body that should have lain lifeless before the altar or before Yahweh.

The blood must be sprinkled ( $\text{צִרְפוּ$ ) against the altar on all sides (Lv 1: 5c). Péter-Contesse (1993: 43) argues that the verb  $\text{צִרְפוּ}$ , which often occurs in the context of sacrifices, is essentially connected with the burnt offering. It especially evokes, he points out, how the blood of the victim must be treated with great respect when it is not used in a purification ritual. As he also remarks, on the one hand, the act of sprinkling the blood on or against the altar is a way of offering it to Yahweh, the unique master of life, and on the other hand, of symbolically establishing the contact between the offerer and Yahweh. In Ross’s view (2002: 92), this blood rite is aimed at preventing the blood from being eaten or used for anything else. He adds that since Yahweh requires the shedding of blood for atonement, the blood ‘figuratively cries out to Yahweh that satisfaction had been exacted through the death of the victim’.

#### 4.4.3.2 The meal offering (Lv 2: 1-16)

2:1 When someone brings a grain offering to the Lord, his offering is to be of fine flour. He is to pour oil on it, put incense on it <sup>2</sup> and take it to Aaron's sons the priests. The priest shall take a handful of the fine flour and oil, together with all the incense, and burn this as a memorial portion on the altar, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. <sup>3</sup> The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the offerings made to the Lord by fire. <sup>4</sup> If you bring a grain offering baked in an oven, it is to consist of fine flour: cakes made without yeast and mixed with oil, or wafers made without yeast and spread with oil. <sup>5</sup> If your grain offering is prepared on a griddle, it is to be made of fine flour mixed with oil, and without yeast. <sup>6</sup> Crumble it and pour oil on it; it is a grain offering. <sup>7</sup> If your grain offering is cooked in a pan, it is to be made of fine flour and oil. <sup>8</sup> Bring the grain offering made of these things to the Lord; present it to the priest, who shall take it to the altar. <sup>9</sup> He shall take out the memorial portion from the grain offering and burn it on the altar as an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. <sup>10</sup> The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the offerings made to the Lord by fire. <sup>11</sup> Every grain offering you bring to the Lord must be made without yeast, for you are not to burn any yeast or honey in an offering made to the Lord by fire. <sup>12</sup> You may bring them to the Lord as an offering of the firstfruits, but they are not to be offered on the altar as a pleasing aroma. <sup>13</sup> Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings. <sup>14</sup> If you bring a grain offering of firstfruits to the Lord, offer crushed heads of new grain roasted in the fire. <sup>15</sup> Put oil and incense on it; it is a grain offering. <sup>16</sup> The priest shall burn the memorial portion of the crushed grain and the oil, together with all the incense, as an offering made to the Lord by fire. (NIV)

The Hebrew term for the meal or cereal offering is  $\text{h}\chi\text{n}\text{m}$ . Péter-Contesse (1993: 54) reminds one that this word originally possessed the quite general root-meaning 'gift', designating diverse sorts of sacrifices, or even, in profane circumstances, a 'present' (2 Ki 20: 12), or a 'tribute' (Jdg 3: 15-18). However, he notes that in later usage,  $\text{h}\chi\text{n}\text{m}$  became a technical term for non-animal or vegetable offerings. As Harrison (1980: 49) explains, like the burnt offering, the meal offering is a voluntary gift to Yahweh designed to provide 'a soothing aroma for Yahweh' (v. 2) and it generally consists of a mixture of flour and oil that is sometimes offered with frankincense (vv. 1-2). For Milgrom (1991: 196), the most suitable definition for the biblical  $\text{h}\chi\text{n}\text{m}$  is 'a present made to secure or retain good will'.

As Gorman (1997: 26) mentions,  $\text{h}\chi\text{n}\text{m}$  is the cheaper form of  $\text{h}\text{l}$  [ (the burnt offering) and only parts of it are burnt on the altar, in contrast to the whole burnt offering. This accords with Milgrom's argument (1991: 195) which specifies that the meal offering is regarded as a substitute for the blood offering. To support his opinion, Milgrom refers to the

ancient practice in the Mesopotamian cult, which labelled the meal or cereal as the offering of the poor. He therefore emphasises that *ḥḫnm* is a discrete sacrifice that functions ‘to duplicate the manifold purposes of the burnt offering for the benefit of those who cannot afford a burnt offering of quadruped or bird’.

Ross (2002: 98) suggests that the meal offering is, for those who have been accepted by Yahweh through a sacrificial atonement, the most appropriate way to express their dedication to him. And this is, he underlines, the relationship between *ḥḫnm* and *ḥl* [ . In addition, as Ross posits, the meal offering is also a way for the offerer to acknowledge that everything he has belongs to Yahweh, and that he gives a portion of that substance back to Yahweh as an expression of his belief that Yahweh is the source of, and provider for, life.

As Milgrom (1991: 198) indicates, there exist in the Old Testament two types of meal offering: an accompaniment to the burnt offering and an independent, discrete offering. The first type of meal offering is, therefore, the required auxiliary of the burnt offering, and it is probably for this reason that the two are conjoined in the sacrificial prescriptions. Milgrom explains further:

[w]hen the Hebrew ate flesh, he ate bread with it and drank wine, and when he offered flesh on the table of his God, it is natural that he should add to it the same concomitants, which were necessary to make up a comfortable and generous meal (1991: 198).

As far as the second type of meal offering is concerned, Milgrom (1991: 98) notes that it could be offered by itself as an independent offering; for example, when it is the offering of the firstfruits (Lv 2: 1). According to the priestly rules, it is generally accompanied by oil and, if uncooked, by frankincense (Lv 2: 1-3, 14-16). If the independent meal offering is cooked, Milgrom (1991: 198) points out that the requirement for the frankincense is waived (see vv. 4-10) ‘as special concession to the poor for whom even a few grains of this spice would have strained their means’.

Regarding the use of the frankincense (Lv 2: 1-2), Milgrom (1991: 180-181) states that it is not required for the meal offering that accompanies meat offerings. In his opinion, the frankincense is not intended to provide ‘a pleasing aroma to the Lord’ because the flesh offering by itself fulfils this purpose. Milgrom therefore suggests that the frankincense requirement regarding the uncooked meal offering may have served ‘the functional purpose of distinguishing it from the uncooked meal offering that accompanies the blood offering’.

It is laid down in Leviticus 2:11 that no meat offering shall be made either with leaven or with honey. However, there is in this passage no prohibition of using these two ingredients in the usual meals of the Israelites. The text does not furnish the reason for this particular prohibition. However, Milgrom (1991: 189) argues that the leaven is ‘the common rabbinic metaphor for humankind’s evil propensities; it is therefore taboo on the altar of blessing and life’. In addition to Milgrom’s theory, Péter-Contesse (1993: 57) suggests that leaven and honey were prohibited from use in the sacrifice because they might have been utilized in the Canaanite cult. He also indicates that in the priestly view, the fermentation associated with these two substances ‘brings them into connection with decay and corruption and, thus, with death’. The altar must be, in his opinion, protected from items associated with decay, corruption and death.

Although the meal offering is sometimes used as an auxiliary offering, it is considered to be most holy (וּדְבָר; Lv 2: 3; 6: 17 [cf. Heb 6: 10]), as are the burnt offering, the purification offering and the reparation offering. The word וּדְבָר indicates that this sacrifice is set apart from common or normal use. According to Ross (2002: 107), the priest as a holy person can eat the meal offering in order to demonstrate that it is totally dedicated to Yahweh and that Yahweh accepts it. He also explains that another reason for declaring the meal offering ‘most holy’ is to prevent the offerer from retaining the best of his crops and his fields for the purposes of self-indulgence, for this does not harmonise with dedication.

#### 4.4.3.3 *The peace offering (Lv 3: 1-17)*

3:1 If someone’s offering is a fellowship offering, and he offers an animal from the herd, whether male or female, he is to present before the Lord an animal without defect.<sup>2</sup> He is to lay his hand on the head of his offering and slaughter it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Then Aaron’s sons the priests shall sprinkle the blood against the altar on all sides.<sup>3</sup> From the fellowship offering he is to bring a sacrifice made to the Lord by fire: all the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them,<sup>4</sup> both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys.<sup>5</sup> Then Aaron’s sons are to burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offering that is on the burning wood, as an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.<sup>6</sup> If he offers an animal from the flock as a fellowship offering to the Lord, he is to offer a male or female without defect.<sup>7</sup> If he offers a lamb, he is to present it before the Lord.<sup>8</sup> He is to lay his hand on the head of his offering and slaughter it in front of the Tent of Meeting. Then Aaron’s sons shall sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides.<sup>9</sup> From the fellowship offering he is to bring a sacrifice made to the Lord by fire: its fat, the entire fat tail cut off close to the backbone, all the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them,<sup>10</sup> both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the

covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys.<sup>11</sup> The priest shall burn them on the altar as food, an offering made to the Lord by fire.<sup>12</sup> If his offering is a goat, he is to present it before the Lord.<sup>13</sup> He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it in front of the Tent of Meeting. Then Aaron's sons shall sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides.<sup>14</sup> From what he offers he is to make this offering to the Lord by fire: all the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them,<sup>15</sup> both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys.<sup>16</sup> The priest shall burn them on the altar as food, an offering made by fire, a pleasing aroma. All the fat is the Lord's.<sup>17</sup> This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live: You must not eat any fat or any blood. (NIV)

The peace offering is a communion offering and the technical term for it is  $\sim ymlv$ . It figures together with the  $hl$  [ ] in the public cult, but it is regulated by a different set of ritual requirements from the  $hl$  [ ] (Péter-Contesse 1993: 64). The Hebrew word  $\sim ymlv$  is a plural noun related to  $\sim lv$ , which means 'to have peace, be in a covenant of peace, be whole, be complete' (Ross 2002: 114). Milgrom (1991: 217) explains that the term 'peace offering' or 'well-being offering' comprises two words,  $\sim ymlv hbz$ , which originally referred to two discrete sacrifices, the  $xbz$  (sacrifice) and the  $\sim ymlv$ , that the priestly writers have combined.<sup>120</sup> However, he points out that  $xbz$  and  $\sim ymlv$  refer to two different sacrifices: the first is a private family or clan offering, whereas the second comprises a royal, festal and public offering.

Referring to the book of Leviticus, the priestly traditions only require the presentation of the peace offering in two instances: at the inaugural ritual of Aaron's priesthood (Lv 9: 18-21) and during the Festival of Weeks (Lv 23: 19). These traditions also specify three types of peace offerings such as the thanksgiving offering ( $hdwt$ ), the votive offering or vow ( $rdn$ ) and the freewill offering ( $hbdn$ ), Lv 7: 11-18), which are not public.

According to Harrison (1980: 56), the peace offering indicates conscious social communion, in which what is deficient in the offerer will be remedied as he comes in faith and penitence to God, the healer and restorer. On the other hand, Milgrom (1991: 221) emphasises that the main function of the peace offering is 'to provide meat for the table'.

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<sup>120</sup> Gorman (1997: 30) notes that  $xbz$ , which stems from a root denoting sacrificial slaughter, is related to  $xbzm$ , the Hebrew word for altar.

Therefore, assigning an expiatory function to this sacrifice, he notes, is generally resisted by commentators. He even argues that no confession is ever made over the peace offering but, rather, that only words of praise are uttered. To support his view, Milgrom (1991: 221) points out that the key expiatory term  $\text{רָפַק}$  (to cover, make atonement) is missing from this sacrifice.

In Gorman's opinion (1997: 30), each type of peace offering indicates a situation in which the offerer is making 'a response of gratitude and joy to God.' Therefore, the peace offering, according to him, must be related to and understood within the context of the dynamics of Israelite life. Gorman therefore stresses that this sacrifice is a ritual means of enacting one's gratitude and joy and 'of positioning the self within the context of the sacred'.

For Ross (2002: 111), the main emphasis of the peace offering should fall on 'celebrating all benefits of being at peace with God; it indicates that all is well between the worshiper and God'. He considers that all the occasions for this sacrifice are connected to the blessings of God on the righteous. Such a celebration, Ross notes, was the high point of the Israelite worship.

According to what is recorded in Leviticus 7: 19-21, the meat of the  $\sim\text{ym}\text{lv}$  can be eaten by anyone as long as the place and the person are in a state of purity. In Deuteronomy 27: 7, it is stated that those who consume it must eat the peace offering while rejoicing before Yahweh their God. This statement indicates that the peace offering took place in the altar's vicinity and that it is eaten near the altar. For Péter-Contesse (1993: 65), therefore, the earlier practice of eating the sacred meal within the sanctuary precincts is probably responsible for the rules requiring a state of ritual purity in both the peace offering and the people who eat it, as well as the incineration of the meat not eaten within one or two days.

With regard to the animal sacrifice for the peace offering, it is required to be, like that of the burnt offering, without blemish (Lv 3:1) and taken from the herd (vv. 1-5) or the flock, either a sheep (vv. 6-11) or a goat (vv. 12-16). The difference is that the worshipper is allowed to offer a male or female animal. According to Milgrom (1991: 204), one is permitted to offer a female animal because the peace offering's function is to provide meat for the offerer, so it is not necessary to restrict the animal's species or its sex. As stated in the text, the person who brings a peace offering is instructed to lay his hand on the head of the victim and to slaughter it in order that the priest can sprinkle the blood upon the altar (Lv 3: 2). The hand-laying rite, the actions relating to the blood and the slaughtering have already been

discussed in relation to the הַלְלָהּ [ . Gorman (1997: 31) points out that these actions very likely perform the same function in this ritual.

