



Church and State relations in Lesotho: A historical review locating the voice of the church in Lesotho's political and mainstream history¹

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Abstract

The year 2024 sees Lesotho celebrate 200 years since the formation of Basotho as a nation. In these 200 years, the church has played a significant role in nation building and development. This article explores and seeks to locate the voice and presence of the church both as an ecumenical body and as a prophetic voice within the tumultuous history of Lesotho's politics with a specific timeframe from 1833-2002. A literature review of relevant academic articles as well as historical works is used to ensure that the accounts recorded are factually correct. The formation of Basotho in the 18th century is a direct result of violence and war in the form of *Lifaqane*. King Moshoeshe I, founder of the Basotho nation believed that peace could be procured via the presence of missionaries, therefore denoting the establishment of the church as an important factor. Within Lesotho's mainstream history, the role played by the church has often been referred to in passing. Common sayings like "*Baruti ba Moshoeshe (Moshoeshe's pastors/ministers)*", and "*Lesotho ke naha ea Bokresete (Lesotho is a Christian nation)*" are often quoted, and yet the actual role that the church has played and continues to play in Lesotho's history and development has been an after-thought. In light of this, this article locates the role that the church has played in different eras of Lesotho's history. From the establishment of the 1st church (Protestant Church) in Morija, to the formation of ecumenical bodies such as The Heads of the Churches and Church Council of Lesotho to the current emerging coalition democracies under the constitutional monarchy.

Keywords: Church, State, History, Ecumenism, Prophetic Voice.

Introduction

There are many different definitions of what the Church is. Dulles gives five definitions of the church which include Servant, Herald, Institution, Mystical Communion, and People of God (Dulles, 1985:59-90). Smit (2007:61-69), sees the church in five perspectives: as a place of worship, local congregation, but also in terms of denominations, ecumenical bodies and the global body of Christ in the world. For the purpose of this paper, the term Church shall refer to the church as an Ecumenical body and as a Prophetic Voice. According to Leanya (2013:15), within church-state relations, these two aspects of the church prominently represent the churches' critical role in society and vis-à-vis "the powers". Leanya (2013:15) also notes that:

¹ This article is formulated from my unpublished Masters of Arts thesis titled *Church State Relations in Lesotho: a theological review of Catholic and Reformed Traditions, 1833-2007* (2013).



“theologically defined, the state acts as God’s agent of justice and peace, and the church acts as the servant-herald, the mystical (ecumenical) communion of God’s people, hearing the prophetic Word, embodying that Word, and implementing the Word in the world”.

Two denominations have had significantly higher roles to play within church/state history in Lesotho, these are the Protestant Church contemporarily known as the Lesotho Evangelical Church of Southern Africa (LECSA) formerly known as the Lesotho Evangelical Church (LEC), which has direct links to the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS) and the Roman Catholic Church (RCC).

Therefore, in specific parts, the church will be referred to in terms of a denomination, which will specifically identify one of these two churches. The impact of the church as an Ecumenical body, which will point to the work of the Heads of Churches (HOC) and Christian Council of Lesotho (CCL) within the mainstream history of Lesotho will be explored. The Prophetic Voice is located within the writings, speeches and public commentary made in the form of sermons, press releases specifically during the troubled times of Lesotho’s history.

The relationship between church and state has historically been one of the most complex and the subject of many debates. The same has been found to have been the case with regards to Lesotho. Hincks (2009:664-66) notes that the church in Lesotho has at times seemed to have been very strong and vibrant while at other times it was found wanting in terms of how it relates to the government of the day and what its boundaries are.

The church comes to Lesotho

It is important here to note that Basotho knew and worshipped God prior to the arrival of the missionaries and the Church in Lesotho. According to Gill (1993:50), Basotho have always been religious, believing in one God (*Molimo*), who is unknowable and distant from humanity. According to Basotho, this God was reachable only through one’s ancestors (*balimo*), who acted as mediators between the living and this God. However, only those who were presumed good while living would generally be considered fit to intercede for a family or the nation when the need arose. They could intercede with God in order to provide good harvests, children, rains, victories in war, good fortune and health and other perceived needs (see Setiloane, 1976; Gill, 1993; Hincks, 2009).