As far as the burning of the peace offering is concerned, Leviticus 3: 3-4 precisely indicates the portions of fat and the organs that must be burnt upon the altar. According to Leviticus 3: 5, these portions must be burnt in order to provide a sweet savour or ‘aroma pleasing to the Lord’. However, Gorman (1997: 32) argues that ‘the central feature of this ritual is the sharing of the sacrificial animal: God smells the burning of the fat and the offerers eat the meat’.

The text concerning the peace offering ends with a concluding prohibition, which reads as follows: ‘all the fat is the Lord’s... You must not eat any fat or any blood’ (Lv 3: 16b-17b). The text clearly specifies the reason for the prohibition: the fat and the blood belong to Yahweh. Yet Gorman (1997: 33) points out that ‘since blood is associated with life, it is likely, although not certain, that fat has a similar connotation’. The prohibition is termed ‘a perpetual statute’ (v. 3: 17), which indicates the extreme importance of these particular instructions.

#### *4.4.3.4 The purification offering (4:1-5:13)*

4:1 The Lord said to Moses,<sup>2</sup> “Say to the Israelites: When anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord’s commands,<sup>3</sup> if the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, he must bring to the Lord a young bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed.<sup>4</sup> He is to present the bull at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the Lord. He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it before the Lord.<sup>5</sup> Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull’s blood and carry it into the Tent of Meeting.<sup>6</sup> He is to dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle some of it seven times before the Lord, in front of the curtain of the sanctuary.<sup>7</sup> The priest shall then put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense that is before the Lord in the Tent of Meeting. The rest of the bull’s blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.<sup>8</sup> He shall remove all the fat from the bull of the sin offering-- the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them,<sup>9</sup> both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys,<sup>10</sup> just as the fat is removed from the ox sacrificed as a fellowship offering. Then the priest shall burn them on the altar of burnt offering.<sup>11</sup> But the hide of the bull and all its flesh, as well as the head and legs, the inner parts and offal,<sup>12</sup> that is, all the rest of the bull, he must take outside the camp to a place ceremonially clean, where the ashes are thrown, and burn it in a wood fire on the ash heap.<sup>13</sup> If the whole Israelite community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord’s commands, even though the community is unaware of the matter, they are guilty.<sup>14</sup> When they become aware of the sin they committed, the assembly must bring a young bull as a sin offering and present it before the Tent of Meeting.<sup>15</sup> The elders of the community are to lay their hands on the bull’s head

before the Lord, and the bull shall be slaughtered before the Lord. <sup>16</sup> Then the anointed priest is to take some of the bull's blood into the Tent of Meeting. <sup>17</sup> He shall dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle it before the Lord seven times in front of the curtain. <sup>18</sup> He is to put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is before the Lord in the Tent of Meeting. The rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. <sup>19</sup> He shall remove all the fat from it and burn it on the altar, <sup>20</sup> and do with this bull just as he did with the bull for the sin offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven. <sup>21</sup> Then he shall take the bull outside the camp and burn it as he burned the first bull. This is the sin offering for the community. <sup>22</sup> When a leader sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the commands of the Lord his God, he is guilty. <sup>23</sup> When he is made aware of the sin he committed, he must bring as his offering a male goat without defect. <sup>24</sup> He is to lay his hand on the goat's head and slaughter it at the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered before the Lord. It is a sin offering. <sup>25</sup> Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. <sup>26</sup> He shall burn all the fat on the altar as he burned the fat of the fellowship offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for the man's sin, and he will be forgiven. <sup>27</sup> If a member of the community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord's commands, he is guilty. <sup>28</sup> When he is made aware of the sin he committed, he must bring as his offering for the sin he committed a female goat without defect. <sup>29</sup> He is to lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and slaughter it at the place of the burnt offering. <sup>30</sup> Then the priest is to take some of the blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. <sup>31</sup> He shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar as an aroma pleasing to the Lord. In this way the priest will make atonement for him, and he will be forgiven. <sup>32</sup> If he brings a lamb as his sin offering, he is to bring a female without defect. <sup>33</sup> He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it for a sin offering at the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered. <sup>34</sup> Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. <sup>35</sup> He shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the lamb of the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar on top of the offerings made to the Lord by fire. In this way the priest will make atonement for him for the sin he has committed, and he will be forgiven.

5:1 If a person sins because he does not speak up when he hears a public charge to testify regarding something he has seen or learned about, he will be held responsible. <sup>2</sup> Or if a person touches anything ceremonially unclean-- whether the carcasses of unclean wild animals or of unclean livestock or of unclean creatures that move along the ground-- even though he is unaware of it, he has become unclean and is guilty. <sup>3</sup> Or if he touches human uncleanness-- anything that would make him unclean-- even though he is unaware of it, when he learns of it he will be guilty. <sup>4</sup> Or if a person thoughtlessly takes an oath to do anything, whether good or evil-- in any matter one might carelessly swear about-- even though he is unaware of it, in any case when he learns of it he will be guilty. <sup>5</sup> When anyone is guilty in any of these ways, he must confess in what way he has sinned <sup>6</sup> and, as a penalty for the sin he has committed, he must bring to the Lord a female lamb or goat from the flock as a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin. <sup>7</sup> If he cannot afford a lamb, he is to bring two doves or two young pigeons to the Lord as a penalty for his sin-- one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. <sup>8</sup> He is to bring them to the priest, who shall first offer the one for the sin offering. He is to wring its head from its neck, not severing it completely, <sup>9</sup> and is to sprinkle some of the blood of the sin offering

against the side of the altar; the rest of the blood must be drained out at the base of the altar. It is a sin offering.<sup>10</sup> The priest shall then offer the other as a burnt offering in the prescribed way and make atonement for him for the sin he has committed, and he will be forgiven.<sup>11</sup> If, however, he cannot afford two doves or two young pigeons, he is to bring as an offering for his sin a tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering. He must not put oil or incense on it, because it is a sin offering.<sup>12</sup> He is to bring it to the priest, who shall take a handful of it as a memorial portion and burn it on the altar on top of the offerings made to the Lord by fire. It is a sin offering.<sup>13</sup> In this way the priest will make atonement for him for any of these sins he has committed, and he will be forgiven. The rest of the offering will belong to the priest, as in the case of the grain offering.” (NIV)

The technical term for the purification offering is  $\tau a j x$ . According to Péter-Contesse (1997: 77), the word  $\tau a j x$  derives from the root  $a j x$  (to sin) and designates the contexts of either ‘the sin’ (act of sinning), or ‘the sacrifice for the sin’, or ‘the victim offered as a sacrifice for sin’. He explains that, in the past, commentators considered that chapter 4 of Leviticus dealt with  $\tau a j x$  and chapter 5 with  $\sim v a$  (trespass or guilt offering), since this word occurs in Leviticus 5: 6. At the present time, however, the large majority of the translators and commentators, he notes, concur that chapter 4: 1-5: 13 deals with the  $\tau a j x$  and chapter 5: 14-26 with the  $\sim v a$ .

As Milgrom (1991: 253) observes, almost all the versions and translations, old and new, render the  $\tau a j x$  as ‘sin offering’. In his view this translation is inaccurate and he furnishes the following reasons: 1) morphologically, the word  $\tau a j x$  appears as a ‘piel’ derivative; 2) its corresponding verbal is not the ‘qal’ ‘to sin, to do wrong’ but always the ‘piel’ (e.g. Lv 8: 15), which means ‘to clean, expurgate, decontaminate’ (e.g. Ezk 43: 22, 26; Ps 51: 9, 3); the ‘waters of  $\tau a j x$ ’ (Nm 8: 7) exclusively serve a purifying function (Nm 19: 19; see Ezk 26: 25). Therefore, Milgrom considers that the more accurate translation for  $\tau a j x$  is ‘purification offering’. Besides, he points out that according to the literal meaning of the text this sacrifice is not offered for sin.

The rendering of  $\tau a j x$  as a purification offering leads to the question: whom and what does it purge, and how does the purification operate? As stated in the text, such an offering is brought by a person or a priest who has sinned ‘through ignorance [inadvertently, or unintentionally] against any of the commandments of the Lord’ (Lv 4: 2-3). Therefore, it

seems to be logical that the  $\tau a j x$  is intended to purify the offerer of his sin. But for Milgrom (1991: 254) this sacrifice never purifies its offerer. This point is, he contends, supported by the use of its blood recorded in Leviticus 8: 15 : '[Moses] took some of the blood, and with his finger he put it on all the horns of the altar to purify ( $a j x$ ) the altar. [...] So he consecrated ( $v d q$ ) it, to make atonement ( $r p q$ ) for it'. Milgrom consequently stresses that the  $\tau a j x$  blood is 'the purging element, the ritual detergent' required for an object, not for a person. The proper term to apply to the latter, in his opinion, is 'to clean' and not 'to purge'. Answering the question posed above, Milgrom argues that it is the altar and its sancta that the  $\tau a j x$  blood purifies. He explains his reasons as follows:

By daubing the altar with the  $\tau a j x$  blood or by bringing it inside the sanctuary [e.g. Lv 16: 14-19], the priest purges the most sacred objects and areas of the sanctuary on behalf of the person who caused their contamination by his physical impurity or inadvertent offence (1991: 256).

Concurring with Milgrom's argument, Gorman (1997: 38) confirms that

...the  $\tau a j x$  functions to purify the tabernacle from impurity generated by the life of the community, to restore the sacred status of the holy area, and to bring about forgiveness for the person or persons responsible for the sin that generated defiling impurity [if sin was involved].

Ross (2002: 124), too, affirms that when Moses offered the purification offering (Lv 8: 15), he 'decontaminated' the altar. The issue, he points out, is that sin and its effects defile God's sanctuary and such defilement will put people in mortal danger if they enter the sanctuary in that condition. Ross adds that the need for forgiveness here is not because of the act of the sinner but owing to the consequences of his sin, which pollute the holy sanctuary.

I consider that all these arguments are well-founded because, referring to the priestly texts, the  $\tau a j x$  is required in cases in which no sin has been committed. Examples of these cases include: the priestly ordination ritual (Lv 8); the purification of women after childbirth (Lv 12); and the ritual for the recovered leper (Lv 13).

Regarding the sacrificial animal for the  $\tau a j x$ , Leviticus 4 specifies the type of animal to be brought: a bull for the 'anointed priest' and the 'whole congregation' (v. 4: 3, 14); a male goat for 'a ruler' (v. 23); either a female goat (v. 28) or a female sheep (v. 32) for

‘one of the ordinary people’. It is stated in the texts that, as with the burnt offering, the animal must be without blemish.

As far as the ritual process of the  $\tau a j x$  is concerned, it generally reflects the following structure: presentation of the animal, slaughter and actions concerning the blood, the burning of the fat and the disposal/eating of the remains. With regard to the presentation of the animal, the hand-laying rite and the slaughter, Gorman (1997: 36) notes that it takes place in the same way as in the burnt offering and the meal offering.

For Milgrom (1991: 261) there are two discrete procedures prescribed for the  $\tau a j x$ . The first consists of daubing the blood on the outer and the sacrificial altar, and the meat becomes the perquisite of the officiating priest (Lv 4: 3; 6: 19). The second encompasses daubing the blood on the inner altar and the animal, except for its fat, must be burnt on the ash heap outside the camp (Lv 4: 6-7, 11-12). As Milgrom specifies, in these two procedures the  $\tau a j x$  offerings, as purificatory items, are dangerous, so they must be eliminated either by eating or by burning. The priests who thereby ‘destroy Israel’s sin’, he mentions, eat the  $\tau a j x$ . Offering his opinion concerning the place ‘outside the camp’ where the remains of the purification offering must be burnt, Milgrom (1991: 263) points out that the ‘camp’ is the sphere of holiness, whereas ‘outside the camp’ is the place of impurity. Thus, the  $\tau a j x$  taken outside the camp, he emphasises, cannot be eaten because it has become contaminated; it must be burnt.

#### 4.4.3.5 *The reparation offering (Lv 5: 14-6: 7)*

5:14 The Lord said to Moses: <sup>15</sup> “When a person commits a violation and sins unintentionally in regard to any of the Lord’s holy things, he is to bring to the Lord as a penalty a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value in silver, according to the sanctuary shekel. It is a guilt offering. <sup>16</sup> He must make restitution for what he has failed to do in regard to the holy things, add a fifth of the value to that and give it all to the priest, who will make atonement for him with the ram as a guilt offering, and he will be forgiven. <sup>17</sup> If a person sins and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord’s commands, even though he does not know it, he is guilty and will be held responsible. <sup>18</sup> He is to bring to the priest as a guilt offering a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value. In this way the priest will make atonement for him for the wrong he has committed unintentionally, and he will be forgiven. <sup>19</sup> It is a guilt offering; he has been guilty of wrongdoing against the Lord.”

6:1 The Lord said to Moses: <sup>2</sup> “If anyone sins and is unfaithful to the Lord by deceiving his neighbor about something entrusted to him or left in his care or stolen, or if he cheats him, <sup>3</sup> or if he finds lost property and lies about it, or if he swears

falsely, or if he commits any such sin that people may do--<sup>4</sup> when he thus sins and becomes guilty, he must return what he has stolen or taken by extortion, or what was entrusted to him, or the lost property he found,<sup>5</sup> or whatever it was he swore falsely about. He must make restitution in full, add a fifth of the value to it and give it all to the owner on the day he presents his guilt offering.<sup>6</sup> And as a penalty he must bring to the priest, that is, to the Lord, his guilt offering, a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value.<sup>7</sup> In this way the priest will make atonement for him before the Lord and he will be forgiven for any of these things he did that made him guilty.” (NIV)

The technical term for the reparation offering, also called ‘guilt offering’, is  $\sim v\alpha$ , of which the root is  $\sim v$ . Milgrom (1991: 339) suggests that this root is associated with the concept of legal culpability or guilt. As he also mentions, in general usage, the  $\sim v\alpha$  as a noun means ‘guilt’; but as a verb, it denotes ‘is guilty’. Considering these meanings,  $\sim v\alpha$  is, therefore, a single word that describes both the wrong (what the guilt was for) and the remedy (the sacrifice) for it. Milgrom (1991: 339) terms this ‘the consequential use of the word’ and demonstrates that ‘words for behaviour often connote their reward or punishment’.

Gorman (1997: 41) notes that the  $\sim v\alpha$  has occasionally been viewed as a type of the  $\tau a j x$  (purification offering) because it exhibits similarities with the latter.<sup>121</sup> For example: both are concerned with doing things that ‘ought not be done’ and with ‘guilt’ (Lv 4: 3, 13, 22, 27; 5: 17, 19; 6: 4-7). However, he argues that the specific cases presented for the reparation offering, the distinct conceptual categories operative in this material, and the structure of the text denote that the two offerings are different.

As mentioned above, the  $\sim v\alpha$  is also termed a ‘guilt offering’ because it is required in matters relating to ‘guilt’ or a ‘trespass’ ( $\l k m$ ) against Yahweh. According to Milgrom (1991: 320-326),  $\l k m$  that refers to ‘breaking faith’ is distinct from impurity, which requires a purification offering. A trespass, he emphasises, is an offence against Yahweh ‘that crosses over and violates the boundaries that set apart the holy things of Yahweh’. In other words, Milgrom contends that a trespass is ‘a misappropriation or misuse of sancta’.

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<sup>121</sup> It should be noted that Ross (2002: 147), too, mentions that the reparation offering is labelled both  $\tau a j x$  and  $\sim v\alpha$ , for it is a purification offering that demands reparation.

Regarding the sacrificial materials to be brought for the  $\sim v\bar{a}$ , they consist of animals from the flock (Lv 5: 5, 6), of fowls (v 7-10), of flour (v 11-13), but chiefly of a ram with its assessment: so many shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary (Lv 5: 15).<sup>122</sup> This indicates that the animal for the  $\sim v\bar{a}$  must be assessed in terms of its monetary value.

As stated in the text, the guilty person or the person who feels guilt must bring to the priest the ram or its assessment, as his reparation offering to Yahweh (Lv 5: 16, 18; 6: 7). Concerning the reparation to the defrauded person, Milgrom (1991: 345) points out that when the guilty feels guilt, 'he shall confess the wrong he has done, make the reparation in its entirety, add one-fifth to it, and give it to the one to whom he has incurred liability'. In his opinion, this implies theologically that if the cause, the verb  $\sim v\bar{a}$  (to feel guilt), leads to the consequences, the noun  $\sim v\bar{a}$  (reparation, reparation offering), then the first step in seeking reconciliation with Yahweh should be the feeling of guilt.

With regard to the ritual process, Gorman (1997: 42) notes that the text emphasises the situations that require the presentation of the reparation offering rather than the details of it. According to him, the material is divided into two speeches: the first speech, which includes Leviticus 5: 14-19, describes two cases: 5: 14-16 and 5: 17-19; the second speech, which includes 6:1-7, contains only one case. Each of these speeches is introduced by the expression 'Yahweh spoke to Moses'.

Gorman (1997:44) emphasises that the outcome of the ritual process is impressive: 'freedom from both incurred guilt and feeling of guilt, expiation of sin, and divine forgiveness'. In his view the feeling of remorse, the confession, the restitution and the sacrifice that the trespasser brings and accomplishes create in him a new state of existence.

To close the discussion concerning sacrifices and offerings presented in this section, it should be said that their performance, according to the laws and rituals prescribed by Yahweh, provides a context for the children of Israel to address their problems which are associated with broken and faithless actions against Yahweh and against other persons. As

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<sup>122</sup> According to Harrison (1980: 71), the silver shekel of the sanctuary was the standard of evaluation, and since money was paid out in weighed amounts of gold or silver in the Bronze Age (cf. Gn 23: 16) the shekel is a unit of weight, not a coin, at this period. He notes that the weight of a shekel is difficult to determine since there was no standard in antiquity. However, he suggests that the shekel in question might have weighed about 11 g.

Péter-Contesse (1993: 97) points out, these sacrificial rituals restore relations, set matters aright and provide a renewed context.

In comparing the analysis of the text concerning sacrifices and offerings in Leviticus 1-6 given above to traditio-practitioners' interpretation of the same text (see 4.3.3), I observe both similarities and dissimilarities. The first similarity is evident in the sacrificial materials. In Leviticus 1-6, the sacrificial animals or bloody offerings are taken from cattle (especially bulls but sometimes cows), from the herd (goats or sheep) and from fowls (pigeons or turtledoves). Animals regarded as unclean, like pigs and horses, are prohibited from being offered as a sacrifice to Yahweh. As far as the non-bloody offerings are concerned, they largely consist of meal offerings including fine flour, oil and cakes.

Similarly, the bloody offerings in the Malagasy traditional religious practice consist of cattle (bulls and cows), of herd (goat and sheep) and of fowl (red cock and sometimes hens). As in Leviticus, animals regarded as unclean, like pigs and horses, are excluded from the sacrifice. With regard to the non-bloody offerings, they largely consist of meal offerings including rice, sweets, milk and honey. It is to be noted that coins also form part of the non-bloody offerings.

The second similarity is to be found in the function of the sacrifices and offerings. Biblical scholars assume that, in Leviticus 1-6, the victim or the sacrificial animal is intended, in general, to substitute for the offerer. As they explain, the blood shed by the victim covers the sin of the offerer. The blood is regarded as the vital element constituting life. Therefore, the sacrifices, in Leviticus 1-6, function as atonement, dedication, purification and reparation. The non-bloody or non-animal offerings or the meal offerings are offered as dedication to Yahweh by those who have been accepted by him through sacrificial atonement. They also constitute a way for the offerer to acknowledge that everything he has belongs to Yahweh and that he gives a portion of that substance back to Yahweh as an expression of his belief that Yahweh is the source of, and provider for, life.

In the Malagasy traditional religion, traditio-practitioners emphasise that the sacrifices also function, in general, as substitution for the offerer who has offended either Zanahary or the ancestors by violating taboos or religious rules. According to the Malagasy belief, all offences against these divine beings inevitably result in sickness or even in death. However, it is also believed that all offenders can be atoned for through the sacrificial animals which are slaughtered in their place and whose blood is shed for them. In other words, the life of the

sacrificial animal represented by its blood is given to the offended divine beings, namely Zanahary and the ancestors, in exchange for the lives of the persons or the community on behalf of whom it is offered. The blood in the Malagasy traditional religion, as explained by traditio-practitioners, comprises the material vehicle of life, and in contrast with the flesh and bones, it represents the immaterial principle that survives death.

Regarding the dissimilarities, the first one is to be noted in the divine authority who orders the regulations for sacrifices and offerings. In Leviticus 1-6, it is clearly stated that Yahweh is the divine and supreme authority who spoke to Moses and transmitted these regulations to him. Hence everything the children of Israel did, as far as sacrifices and offerings are concerned, stemmed not from their own initiatives but from Yahweh's command and instructions.

On the other hand, the divine authority in the Malagasy traditional sacrifices and offering is the ancestor. It is true that sacrifices and offerings are in principle dedicated to both Zanahary and the ancestors. However, in practice, they are addressed to the ancestors. Besides, it is not Zanahary but the ancestors who require these sacrifices and offerings. As traditio-practitioners explain, it is the ancestors, through them, who impose the regulations for the taboos to be observed and the form of the religion to be followed. They also specify the types of the animals to be sacrificed or of the offerings to be offered. Sometimes, they address themselves directly (through a vision or a dream) to the person who has to bring an animal to sacrifice or an inanimate item to offer.

One may observe the second dissimilarity in the beliefs regarding the person responsible for the atonement which sacrifices and offerings are intended to effect. In traditional historical-critical interpretation, biblical scholars specify that in Leviticus 1-6 Yahweh himself declared he was responsible for the atonement because it is for this reason that he had given the Israelites the law or the regulations concerning sacrifices and offerings. Besides, Yahweh is described throughout the Old Testament as the redeemer of his people. Biblical scholars thus emphasise that the atonement is Yahweh's exclusive responsibility.

On the other hand, taking traditio-practitioners' explanation into consideration, the ancestors, in terms of the Malagasy traditional belief, are supposed to be responsible for atoning for those who perform sacrifices and bring offerings. But in this religion no specific statement exists concerning this atonement. The question then arises whether atonement really exists in it, or not. For me the answer is negative because, in my opinion, the responsible for the atonement in the Malagasy traditional religion, if atonement exists, must not be an

ancestor but a Supreme Being, namely Zanahary, whom the Malagasy people believe as the creator and the giver of life. Besides, how can the ancestors, who were sinful when they were alive, atone for sin? Therefore, I consider that the idea of substitution in the Malagasy traditional sacrifices and offerings is to some extent intended to produce the psychological effect necessary to soothe the conscience of the person who has broken taboos or offended the divine beings.

#### **4.4.4 Psalm 113: 5-6; Genesis 2: 18, 22**

##### *4.4.4.1 Psalm 113: 5- 6*

<sup>5</sup> Who is like the Lord our God, the One who sits enthroned on high,

<sup>6</sup> who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?

Commentators commonly agree that Psalm 113 belongs to the Fifth Book of the Psalter, which comprises 44 psalms, Pss 107-150; numerically the longest unit in the book (Goulder 1998: 13). According to Allen (2002: 73), this Book V falls into three sections: 1) 107-117, ten psalms; 2) 118-135, seventeen psalms; 3) 136-150, fourteen psalms. He notes that each section is introduced by a psalm starting with the praise formulation: ‘Give thanks to Yahweh for his goodness’ (Pss 107, 118, 136), and closes with psalms that have the rubric ‘Hallelujah’ attached to them (Pss 111-117, 135 and 146-150). In Beauchamp’s view (1979: 202), Psalm 113 begins a group of songs that the rabbinic tradition calls ‘the Egyptian Hallel’ (Pss 113-118).<sup>123</sup>

As far as Psalm 113 is concerned, Allen (2002: 134) posits that it was clearly cultic: it was, on the one hand, sung in the temple by a choir or a soloist and was addressed to the congregation, and was, on the other hand, also sung by families at the celebration of the Passover. Referring to the striking similarities between Psalm 113 and Hannah’s song (1 Sm 2: 5, 8), Allen mentions that commentators argue for the probable origin of both from the same milieu, the sanctuary of Shiloh, or that, at least, the psalmist had used 1 Samuel 2. Considering the first argument, one could propose that this psalm may have originated in North Israel and been taken over, in order to be used in the worship of the Jerusalem temple. From the perspective of content, Beauchamp (1979: 202) suggests that Psalm 113 could be

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<sup>123</sup> As Beauchamp (1979: 202) explains, the most common Jewish usage is ‘the Hallel’, sometimes ‘the Hallelujah’. But there also exists, he notes, ‘the little Hallel’ (Pss 145-150) and the ‘Great Hallel’; and, for clarity, rabbinic tradition spoke of ‘the Egyptian Hallel’.

divided into three sections: vv. 1-3 (calls for praise), vv. 4-6 (Yahweh's glory and grace) and vv. 7-9 (two cases of integrating grace).

Regarding the verses 5-6, one perceives that they belong to the second section of Psalm 113, according to the above division. Therefore, they are intended to praise Yahweh's glory and grace. Kroll (1987: 338) emphasises that Yahweh, by his glory and grace, 'outshines all his creatures and his creation: he is above them all and over them all'. Consequently, no other god, no wisdom, nothing in heaven and on earth, he observes, can be compared to Yahweh for he is unique.

As Kroll (1987: 338) points out, one of the most incredible characteristics of Yahweh that make him unique, according to Psalm 113: 6, is that he is the God who dwells on high but, at the same time, he is also the God who humbles himself to regard both the heaven and the earth. Kroll states that certainly the heathen philosophers would have been totally disorientated upon hearing about such a God who can be high above the heavens yet at the same time stoops to take an interest in the daily affairs of people.

For Horist (1999: 260), this characteristic of Yahweh, who dwells on high but looks down on earth to regard all things, is not new in the Old Testament. Yahweh, he recalls, had already humbled himself to examine how his people suffered in Egypt:

I have surely seen the affliction of my people, which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians (Ex 3: 7-8a)

and to investigate how they were oppressed after they had come into possession of the Promised Land:

And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the Lord because of their groaning by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them (Jdg 2: 18).

Horist (1999: 260) draws attention to the fact that, as mentioned in Psalm 113, two scenes of misery make Yahweh humble himself and intervene: 1) the suffering of the poor whom, in his great compassion, he is going to raise up and seat with the nobles of his people (vv. 7-8); 2) the sterile woman who could have lost hope of any posterity (v. 9). According to Horist, the fact that Yahweh dwells on high and, at the same time, stoops down is a condescension that cannot be found in any other gods. It is, he emphasises, condescension in

Yahweh to behold matters in heaven, to support the beings there, direct the activities there, and accept human praises and service. Much more is it condescension in him, he stresses, 'to visit the sons of men, to regard them, to order and overrule their affairs, and to take notice of what they say and do'.

In Mannati's opinion (1988: 123), Psalm 113: 5-6 describes the incomparable, omnipotent and omniscient Yahweh as the supreme judge. Yahweh, he remarks, establishes his throne (which is also designated the judge's seat) on the most high place (above the heavens) in order that he can behold everything taking place on earth, judge all nations or all people and reverse their situations. However, Mannati makes it clear that the judgment reflected in Psalm 113: 5-6 does not inflict a direct punishment on the impious; this is merely present implicitly. He explains this implicit punishment as follows: if Yahweh is exalted above the nations' gods, it is because of their defeat; if he stoops so low, it is to call men to account; if he raises the poor, it is to render their oppressors powerless; and if he gives children to the sterile woman, it is to free her from the influences that have made her sterile.

As for Allen (2002: 136), he argues that the verses 5-6 of Psalm 113 contain the 'substance of praise'. He points out that, in these verses, Israel proudly affirms the greatness and supremacy of Yahweh (who is called *wnyhla* [our God]) over all other gods. The divine supremacy evoked in verse 4, he explains, is elaborated in the challenge of verses 5-6 to such an extent that 'imperial nations, imposing and often menacing to little Israel, became nothing compared with the great Lord of history'. Allen affirms that their gods cannot match Yahweh's omnipotence: he is unique in royal glory (he dwells on high) and in grace (he humbles himself to regard the earth).

In comparing the analysis of Psalm 113: 5-6 given above to traditio-practitioners' interpretation of the same text (see 4.3.4.1), I perceive one major similarity and one dissimilarity. The similarity stems from the fact that both the above analysis and traditio-practitioners' interpretation recognise that though God dwells on high he can observe everything happening on earth. Both also affirm that the reason for God's dwelling on high and his stooping down is to judge all nations or all people, and to reverse the situation by punishing the evildoers and rewarding the faithful. Therefore, the 'on high' where God's dwelling is established may designate the judge's seat occupied by God. Consequently God must be feared, for nothing taking place on earth can be hidden from him. A Malagasy

proverb, which is considered by traditio-practitioners to parallel Psalm 113: 5-6, can be translated as follows: ‘Zanahary/Andriamanitra sits on high but he bends down to look on the earth’. Another proverb is translated as follows: ‘do not take the advantage of the silent valley to do evil because Zanahary is above your head seeing and knowing the secret sin you are going to commit’.

The dissimilarity is to be found in the purpose of Psalm 113: 5-6. As explained in the analysis, this passage is intended to praise Yahweh’s glory and grace. His glory is demonstrated by his dwelling on high, whereas his grace is indicated by his humility and stooping down to regard the daily affairs of human beings. The analysis also points out that the text illustrates the greatness and supremacy of Yahweh over all other gods who cannot match him, who is unique in royal glory (he dwells on high) and in grace (he humbles himself to regard the earth). Therefore, the text places its emphasis on Yahweh’s glory and grace.

On the other hand, Malagasy traditio-practitioners focus their emphasis on the fear of the Supreme Being Zanahary. They use Psalm 113: 5-6 not to praise Zanahary but to convince people to fear him. This may be true since all the Malagasy have to fear Zanahary. But the problem is that if the followers are continually incited to fear, they will not be able to praise Zanahary at all. Their obsession with fear will rather push them to avoid the contact with this Supreme Being or to adopt a distant attitude towards him. On the other hand, if traditio-practitioners use this Old Testament passage to incite their followers to praise God/Zanahary’s glory and his love for human beings, they do not need to remind these followers to fear him all the time since the fear is an emotion or a behaviour that logically follows the praise. Therefore, when they emphasise fear, not praise, I must observe that Malagasy traditio-practitioners do not know the nature of the text of Psalm 113: 5-6 at all, nor its context. As a result, the text is to some extent misused.

#### 4.4.4.2 *Genesis 2: 18, 22*

<sup>18</sup> The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” [...] <sup>22</sup> Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. (NIV)

It should be noted that the narrator, in Genesis 2, is not trying to detail what happened in the past when Yahweh created the human race. What he wishes to transmit to the people of his time and of the future is that Yahweh created them and they are Yahweh’s creation.

Regarding Genesis 2: 18, it is to be noticed that in sharp contrast to the phrase ‘and Yahweh saw that it was good’ which occurred many times in chapter one, Yahweh here says: ‘it is not good for the man to be alone’. This means that Yahweh, in realising the aloneness of man, changes his mind concerning man’s situation and decides to solve his problem. This statement occurs in the second account of the creation of man, before the separation of male and female.

Leibowitz (1972: 10) notes that the Hebrew negative אַל used here wields a greater force than the word לֹא. The latter, he underlines, merely points out that a thing cannot be considered good, without committing the speaker to the opinion that it is obviously bad. It may merely be neither bad nor good but just middling, whereas אַל in Hebrew, as he indicates, is emphatic, ‘not at all’, committing the speaker to the opinion that the thing is the opposite of good.

Considering the above explanation, the question that arises is: what then is ‘not at all good’ about man being alone? Leibowitz (1972: 10) responds that man’s problem is his loneliness. Therefore, some authorities, he points out, accord the phrase a psychological motivation, for loneliness is not good mentally. Others see the defect in man’s loneliness as existing in the practical domain because man, when alone, cannot easily fend for himself. Explaining further, Leibowitz outlines that the meeting of man’s need calls for ‘a division of labour and partnership without which no real life can exist’.

For Westermann (1987: 20), the narrator in Genesis 2: 18 emphasises something of peculiar importance to the human creature; this important something is ‘community’. This is why Yahweh created the animals before creating the woman; but man did not find among them what he needed. The reason is, according to Westermann, that the community between two human beings is so unique that it completely contrasts with the possibility of community between man and animal.

Sacks (1990: 24) notices a certain ambiguity in the sense of the word ‘alone’ because it can refer either to one’s insufficiency or to one’s need of another. He then asks: in which of these senses was the man alone? Responding to the question himself, he answers that from the phraseology of the later part of the verse we learn that what Man needs is a helper outside of himself.

Altier (1996: 28) notes that the Hebrew terms  $\text{w}d\text{g}n\text{q} \text{ r}z [$ , which are generally rendered as ‘helper suitable’ are difficult to translate. However, he suggests that the second term means ‘alongside him, opposite him, a counterpart to him’. He also points out that the term ‘help’ is too weak because it suggests a merely auxiliary function, whereas the Hebrew word  $\text{r}z [$  elsewhere connotes active intervention on behalf of someone, especially in military contexts. Therefore, he suggests that a better translation for  $\text{w}d\text{g}n\text{q} \text{ r}z [$  is ‘sustainer beside him’.

The above arguments lead us to consider Genesis 2: 22, which is recorded as follows: ‘Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man’. Westermann (1987: 21) argues that the creation of the woman from one of the man’s ribs is not intended to be a factual description, and must not be so understood. What the narrator wishes, he suggests, is to ground the intimate relationship between man and woman in the process of the creation itself. According to Westermann, the word ‘helper’ is meant, in its broadest sense, to apply not only to work or procreation but also to mutual help in all spheres of human existence.

Aalders (1981: 96), evoking the question which has often been asked, whether the man possesses more ribs than the woman, emphasises that we should not try to satisfy our idle curiosity about such matters. According to him, this passage serves to reveal that Yahweh has created the woman from the man. This, he states firmly, is enough to cause us to recognise ‘the complete and inherent unity of man and woman, which brings us to the vital realisation of the wonderful mystery that the two are one’.

Turner (2000: 29) posits that the delay in the creation of the woman underlines how crucial she is. In specifying how she was created, the text, he states, leads us to understand that the woman was derived from the man, as the man was derived from the dust of the ground. Therefore, the man’s task, in part, is to till the ground (Gn 2:15) and the woman’s is to help the man (Gn 2: 18) because their vocations are related to their origins.

In comparing the analysis of Genesis 2: 18-22 given above to traditio-practitioners’ interpretation of the same text (see 4.3.4.2), both a major similarity and a dissimilarity can be noticed. The similarity is observable in the affirmation in both the analysis of the text and traditio-practitioners’ explanation that marriage is a divine institution established by God for human beings, male and female, from creation onwards. Both also underline that the essential

point in marriage is the community between man and woman in which the two become one. Likewise, biblical scholars and traditio-practitioners imply that to be alone is not good, not only for man but also for woman, because the one is created for the other in order that the two should be complementary.

The dissimilarity is seen on the practical level. In Genesis 2: 22, it is the responsibility of Yahweh to cause man and woman to meet and to unite them in marriage. It is clearly stated that Yahweh created the woman (from Adam's rib) and brought her to Adam, and they (Adam and the woman that he called Eve) became husband and wife. Hence marriage, in the Christian tradition, has always been celebrated in the church, in order that the union of the partners can benefit from God's blessing.

On the other hand, marriage in the Malagasy tradition is largely the traditio-practitioners' responsibility, from the preparation to the celebration. Obviously, this is in accordance with the custom and even in the Christian tradition there are many persons who take some responsibility for a marriage. However, the problem is that instead of consulting God/Zanahary for advice or instructions, traditio-practitioners consult the ancestors and request their favour and blessing on the partners. It is true that they use biblical texts, which in this example comprises Genesis 2: 18, 22, but they merely use them as references for morals. What I mean is that they quote Genesis 2: 18, 22 to convince the partners of the sacredness of the marriage and the importance of their mutual love and complementariness. However, when the time for practical matters arrives they completely desert the biblical text and approach the ancestors in order to exhibit the proposed partners to them, to seek their approval and to consult them regarding the necessary measures and instructions. Therefore, the supreme persons responsible for marriage in the Malagasy tradition are the ancestors, although traditio-practitioners do use Genesis 2: 18, 22 as well as other biblical texts for these purposes.

#### 4. 5 FROM TEXT TO TEACHING

The traditionalists' use of Old Testament texts has now been investigated. In reality, the traditionalists who employ Old Testament texts and with whom I conducted interviews are traditio-practitioners living and working in the Merina and Betsileo areas, or in the highlands of Madagascar. The Old Testament texts that have been analysed are Exodus 3: 1-3, Leviticus 14: 1-8, Jeremiah 8: 22 (used by Rakoto Jean); Exodus 3: 5b, Job 33: 6a, Psalm 121: 8a (used by Raneny); Leviticus 1-6 (used by traditio-practitioners in general); Psalm 113: 5-6 and Genesis 2: 18, 22 (used by traditio-practitioners in general).

I must point out that this use of Old Testament texts in the traditional context is a recent phenomenon in Madagascar. As many people know in this island, the traditionalists, especially the traditio-practitioners, have regarded the Bible as a major enemy. But, the Old Testament, which was the one of the first books translated and printed into the Malagasy language in Madagascar, has become a favourite book for some traditio-practitioners. As explained in the investigation (see 4.3.1, 4.3.2, 4.3.3, 4.3.4), they make use of Old Testament texts for various purposes such as in traditional healing, as religious slogans, in traditional sacrifices and offerings and as references for morals. Obviously, these traditio-practitioners still comprise a minority in comparison to those who do not use Old Testament texts, but all of them are famous and influential.

I should also add that these traditio-practitioners showed great courage when they decided to use the Old Testament because in Madagascar the Bible is regarded as the exclusive property of Christians and therefore to be used in the realm of the Church only. Therefore, the decision taken by traditio-practitioners to use Old Testament texts has inevitably led Christians to condemn and persecute them. The attacks stem especially from groups in the revival movement who regard this traditio-practitioners' use of the Bible as blasphemous. They organise and lead *tafika masina* (a holy army), by means of which they aim, simultaneously, to abolish the Malagasy traditional religion and practices related to it, and to prevent traditio-practitioners from using the Old Testament or the Bible.

In the face of these attacks, traditio-practitioners take their stand in defending both the Malagasy traditional religion and their own principles. Therefore, they use the Old Testament texts, at the same time, to legitimise the Malagasy traditional religion and to promote their own popularity. For example, they reply to their attackers that God, as creator of the universe, is universal, so that the Old Testament, which shows his creative work and contains his instructions for human beings, should be regarded as a universal book, and not the private book of Christians. One can say that these traditio-practitioners have succeeded because their followers, in comparison to their colleagues' who do not use biblical texts, keep increasing in, and even many Christians are attracted by their new methods.

As a researcher, I admit that these traditio-practitioners have made considerable progress as far as their professions are concerned, because of their application of the Old Testament. It is true that, to a great extent, they use Old Testament texts to serve their own purposes, but to their minds these purposes are not bad at all since what they do is to heal people of their diseases, physical or mental, purify people of their impurities, and provide

people with helpful advice and instructions. Furthermore, I heard that most followers of these traditio-practitioners are regarded by people as models because of their exemplary behaviour. It is also true that although traditio-practitioners quote Old Testament texts, they still adhere to the ancestral belief and practices; but at least they recognise God's holiness and glory, as well as his supremacy over other gods, except Zanahary, whom they identify with God.

Therefore, I do not consider it necessary to prevent this new generation of traditio-practitioners from using the Old Testament. Rather, I would like to request the Malagasy people, both Christians and traditionalists, to allow them to continue because I believe that one day they will realise that it is God alone, and not the ancestors, that should be worshipped and obeyed.

However, as a pastor and especially as the responsible for the teaching of the Old Testament in a Graduate School of Theology, I do assert that all pastors and theologians have the responsibility of carefully investigating and thoroughly studying traditionalists' deployment of the Old Testament. And, as a teacher, I recommend that my students commit themselves to this task and give it a particular attention.

The difficulty is that such investigation and study involve appropriate knowledge of the matter. For example, students who are to commit themselves to this delicate responsibility should know how Malagasy traditional religion really functions. Therefore, they need to gain an understanding of these questions from the perspective of the phenomenology of religion. Since the investigation of the traditional religion also involves anthropology, they need to have an understanding of this matter as well. The necessary study requires appropriate methods and techniques. Therefore, students must be trained in how to approach people and observe them in their daily social and religious activities, how to collect reliable information by conducting interviews with the people concerned, and how to transcribe correctly and safely store the information collected. They particularly need to know whether people use the Old Testament or not and how they use it, for what purposes they use it, and what functions this use performs. They also need to be taught how to compare the materials they have collected and arranged with the Old Testament texts being used.

In addition, students need to know what people from other countries, especially from African countries, have already done and are still doing in terms of the contextualisation of the Old Testament. Therefore, they must read books, journals and articles produced by African scholars. It would be even more helpful if they could meet some of these African scholars and discuss issues with them, or if they could be afforded opportunities to attend

regional or international meetings concerning the contextualisation of the Old Testament or the Africanisation of the study of the Old Testament.

Finally yet importantly, students who commit themselves to the contextualisation of the Old Testament are required to possess a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament as well as the most appropriate methods to interpret it and apply it relevantly in the present situation or in the life of people. This thorough knowledge is indispensable because the correct interpretation and contextualisation depend very much on it. Therefore, I recommend that students study seriously not only the history of the Old Testament or its anthropology but also, and especially, the Hebrew as well as various methods and approaches in order to be able critically analyse the texts to be interpreted and contextualised.

To conclude, I emphasise that traditio-practitioners who use Old Testament texts need to be approached more closely. Therefore, I suggest to pastors, theologians and students that they meet them, discuss issues or converse with them. Such meeting and discussion with these traditio-practitioners enable these Church's leaders who are also responsible for the contextualisation of the Old Testament, to know their methods and purposes. My suggestion is also that since these traditio-practitioners are already committed to that path, it is perhaps better to furnish them with comprehensive information about the Old Testament. I mean that we should envisage a serious dialogue with them, such as the Malagasy Lutheran Church already conducts with the Muslims.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 METHODOLOGY AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The qualitative research method is of great importance for a thesis of this genre. As Le Roux (1999: 244) points out, 'it requires a great deal of time, sacrifice and patience on the part of the researcher'. Collecting information from respondents with different standards of living and education and governed by various customs, or describing their behaviours, feelings and thoughts is indeed a delicate task.

According to Mouton & Marais (1988) in Le Roux (1999: 3), qualitative research 'refers to research that focuses on qualities of human behaviour, as well as the holistic nature of social behaviour'. Therefore, the researcher who carries out qualitative research needs to possess sufficient knowledge about the respondents, especially with respect to their daily social and religious activities. This necessity for me to gain sufficient knowledge of the respondents in the present study sometimes involved my living among some of them for a certain period, which enabled me to experience close and continuous contact with them, to gain their confidence, to observe them as an insider and to perceive information about their perspectives or world-view.

After the observation phase, I proceeded to interview respondents. The interview is central in qualitative research because it enables the researcher to describe those feelings, thoughts, intentions and behaviours of respondents that he/she cannot directly observe. It also enables him/her to know how people understand and organise the world (Patton 1984: 196). Therefore, to carry out qualitative research successfully, the researcher needs to prepare his/her interviews carefully; these generally consist of a list of questions that serve as the interview guide. As far as the qualitative research which I carried out is concerned, I have largely used such an interview guide, but on occasion I also interviewed respondents informally, in conversation, if they appeared to be reticent about recordings being made.

The interview guide, as well as the informal conversation interview, enabled me to obtain similar information from a number of people by covering the same material because, as Le Roux (1999: 6) points out, these methods allow the participants to speak freely instead of restricting them in their answers. To preserve the interviews, I have recorded most of them on a tape recorder, but for those conducted with respondents who did not wish to be recorded, I

took notes on notepads. Following Le Roux's experiences (1999: 6), I transliterated the tapes later on and edited the transcriptions obtained, together with the notes taken down on notepads. Afterwards, I numbered, according to Le Roux's system (1999: 7), each transcript of interviews as well as the tapes so that I could use them and refer to them in the thesis.

Qualitative research involves comprehensiveness and flexibility on the part of the researcher (Le Roux 1999: 8). As noted above, respondents are governed by different customs and most of them often request the researcher to comply with these customs. For example, some of the traditio-practitioners with whom I conducted interviews asked me to bring either candles or sweets or coins or a piece of cloth, as offerings to the *masina* (the holy [the ancestor]) because, according to their explanations, the information they were going to give me stemmed from the *masina*. Likewise, when traditio-practitioners invited me to enter their offices (domestic shrines) or to visit their outdoor shrines, they requested me to take off my shoes, to wash my hands, and sometimes to take off my upper clothes and wear a *lambaoany* (a piece of traditional cloth wound round the waist) in their place. The reason is that the place, because of the presence of the *masina* (the holy), is also regarded as *masina* (sacred), so that everything considered unclean must be removed.

As a researcher, I find these customs interesting and worthy of serious investigation, for the reason that they represent the Malagasy religio-cultural heritage. What is unfortunate in Madagascar is that Malagasy researchers, especially Christian ones, sometimes evidence little interest in these rites and customs. As far as Lutheran theologians are concerned, some of them regard the traditional religion and culture as part of the old customs that must be abolished. Consequently, they consider that the use of the Old Testament by traditio-practitioners in their religious practices is not worth being investigated because such an investigation, in their opinion, would encourage the latter to continue to blaspheme against the Bible. The few theologians who wish to commit themselves to the investigation of this field are prevented from doing so by the lack of money to buy necessary equipment like a tape and/or video recorder, to pay for their travelling expenses, to support their living among interviewees during the observation phase and to reward the interviewees for their willingness and cooperation.

As a preacher in the Malagasy Lutheran Church, I found that being obliged to comply with the traditio-practitioners' requests mentioned above while undertaking my research, was quite problematic because I feel that to some extent this conflicts with my mission, which consists of bringing the Gospel to the traditionalists and making them Jesus' disciples. Some

of my colleagues, as well as other Christians even criticised me, asserting that in obeying these traditio-practitioners' requests I have compromised my evangelical mission, since I have failed to fulfil it according to the Lord's will. However, I have explained to them that the traditio-practitioner's world, that is the context in which the Old Testament is used, is like a private property to which no one has access before complying with the required rules and conditions.

This project has proceeded from my observation that there is an increasing tendency within various religious movements in Madagascar – both within and outside mainstream Christianity – to make use of Old Testament texts. In particular, the Old Testament is used not only by Christians but also by non-Christians. And the phenomenological aspect of this activity, which aroused my interest, invited me to investigate it.

The main questions which this project has endeavoured to answer are: How do people in these religious movements use Old Testament texts? Why do they use such texts? The first question has led me to describe and examine the different ways in which Old Testament texts are applied in Malagasy Christian and non-Christian contexts. The second question has encouraged me to investigate and analyse the reasons for and the purposes behind these methods of using such texts. The investigation has also showed how the Old Testament is particularly used by traditio-practitioners as a 'closed book' (as sacred object) and as an 'open book' (as a text to be read and interpreted) in their religious practices. It is to be emphasised, however, that my investigation is intended neither to verify nor to falsify the use of the Old Testament in these religious movements. My objective is rather, on the one hand, to show an example of the use of the Old Testament to interpret Madagascar/Africa, and on the other hand, to develop an interpretive model based on three cases where Old Testament texts have been employed both inside and outside mainstream church structures for various purposes.

In hindsight it has become clear that a qualitative research method has its advantages, but we should remember that the use of this method is still embedded in the complex process of interpretation — in this case the interpretation of research interviews. One of the said advantages is that it enables the researcher to communicate more clearly with the scientific scholarly community that displays — to some extent — an agreed understanding of what qualitative research involves. Another advantage is that it allows the researcher to offer richer interpretations of the matter under investigation. The chances that the researcher's own presupposition, interests, and intuitions will dominate the outcome of the research are reduced but not, of course, done away with entirely.

As far as my own experiences are concerned, three points should be mentioned. First, the use of qualitative research prevented me from relying primarily on my own presuppositions and conducting the study according to my own feelings. It is to be confessed here that as a Merina native and Lutheran pastor, I was tempted to think that the field was relatively familiar to me, when I considered it for the first time. Therefore, influenced by my presuppositions and personal intuitions I supposed that it would be easily explored.

But, when I started to undertake my investigation according to the qualitative research method, I discovered that, contrary to what I supposed, I was engaged in quite a new field. In fact, the information regarding the different ways of interpreting and using the Old Testament in different contexts and for various purposes, which was made available by different categories of interviewees and which constitutes the main source on which the study is based, revealed a new phenomenon that I did not understand previously. One example demonstrating the results of qualitative research is the collection of traditionalists' responses and explanations concerning their understanding of the Old Testament, their ways of using it and their purposes in employing it (cf. Chapter Four), which provided me with new information that cannot be explained in terms of my presuppositions and own intuitions.

Second, the use of qualitative research reduced the chances of being swept along or dominated by my curiosity. The fact that I was facing a new phenomenon aroused not only my interest but also my curiosity, with the result that my mind was full of general questions when I conducted my interviews. Fortunately, qualitative research, which enabled me to prepare my interview guide in advance, served as a barrier preventing me from primarily following my inquisitiveness, which would result in my study saying more about its author than about the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, I would like to make clear that, because of the qualitative research method, the course of the study evolved as I proceeded.

Third, the application of qualitative research enabled me to allow the interviewees to speak freely. It should be mentioned that one of the temptations in conducting interviews is to ask the respondents questions intended to channel their responses according to the interviewer's presuppositions. Such a method is far from being effective because it merely inhibits, dominates or restricts the interviewees in their answers. On the contrary, the guidelines or interview guide, which enabled me to ask all the respondents the same questions, were aimed at offering the participants the opportunity to indicate their opinions and freely to express their understandings of the subject of the interview. These different points of view or perspectives stemming from categories of interviewees constituted valuable

information, which enabled me to provide a richer interpretation of the use of the Old Testament in Malagasy contexts.

But then it has also become clear to me that qualitative research is still an exercise in interpretation, which is a very complex endeavour, and where the subjective role played by the researcher should not be underestimated. Factors such as the following illustrate the point: the purpose of one's research; the selection of case studies and interviewees; the fact that this research project is part of a bigger project on the Africanisation of biblical studies; the researcher's previous personal experiences in the field; the social location of the researcher and the interviewees; the fact that language constitutes reality (which applies to both the interviewer and the interviewees); the denominational background of the researcher (which enables the researcher to arrive at certain conclusions, but also limits him), and other factors. These matters gradually became clear to me throughout the research period, and now at the conclusion of my project I assert that the final text of the thesis reflects awareness of the potential as well as of the limits of my role as an interpreter.

## 5.2 THE THREE CASE STUDIES AND A COMPARISON

### 5.2.1 Case study one: The *famadihana* (turning of the dead) in the Malagasy

#### **Roman Catholic Church (cf. Chapter Two)**

This is the first case, and illustrates the use of Old Testament texts within the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church (MRCC). The *famadihana* is a custom of ancestral veneration, which reflects the Malagasy traditional religio-culture in its strongest form. Long before the introduction of Christianity to Madagascar, it was mostly the Merina and Betsileo ethnic groups, in the highlands of Madagascar, who practised it. For these two ethnic groups it constitutes a means of showing respect and veneration for the ancestors, who are believed still to be active members of their families and their communities. The *famadihana* generally takes place two or three years after the first burial, i.e., after the flesh has completely decayed. It largely consists of taking the bodies or bones of the ancestors out of tombs, wrapping them up in new shrouds, talking with them and sometimes dancing with them, asking them for blessings and special favours like protection, prosperity and children, and replacing them in the tombs. The ceremonies generally last for two or three days during which the organisers, according to the custom, kill a bull per day and prepare a huge meal of rice and meat to feed hundreds of guests invited to celebrate with them and to honour the ancestors.

Since the missionaries' arrival in Madagascar (cf. Chapter One), the Malagasy Christian churches (such as the Lutheran, Reformed, Catholic and Anglican denominations) have tried to abolish the *famadihana*, but they have not succeeded, the reason being that almost all the Merina and Betsileo people, Christians and traditionalists, have continued practising it. Therefore, the MRCC has decided to provide it with a biblical foundation and to incorporate it into the liturgy. Instances of biblical texts used by the MRCC in the *famadihana* are Genesis 49: 29 - 50: 13 (concerning Jacob's death and burial); Exodus 13: 19 (the transfer of Joseph's bones from Egypt to Canaan) and Exodus 20: 12 (the Fourth Commandment). From interviews conducted with Catholic leaders and Christians, it is evident that the MRCC's aim is to legitimise the *famadihana* so that it becomes a Christian practice and celebration, which can serve to inculturate her faith that is intended to be accessible to people from various cultural contexts.

### **5.2.2 Case study two: Nenilava's robe and crown in the Malagasy Lutheran Church (cf. Chapter Three)**

The second case illustrates the application of Old Testament texts within the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC). Nenilava (Tall mother), whose real name was Volahavana Germaine, was one of the great figures in the MLC. She was the founder and charismatic leader of a movement, the so-called 'revival movement of Ankaramalaza', which is now spreading throughout Madagascar and abroad. According to her biography, collected and recorded by various writers (Rajosefa 1967, Rabarihoela 1999, Rabehantonina 2000, Tsivoery 2001, Edland 2002), Jesus called Nenilava and commissioned her to bring the Gospel to the Malagasy people as well as to people abroad. Her mission also consisted of healing people of their diseases, driving out evil spirits, providing people with wise and helpful advice and offering practical solutions to people's daily struggles. In addition, Jesus gave her the ability to read the thoughts of the person to whom she spoke and to predict the future. The story also says that before sending Nenilava on her special mission, Jesus promised to confirm her consecration publicly. Therefore, he showed her in a vision the robe and the crown that she was to wear on that occasion. Accompanied by pastors, shepherds and Christians, Nenilava undertook a long evangelistic journey throughout Madagascar and abroad (Comoros, France, Norway and America). She became so popular that not only Christians from different denominations but also people from non-Christian contexts such as Muslims and traditionalists came to her to be healed or to be freed from possession by evil spirits.

Because of the great and miraculous work Nenilava had accomplished in the name of Jesus, the revival movement of Ankaramalaza as well as the MLC recognised her as a prophetess and priestess. Therefore, in August 1983 they decided to organise, in Ankaramalaza, a major religious ceremony to confirm her consecration, according to Jesus' promise, and to honour her in a ceremonial way. Such a consecration required special vestments. Therefore, in terms of Nenilava's vision of the robe and crown mentioned above, the organisers planned to make a bride's robe and crown for her, which would illustrate her representing the Church as the Lord's bride. But as this plan evolved they decided instead that Nenilava would wear a priestly robe made according to the priestly garments described in Exodus 28 and a silver crown related to Deuteronomy 28, which would proclaim her as prophetess and priestess. To a certain extent their aim was to legitimise Nenilava's prophethood and priesthood and to contextualise the Old Testament in order that it could be used meaningfully and relevantly in the Church's present situation.

### **5.2.3 Case study three: Traditionalists' use of Old Testament texts (cf. Chapter Four)**

The use of Old Testament texts outside the realm of the Church forms the material of the third case study. The users mentioned in this case study are not ordinary traditionalists but traditio-practitioners who are responsible for the traditional religion. Some of them have inherited their professions from their grandparents or parents and others have acquired theirs by experience. However, what is common to them is that, except for a very few, they are all possessed by ancestral spirits who inspire them and guarantee their credibility and successfulness. Most of the traditio-practitioners I met and with whom I have conducted interviews stem from the central part of Madagascar, more precisely from the area of Antananarivo.

Since the missionaries' arrival in Madagascar, many Christians have regarded the Malagasy traditional religion as nothing but 'ancestor worship' or a diabolical cult that Satan uses to lead people to perdition. Therefore, most Christians who are convinced that it is their sacred duty and mission to eradicate 'ancestor worship' incessantly attack it. The threat became even more serious when groups in the revival movements began to deploy *tafika masina* (holy war) as a means to abolish the practice of the traditional religion. As a result, the Malagasy traditional religion, as well as the religious and cultural practices related to it, is gradually losing its value and credibility.

Facing these attacks, the traditio-practitioners continually sought for effective means to defend their practices and to prevent them from being eradicated. Some years ago a number of them came to the decision to use the Bible or, more precisely, the Old Testament in which they found customs and situations they considered similar to Malagasy traditional contexts. Their aim was to legitimise the Malagasy traditional religion, to make it more acceptable to Christians and, at the same time, to consolidate their own popularisation.

These traditio-practitioners use Old Testament texts in their religious practices for various purposes. For example, Rakoto Jean, a traditio-practitioner working in the west of Antananarivo, makes use of Exodus 3: 1-3, Leviticus 14: 1-7 and Jeremiah 8: 22 in his traditional healing. This case shows the use of the Old Testament as an 'open book'. Raneny (the Mother), another traditio-practitioner working in Ambatolampy (60 km to the south of Antananarivo) and in Kiririoka (a sacred place located 5 km to the west of Fandriana, the capital of north Betsileo) quotes Exodus 3:5b, Job 33: 6a and Psalm 121: 8a as religious slogans in her religious practices. This case shows the use of the Old Testament as a 'closed book'. In addition, the text of Leviticus 1-6 is generally used in the traditional sacrifices and offerings, while Psalm 113: 5-6 and Genesis 2: 18-22 are utilised as references for morals. These last two cases show other examples of the use of the Old Testament as an 'open book'.

#### **5. 2.4 Comparison of the three case studies**

In comparing the methods of using Old Testament texts in these three case studies, I have discerned similarities and dissimilarities between these approaches. The first similarity is to be perceived in the conscious decisions taken by the MRCC, the MLC and traditio-practitioners to use Old Testament texts in their respective contexts. These decisions have been taken more or less in the same period. The MLC decided in 1983 to use Old Testament texts for Nenilava's robe and crown within the revival movement of Ankaramalaza (cf. 3.2.2). The MRCC, which had already begun to inculturate her faith many years previously or, more precisely, after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), took the decision in 1999 to use Old Testament texts in the *famadihana* (cf. 2.2.4). The traditio-practitioners' utilisation of these texts became known between 1985 and 1990.

The second similarity is observable in the use of Old Testament texts for legitimisation of Malagasy practices. It has been argued in the thesis that all of the three entities, MRCC (cf. 2.3.4.2), MLC (cf. 3.3.3.1) and traditio-practitioners (cf. 4.3.5.1) have made use of Old Testament texts to legitimise what they consider should be given more meaning and value.

Such legitimisation therefore comprises the common denominator of the use of Old Testament texts within and outside the Church.

The third similarity is constituted by the three methods of applying Old Testament texts in Malagasy contexts, which are: inculturation (for the MRCC; cf. 2.3.4.2), contextualisation (the MLC; cf. 3.3.3.2) and accommodation (for traditio-practitioners; cf. 4.3.5.2). Obviously, these three words are different in terminology, but they exhibit similar meanings and purposes since each of them is acknowledged as a process for interpreting biblical texts and applying them in given contemporary contexts.

The fourth similarity is to be observed in the winning of converts as a consequence of the use of Old Testament texts. It is true that neither the MRCC nor the MLC has claimed that their purposes in using Old Testament texts in their respective contexts are to win converts. However, Catholic converts declared in the interviews I have conducted with them that they decided to follow the Catholic faith when the MRCC used biblical texts in the *famadihana* and incorporated it into her liturgy. Likewise, Lutheran converts acknowledged that it was their admiration for Nenilava as prophetess wearing a priestly robe and crown which attracted them to the MLC. Traditio-practitioners similarly did not conceal the fact that they make use of Old Testament texts in their religious practices with the aim of winning converts, or more precisely, of drawing people attracted by Christianity back to the traditional religion.

With regard to the dissimilarities, the first one is discernible in the contradictory purposes of the three entities (MRCC, MLC and traditio-practitioners) in legitimising their respective contexts by means of Old Testament texts. The MRCC's purpose in legitimising the *famadihana* by means of Old Testament texts is to shift the practice of this custom from the traditional context to the Church context so that it becomes a Christian celebration (cf. 2.3.4.2). In other words, the MRCC has accorded the *famadihana* a biblical foundation so that she can use it to make the Catholic faith attractive and accessible to the traditionalists. Likewise, the MLC's objective in legitimising Nenilava's prophethood and priesthood by means of a priestly robe and a crown, created according to Old Testament texts, is, to a certain extent, intended to make her charismatic mission more convincing and attractive to different people, including traditionalists. On the other hand, the traditio-practitioners' purpose in using Old Testament texts to legitimise their religious practices is to shift the use of the Bible from the Christian monopoly to a more universal use. They employ the Old Testament or the Bible as a sacred book by means of which they can make the traditional religion more attractive and meaningful to Christians. The dissimilarity is thus made obvious by the contradiction of these

purposes which attract Christians in opposite directions, from traditional religion to Christianity (the purposes of the MRCC and MLC) and from Christianity to traditional religion (the aim of the traditio-practitioners).

The second dissimilarity, which complements the first one, is to be found in the Supreme Authorities who benefit from the MRCC's, the MLC's and traditio-practitioners' use of Old Testament texts. For the MRCC and MLC, the beneficiary of their use of Old Testament texts in the *famadihana* and in the making of Nenilava's robe and crown, respectively, is God. The *famadihana*, after having been legitimised or founded on biblical texts, is incorporated in the MRCC's worship or liturgy that is aimed at glorifying God. Likewise, the purpose of the priestly robe and crown that the MLC and the 'children of Ankaramalaza' made for Nenilava, the servant of God, was to illustrate God's glory and grace. On the other hand, the beneficiaries of the traditio-practitioners' use of Old Testament texts in the traditional religion are the ancestors. Almost all of these practitioners are chosen and possessed by ancestral spirits who guarantee their credibility and success. In return, they dedicate everything they do to the ancestors. And it is the fundamental difference between God and the ancestors that demonstrates the dissimilarity between the use of Old Testament texts within and outside the Church.

### 5.3 RELEVANCE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN MADAGASCAR/AFRICA

The relevance of the Old Testament in Madagascar, as it is throughout Africa, is undeniable. This can be ascribed to many factors, of which the most important, as Le Roux (1999: 244) points out, are 'numerous points of convergence between most of African cultures and those embodied by the Old Testament'. These convergences are particularly evident in the similarities in world-view and in the fact that the Old Testament deals with many aspects of life, like the social, the agricultural, family and ritual aspects, which are all-important to African people (cf. Du Toit 1998: 372).

An instance of this relevance of the Old Testament may be noted in the important role that it has played, from the arrival of the missionaries until now, in the religious, social and cultural life of the Malagasy people, Christians and traditionalists (see 1.1.2). Likewise, the Old Testament plays a key role in South Africa, particularly among the African Initiated Churches. It forms the belief of these churches, constituting the basis of their doctrine and worship, as well as of their believers' behaviours (cf. Van Zyl 1995: 425). Another example illustrating the relevance of the Old Testament in Africa is to be found in the therapeutic and

protective roles which it plays in the Nigerian Initiated Churches. In fact, the Old Testament or, more precisely the book of Psalms, is used in these churches for the well-being of people, such as their good health, prosperity and *shalom* (Adamo 2001: 73).

#### 5.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN MADAGASCAR/AFRICA

The investigation of the use of Old Testament texts in Malagasy/African contexts is most important, because not only does it enrich and develop the interpretation of the Old Testament but it can also be used to interpret Africa. As attested by the history of the Old Testament in Africa, its interpretation has been dominated by methods and perspectives brought to us from the West. However, some of these methods have merely led us to philosophical abstractions or to general responses that have served the academy more than the African Church, largely constituted by people of average intellectual education (cf. Katho 2003: 4). As a result, these methods inherited from the West have almost always had little impact on the life of African people because such approaches are not able to convey adequate responses to their daily difficulties. Since most biblical scholars are convinced that the Word of God can offer solutions for the multiple African problems, the interpretation of the Old Testament should be aimed at a specific problem in a specific context (2003: 4). I concur with Holter's (1999: 36) perception with regard to interpreting the Old Testament in Africa:

In order to be an Old Testament scholarship [Old Testament scholar] that is able to let its [his/her] voice be heard within the global guild of Old Testament scholarship, its [his/her] interpretation of the Old Testament must continue the dialogue with the material and methodology of this global guild. And in order to be an African scholarship [African scholar], that [who] is able to let its [his/her] voice be heard within Church and society in Africa, its [his/her] interpretation of the Old Testament must continue to reflect its dialogue with the experiences and concerns of Africa.

As remarked above, the investigation of the use of Old Testament texts in Malagasy/African contexts is of great importance, because it assists theologians to develop a framework of academic biblical interpretation that will be responsive to given cultural and religious contexts. It also helps us to be prepared to adopt appropriate strategies for promoting authentic and effective inculturation. Malagasy/African theologians should recognise that inculturation is a useful tool that enables them to orientate their research towards a more effective mode of reading and interpreting the Old Testament. This effective mode resulting

from effective inculturation should be able to respond adequately to the questions that people ask about making the Word of God alive, active and genuine in their daily lives.

Likewise, the investigation of the use of the Old Testament in Malagasy/African contexts is indispensable for the interpretation of the Old Testament in Madagascar/Africa because it enables theologians to apply contextualisation, which is another useful tool for making the Old Testament meaningful and relevant to the situations of Christians. Malagasy/African theologians must remember, however, that contextualisation is not only a matter of interpreting and applying biblical texts to given contemporary contexts. It also involves the interpreters' critical analysis of the aspects of both contexts, biblical and contemporary, in order to make sure that they are compatible. This is a most responsible task. The important thing is that there should be criteria regarding how to carry it out and that traditional customs should gain a new meaning in the light of the Christian faith.

The outcomes of the three case studies conducted during this research suggest that the Malagasy's use and understanding of the Old Testament can be described in terms of the functions of various interpretations of the Old Testament, or the hermeneutics involved in such interpretations. I have already pointed out that Old Testament texts function in the processes of inculturation, legitimisation, accommodation, the winning of converts, and so forth. But here I would like to focus on the issue of hermeneutics, where three main dimensions of Malagasy hermeneutics have presented themselves in the case studies.

The first dimension is that of relevance, which is characteristic of Malagasy interpretations of the Old Testament in all three case studies. The study demonstrates that in Madagascar the Old Testament is regarded as a relevant, holy book relating God's revelation and containing his living and active Word, addressed to all generations in all contexts. The understanding of the Old Testament on this island is based on the fact that God, who made himself contextual, can come within the reach of specific peoples in concrete situations and circumstances. Thus, academic and grassroots interpretations of the Old Testament are not mere metaphysical speculation or theoretical abstractions, but appear as culture-bound, historically situated reflections on God's dynamic relationship with the world and his redemptive plan and providential care for all human beings. It is believed that the God of the Old Testament can make a difference to the lives of the Malagasy people, here and now.

Second, related to the issue of relevance is the contextual dimension. In other words, the Old Testament in Madagascar is read, interpreted and used in a contextual way in which people, Christians and traditionalists, assume that they can meet God, who is interested in the

well-being of all nations, in their unique situations. This study has shown that the understanding of the Old Testament in Madagascar is not uniform; it depends on the specific situation, which influences its interpretation and use.

The third facet of a Malagasy understanding of the Old Testament is its ritual dimension. The study has indicated that, apart from its verbal use within (and outside) the Church, the Old Testament also functions prominently in various rituals. The ritual dimension occurs in a variety of contexts, both in Christian and in traditional religious ones.

There are indeed marked differences – and even contradictory features – between the Old Testament interpretations expressed in the three cases. Nevertheless, I will argue that they all reflect certain common interpretive denominators – the search for relevance, for contextuality and for ritual expressions – and that behind these all lies an interpretive strategy seeking to perceive God in the concrete experiences of life and faith in Madagascar.

## 5.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TEACHING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN MADAGASCAR/AFRICA

The study of the use of Old Testament texts in Malagasy/African contexts is of great consequence, for the reason that it constitutes a valuable contribution to developing the form taken by the teaching of the Old Testament in Africa. As Le Roux (1999: 254) emphasises,

Africa has customs and traditions that need to be respected for some of them are closely linked to those in the Old Testament that might not be ignored in the teaching of this subject. On the contrary, these need to be pointed out all the more clearly, and be taken into consideration.

Therefore, the Church should consider the study of the use of Old Testament texts in these contexts as being among the matters to be assimilated within the teaching of the Old Testament in faculties or institutions. This will enable us to make students aware of the importance and value of the African religious and cultural heritage and, at the same time, to prepare them for the necessary procedures and methodology that this study involves. Regarding the methodology, teachers must initiate students into qualitative research as well as into all the technical procedures which it requires (Le Roux 1999: 254-255).

As we know, students mostly stem from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, to which they should remain attached. Therefore, in preparing them for the study of the use of Old Testament texts in Malagasy/African contexts, teachers will aid them, at the same time,

to build up their cultural and experiential strengths, to acquire new knowledge and to understand their role in the community, the nation and the world (Le Roux 1999: 255).

We are also aware of the present tendency in Madagascar/Africa to lose interest in the traditional religion and cultures, which is noticeable particularly in the attitudes that those living in cities, especially literate and/or young people, adopt vis-à-vis these cultures and religions. This is probably a result of the incessant change brought by modernisation to the African world. On the other hand, these traditional religions and cultures are still prevalent throughout the rural areas, and they even interact actively with the Old Testament.

One challenge in this area of teaching is, therefore, to arouse students' interest in this interaction between the Old Testament and Malagasy/African traditional religion and cultures and to encourage them to investigate it methodologically and critically. Another challenge is to provide effective learning, to improve the quality of the teaching and to make the teaching of the Old Testament learner-centred instead of teacher-centred and controlled (Le Roux 1999: 255). However, it should be mentioned here that the major problem we face in most institutions for higher education in theology in Madagascar is the lack of relevant books, especially books written by African scholars. What we currently have at our disposal, as far as the Old Testament is concerned, are a few outdated books written by western scholars. I must acknowledge that the reason for this problem is the lack of funding for most such institutions.

To conclude, the inclusion of the study of the use of the Old Testament in Malagasy/African contexts in the teaching programme of the Church's faculties or institutions is most advantageous, and consequently strongly recommended. The advantage is that it leads the students to become interested in the African traditional religion and cultures, provides new knowledge stemming from the investigation and critical analysis of the interaction between the Old Testament and the Malagasy/African context and helps to improve the quality of the teaching.

### ***Areas for further research***

In Africa the religious and cultural environment has not yet been completely destroyed by the consequences of modern technology and the influences of its mentality. Therefore, one can aver that it is still rich in religious and cultural contexts that may display points of convergence or similarities with the Old Testament. Three religious contexts in Madagascar in which Old Testament texts are used have been described and analysed. Other cases

showing interactions between the Old Testament and Malagasy religious and cultural contexts could comprise the objects of future research, whether mine or that of other researchers. Three of them are: Malagasy traditional circumcision and circumcision in the Old Testament, the Malagasy traditional covenants and the covenants in the Old Testament, and the Malagasy creation narrative and the Old Testament creation narrative. It is therefore hoped that the present study has created a solid foundation for further study in this field.

# ADDENDUM

The interview guide that I have prepared in the Malagasy language can be translated as follows:

## **1 CASE STUDY ONE: THE *FAMADIHANA* (TURNING OF THE DEAD) IN MALAGASY ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH**

### **1.1 RELIGIOUS LEADER**

#### **1.1.1 Personal particulars**

Name:

Gender:

Ethnic group:

Responsibility in the Church:

Place:

Date:

#### **1.1.2 Questions**

Could you tell me about the *famadihana*?

As we already know, the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church practises the *famadihana*:

When did she start to practise it?

Why did she decide to practise it?

Could you give me a general description of this Catholic *famadihana*?

Are there differences between the traditional and Catholic *famadihana* as far as the rituals and the ceremonies are concerned?

How did the Malagasy Catholic Christians take this Church's decision to practise the *famadihana*?

We also know that the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church uses Old Testament texts in the *famadihana*:

When did she start this use?

Which texts/passages does she use most?

Are there other biblical texts/passages she uses?

How does she use these texts/passages in the *famadihana*?

Why does she use these texts/passages in the *famadihana*?

What is the function of this use of Old Testament texts in the *famadihana*?

What are the impacts of this use of Old Testament texts (in the *famadihana*) on the life of the Malagasy Catholic Christians?

How did the other Malagasy Churches react to this Catholic Church's use of the Old Testament in the *famadihana*?

What are the implications of this use of Old Testament texts (in the *famadihana*) for the interpretation and teaching of the Old Testament in the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church?

In your opinion, should the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church continue this use the Old Testament in other religio-cultural contexts?

## 1.2 MALAGASY CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN FOLLOWERS

### 1.2.1 Personal particulars

Name:

Gender:

Ethnic group:

Occupation:

Place:

Date:

### 1.2.2 Questions

When did you follow the Catholic faith?

How did you become Catholic?

As we know the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church has decided to practise the *famadihana* and to incorporate it in her liturgy:

Could you tell me the differences between the traditional and Catholic practices of the *famadihana*?

As a Christian, what do you think about this Church's practice of *famadihana*?

What is the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church's objective in practising the *famadihana*?

Could you tell me the reactions of Christians from other denominations in finding that the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church practises the *famadihana*?

We also know that the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church uses Old Testament texts in the *famadihana*:

What do you think about this use of biblical texts in the *famadihana*?

How does the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church apply these texts in the *Famadihana*?

What are the Malagasy Roman Catholic's purposes in using Old Testament texts in the *famadihana*?

What are the impacts/results of this use on your Christian life?

In your opinion, is it good that the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church continues to use the Old Testament in other religio-cultural contexts?

## **2 CASE STUDY TWO: NENILAVA'S ROBE AND CROWN IN THE MALAGASY LUTHERAN CHURCH**

### **2.1 RELIGIOUS LEADER**

#### **2.1.1 Personal particulars**

Name:

Gender:

Ethnic group:

Responsibility in the Church:

Place:

Date:

#### **2.1.2 Questions**

Almost all Christians in Madagascar as well as many people from non-Christian context know that Nenilava was a great figure in the Malagasy Lutheran Church, especially in the revival movement circles:

Could you tell me how did she become so popular?

What role did she play in the Malagasy Lutheran Church?

How did she accomplish her mission?

What are the impacts of this mission on the life Christians as well as of the Church?

It is said that the Malagasy Lutheran Church and the revival movement of Ankaramalaza has acknowledged Nenilava both as prophetess and priestess:

What were the reasons for this acknowledgement?

How do you think about these double titles and responsibilities assigned to one person?

What made Nenilava different from the other charismatic leaders that the Malagasy Lutheran Church recognised as prophets before her?

As we know, the Malagasy Lutheran Church and the revival movement of Ankaramalaza made for Nenilava a priestly robe and a crown, which were, respectively, modelled on the high priest's garments described in Exodus 28 and related to Deuteronomy 28:

Why did they take the decision to make these robe and crown?

How did they proceed to make these robe and crown?

What are the purposes of this use of Old Testament texts in the making of Nenilava's robe and crown?

What are the impacts of this use on the life of the Malagasy Lutheran Christians?

What were the reactions of theologians and ordinary Christians to this use of Old Testament texts to create a priestly robe and a crown for Nenilava?

What are the implications of this use of Old Testament texts for the interpretation and teaching of the Old Testament in the Malagasy Lutheran Church?

In your opinion, should the Malagasy Lutheran Church continue to apply Old Testament texts in other Christian religious contexts?

## **2.2 MALAGASY LUTHERAN CHRISTIAN FOLLOWERS**

### **2.2.1 Personal particulars**

Name:

Gender:

Ethnic group:

Occupation:

Place:

Date:

### **2.2.2 Questions**

When did you follow the Lutheran faith?

How did you become Lutheran?

Could you tell me about Nenilava as well as the revival movement of Ankaramalaza she had founded within the Malagasy Lutheran Church?

What was the role/mission of Nenilava in the Malagasy Lutheran Church?

How did she accomplish this role/mission?

As we know, the Malagasy Lutheran Church and the revival movement of Ankaramalaza have used the texts of Exodus 28 and Deuteronomy 28 to create a priestly robe and a crown for Nenilava:

Could you tell me how they did to make these robe and crown?

What is the Malagasy Lutheran Church's objective in using these Old Testament texts to make Nenilava's priestly robe and crown?

What do you think about the use of Old Testament texts in this Christian context?

What are the impacts/results of Nenilava's priestly robe and crown on your Christian life?

In your opinion, is it good that the Malagasy Lutheran Church continues to use Old Testament texts in other Christian religious contexts?

## **3 TRADITIONALISTS' USE OF OLD TESTAMENT TEXTS**

### **3.1 RELIGIOUS LEADER (TRADITIO-PRACTITIONERS)**

#### **3.1.1 Personal particulars**

Name:

Gender:

Ethnic group:

Occupation (besides the religious duties):

Place:

Date:

#### **3.1.2 Questions**

Could you tell me about the Malagasy traditional religion and culture?

How did you become traditio-practitioner?

How do you carry out your religious duties?

What is the role of a traditio-practitioner in the Malagasy traditional religion as well as in the community?

We know that the high lands of Madagascar are almost dominated by Christianity today:

To what extent does this irresistible spread of Christianity affect the traditional religion and culture, as well as your profession?

How do traditio-practitioners working in the high lands of Madagascar face this predominance of Christianity over the traditional religion?

As we know, it is an undeniable fact that some traditio-practitioners have taken the decision to use the Old Testament texts in their religious practices, and you are one of them:

How do you consider the Old Testament?

Why do you think that the using of the Old Testament, which the Christians regard as their exclusive holy book, in the traditional religion is a good idea?

Could you give examples of texts/passages you use in your religious practices?

How do you use/apply them?

Why do you use them?

What are the consequences/impacts of your use of the Old Testament/Old Testament texts on the traditional religion, on the life of your followers, as well as on your own profession?

How do Christians react in finding that you apply Old Testament texts in your religious practices?

How do you face their reactions?

Do you consider it is good for you to continue to use the Old Testament in your religious practices?

Do you wish to have a contact or a dialogue with Christian theologians? Why?

## 3.2 TRADITIONALIST FOLLOWERS

### 3.2.1 Personal particulars

Name:

Gender:

Ethnic group:

Occupation:

Place:

Date:

### 3.2.2 Questions

When did you become traditionalist follower?

How did you become traditionalist follower?

How does your traditio-practitioner perform his religious duties?

As we know, Christianity keeps spreading throughout the high lands of Madagascar and, as a result, most people, statistically speaking, become Christians:

Does this Christian predominance cause problems to the traditional religion and culture?

How do the traditionalists, especially the traditio-practitioners, face these problems?

We also know that traditio-practitioners since some years decided to use the Old Testament in their religious practices, and your traditio-practitioner is one of them:

How does he/she use the Old Testament?

Could you give me examples of the texts he/she uses?

Could you tell me his/her purposes in using these Old Testament texts?

Do you think it is a good idea to use the Old Testament, which is recognised as a Christian book in the traditional religion?

What are the impacts/consequences of the traditio-practitioner's application of the Old Testament in your religious and social life?

In your opinion, is it good for your traditio-practitioner to continue to use the Old Testament?

Do you wish that your traditio-practitioner would have a contact/dialogue with Christian theologians? Why?

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## Transcripts of interviews conducted during field study

DCF 1	January 2003	Rakotozafy (a Merina elder), farmer, Ambohimandroso.
DCF 2	January 2003	Razakamady (native Betsileo living in Antananarivo), shopkeeper, Antananarivo.
DCF 3	January 2003	Rafaravoahangy, professor of the Malagasy in a private High Schol, Antananarivo.
DCF 4	February 2003	Rafalimanantsoa, teacher in a primary school, Ambatolampy.
DCF 5	February 2003	Rakotosaona, professor of Mathematics in a secondary school, Antananarivo.
DCF 6	February 2003	Andrianony, farmer, Ambatolampy.
DCF 7	February 2003	Raharison, Catholic representative in the central office of the Christian Churches Federation in Madagascar, Antananarivo.
DCF 8	March 2003	Ramasy, contractor, Antsirabe.
DCF 9	March 2003	Razafisoa, couturier, Antsirabe.
DCF 10	March 2003	Andriantsalama, farmer, Ambohibary.
DCF 11	March 2003	Rakotosamimanana, trainee magistrate, Antananarivo.
DCF 12	April 2003	Rasoanjanahary, teacher in a primary school, Antsirabe.
DCF 13	April 2003	Ramarozaka, driver, Fianarantsoa.
DCF 14	April 2003	Raherisoanjato, professor of history, University of Antananarivo.
DTF 1	May 2003	Ramarojaona, farmer, Antsirabe.
DTF 2	May 2003	Ramahandry, carpenter, Ambohibary.
DTF 3	June 2003	Randimbisoa, farmer, Itaosy-Antananarivo.
DTL 1	June 2003	Randriamanantena, traditio-practitioner, eastern part of Antananarivo.
DTL 2	December 2003	Rakoto Jean (alias Ra-Claude), traditio-practitioner, Ambohidratrimo, west of

		Antananarivo.
DTL 3	December 2003	Raneny (the Mother; real name: Razanamparany), traditio-practitioner, Ambatolampy.
DTL 4	January 2004	Rasamoelina, traditio-practitioner, Antanifotsy.
DTL 5	January 2004	Rajaonasy, traditio-practitioner, Antsirabe.
DTL 6	January 2004	Anonymous traditio-practitioner, Ambohimandroso.
DTL 7	January 2004	Nenibe (Grandmother), traditio-practitioner, north of Antananarivo.
DCL 1	February 2004	Randriamanana, Catholic catechist, Antanifotsy.
DCL 2	February 2004	Noiret, French missionary, Catholic priest, church history professor at the Catholic Major Seminary, Fianarantsoa.
DCL 3	February 2004	Raharimalala, Catholic sister, Antananarivo.
DCL 4	February 2004	Rakotomanga, Catholic priest, Ambositra.
DCL 5	March 2004	Ralibera, Catholic priest, Antananarivo.
DCL 6	March 2004	Bonaventure, Catholic priest, trained as shepherd in the Lutheran revival movement, Antananarivo.
DCL 7	March 2004	Rasata, Catholic Christian, trained as shepherd in the Lutheran revival movement, Antananarivo.
DCL 8	March 2004	Rajaona, A, Catholic priest and liturgist, Antananarivo.
DCL 9	April 2004	Randriamamonjy, Catholic catechist, Antsirabe.
DCL 10	April 2004	Rasoarivony, professor of French in a Catholic College, Antananarivo.
DCL 11	May 2004	Cardinal Razafindratandra, current head of the Malagasy Roman Catholic Church

		and archbishop of Antananarivo.
DCL 12	May 2004	Rabemanahaka, retired pastor of the Malagasy Reformed Church, Antananarivo.
DCL 13	June 2004	Rakotomalala, Lutheran catechist, north of Antsirabe.
DCL 14	June 2004	Andrianarijaona, co-leader of the revival movement of Ankaramalaza and national coordinator of the Protestant revival movements, Antananarivo.
DCL 15	June 2004	Rakoto Endor Modeste, lecturer at the Malagasy Lutheran Graduate School of Theology in Fianarantsoa and member of 'the children of Ankaramalaza'.
DCL 16	July 2004	Rakotoarivony, lecturer at the Malagasy Lutheran Graduate School of Theology in Fianarantsoa and member of 'the children of Ankaramalaza'.
DCL 17	July 2004	Rabemanantsoa, lecturer at the Malagasy Lutheran Graduate School of Theology in Fianarantsoa and member of 'the children of Ankaramalaza'.
DCL 18	December 2004	Andriatsiratahina, general secretary of the Malagasy Protestant Churches Federation, Antananarivo.
DCL 19	December 2003	Rakotomaro, current general secretary of the MLC, Antananarivo.

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Razafindratandra, A 1999. Cassette, containing Cardinal Razafindratandra's teaching entitled: *Fampianaran'ny Fiangonana momba ny famadihana* (Church's teaching about the *famadihana*), Antananarivo.



(Antananarivo).



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PHOTO 3: A traditional tomb in the south-western part of Madagascar (Mahafaly).



A6RT1D Alamy Images

PHOTO 4: A funeral procession (participants in coffins) from temporary tombs to be buried in the ancestral tomb on the occasion of a transfer famadihana (East of Antananarivo).



A6RT15 Alamy Images

PHOTO 5: A group of people gathered around the 'bones' of a razana (ancestor) for the wrapping during a prestige famadihana. Some of them are talking with the 'razana' (Ambositra).



A6RT26 Alamy Images

PHOTO 6: A group of people gathered around a table (ancestor) in a new and colorful setting during the inauguration famadihana (Antanifotsy).





*PHOTO 7: Wrapping 'razana' (ancestors) in new shrouds during a prestige 'famadihana' (Antsirabe).*



*(ancestor) during a prestige 'famadihana' (Ambatolampy).*



*PHOTO 9: Dancing with the razana (ancestors) who are ready to be replaced in the tomb (Antsirabe).*



*bodies (in coffins), which have been transferred from the missionary cemetery to the Catholic tomb erected in the chapel outside the Cathedral of Antananarivo (during a Catholic transfer 'famadihana', 1999).*



*PHOTO 11. Preparation for the placing of Malagasy bishops' bodies in their respective compartments, in the Catholic tomb (Antananarivo).*



*PHOTO 12. Nenuava as a shepherdess dressed in white robe and wearing a white headdress (Ankaramalaza 1951).*





PHOTO 1: A Merina tomb (Antananarivo).



PHOTO 2: Temporary Merina tombs (Ambohimandroso).



PHOTO 3: A traditional tomb in the south-western part of Madagascar (Mahafaly).



PHOTO 4: Hundreds of people carrying 'razana' (ancestors, in coffins) from temporary tombs to be buried in the ancestral tomb on the occasion of a transfer famadihana (East of Antananarivo).



PHOTO 5: Women preparing the 'eight bones' of a razana (ancestor) for the wrapping during a prestige famadihana (during a prestige famadihana). Some of them are talking with the 'razana' (Ambositra).



PHOTO 6: Men wrapping a razana (ancestor) in a new and coloured silk shroud during an inauguration famadihana (Antanifotsy).



PHOTO 7: Wrapping 'razana' (ancestors) in new shrouds during a prestige famadihana (Antsirabe).

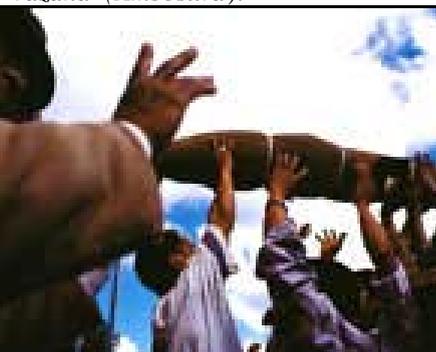


PHOTO 8: Young men dancing with a wrapped razana (ancestor) during a prestige famadihana (Ambatolampy).



PHOTO 9: Dancing with the razana (ancestors) who are ready to be replaced in the tomb (Antsirabe).



*PHOTO 10: Malagasy Catholic bishops' bodies (in coffins), which have been transferred from the missionary cemetery to the Catholic tomb erected in the chapel outside the Cathedral of Antananarivo (during a Catholic transfer 'famadihana', 1999).*



*PHOTO 11: Preparation for the placing of Malagasy bishops' bodies in their respective compartments, in the Catholic tomb (Antananarivo).*



*PHOTO 12: Nenilava as a shepherd dressed in white robe and wearing a white headdress (Ankaramalaza 1951).*



*PHOTO 13: Nenilava wearing her priestly robe and crown (Ankaramalaza 1983).*



*PHOTO 14: Procession of new 'mpiandry' (shepherds) before the ceremony of their consecration (Antananarivo).*



*PHOTO 15: Procession of Christian women who are going to attend the religious ceremony of the consecration of new shepherds (Antananarivo).*



*PHOTO 16: The high priest's garments.*



*PHOTO 17: Nenilava's priestly robe and crown.*



*PHOTO 18: A traditio-practitioner preparing for the performance of a 'sorona' (sacrifice; Betafo).*



Mandrasa anahy (sambor de zaha)

*PHOTO 19: A bull designated by a traditio-practitioner to be sacrificed to an ancestor (Betafo).*



Mandrasa anahy (sambor de zaha)

*PHOTO 20: Purification of a bull before sacrificing it to an ancestor (Betafo).*



*PHOTO 21: The entrance to the sacred place in Kiririoka. The religious slogan written on the lintel can be translated as follows: 'Your justice has saved you'*



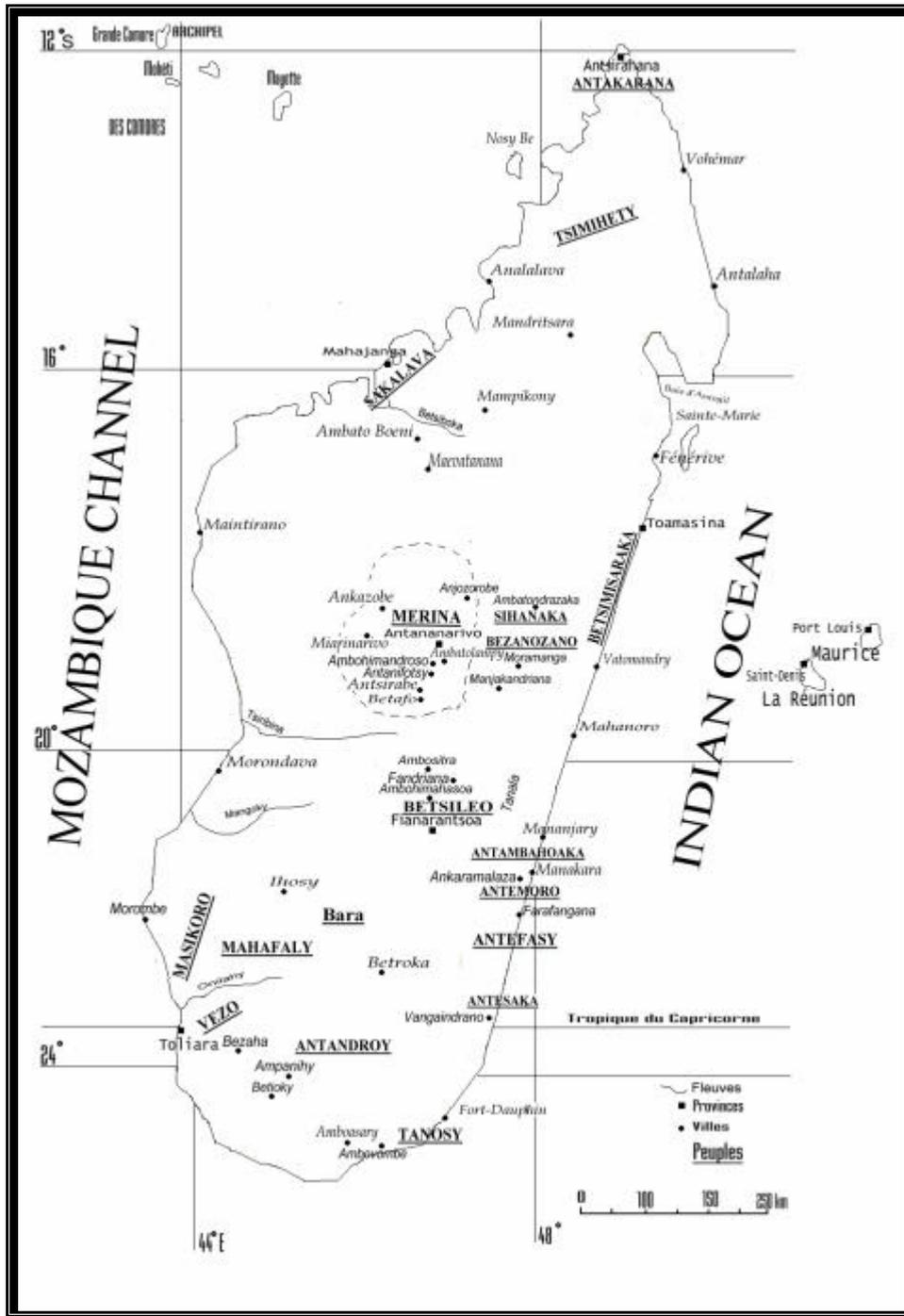
*PHOTO 22: The religious slogan written on the entrance to the sacred place in Kiririoka, which is translated as follows: 'Take off your sandals for the place where you are standing is holy ground'.*



*PHOTO 23: The traditio-practitioner Raneny (The mother; dressed in coloured cloth and wearing a cap) attending followers who come to bow to the ancestor 'Dada' and his ancestral family (wrapped in red shrouds) and give them offerings.*



*PHOTO 24: Raneny, lying down on 'Dada's' body, is discussing with two of her assistants. On her left is put a basket in which followers place offerings to 'Dada' who, as one can see, is already full up, with sweets.*



MAP: Madagascar with the names of the Malagasy ethnic groups (in capitals and underlined).

Map drawn from:  
 Molet, L 1979. *La conception du monde Surnaturel et de l'homme en Imerina*, Vol 1.  
 Paris : L'Harmattan