So, it is safe to assume that it was not for a lack of knowledge of God that King Moshoeshoe I wanted missionaries and the church established in Lesotho. Ellenberger (1912:235-236) Setiloane (1976:106), Beck (1997:110) all note that it was as a result of persistent harassment by the Kora, that king Moshoeshoe seriously considered inviting missionaries. They further assert that the Basotho king had heard from visitors’ personal testimonies that the presence of missionaries brought about peace and political stability. In 1832, King Moshoeshoe I extended an invitation to missionaries. This task was assigned to Krotz, an emancipated slave who had visited Thaba-Bosiu as an invited guest of Moshoeshoe. To show how serious Moshoeshoe was about securing peace in his territory, he sent 200 cattle as an incentive for Krotz to procure at least one missionary for him.

On the 28th of June 1833, the first missionaries of PEMS arrived in Lesotho. These were Eugène Casalis, Thomas Arbousset and their aide, a non-ordained artisan/missionary, Constant Gosselin (Beck, 1997:110). Of these three, Casalis would prove to be closest to King Moshoeshoe I, so much so that he has been referred to as “the king’s closest advisor”, Beck (1997:111). Casalis also acted as an advisor and representative of Basotho interests, particularly the retaining of land and establishing of peace in the region.

In January 1862, the first Roman Catholic Church (RCC) missionaries arrived in Lesotho and were received by Molapo, a son of Moshoeshoe and Chief in the northern part of Lesotho. Because he did not have a final say on whether the missionaries could stay or not, he referred



them to Thaba-Bosiu to go and meet King Moshoeshe and obtain his permission for them to live amongst his people (Hincks, 2009:229). Upon their arrival at a place called Thaba-Bosiu (mountain at night), the missionaries received a warm welcome by the king who sat down with them to inquire about their faith. Hincks (2009:229-230) also notes that these missionaries were Bishop Allard and Father Gerard, who informed Moshoeshe of how only 300 years earlier, the Protestants had separated themselves from the RCC, calling themselves Reformed and that the "Protestant faith was too young to be the religion of Jesus Christ". According to Hincks (2009:230), the Protestant missionaries had also already given a bad impression of the RCC missionaries and theology also.

1833-1965

The early relationship between the church and state in the history of Lesotho is both complex and difficult. It was further complicated by the fact that the church, especially the Protestant church lead by missionaries was more concerned with the westernization of Basotho, paying less interest in the principles of church and state as stated by Protestant theologians such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli or the Anabaptist view on church and state (see Gill, 1993:82; Beck, 1997:111 & Leanya, 2013: 51).

When Boers started to settle in the rich Caledon River valley, where the Sotho and Tswana farmers had settled around mission stations, disputes arose over the ownership of land which in turn forced missionaries into political roles they sometimes sought to avoid. Consequently, Moshoeshe called upon British authorities in the Cape Colony in 1843 to help block the Boers from seizing anymore of his territory (Beck, 1997:112). With the help and advice of Casalis, Moshoeshe went on to sign a treaty with Sir George Napier, the Cape governor, that recognised Moshoeshe's sovereignty over all the lands between the Orange and Caledon River and a strip of land west of the Caledon in 1843, where Sir Napier himself admitted that Moshoeshe is "a friend and ally of the Cape Colony" (Beck, 1997:112). Stevens (1967:31) agrees with Beck (1997), but also goes further to say that the missionaries were not always heedful of the consequences of their involvement in political matters and their attempts to influence the paramount chief brought considerable criticism from both Boers and British administration.

The Catholic missionaries steered clear of the political arena and it appears as though Moshoeshe did not expect their involvement. This however was contrary to Moshoeshe's expectations of the Protestant missionaries as is asserted by Sanders (1975:227), Beck (1997:115), Hincks (2009:234).

Sanders (1975:227) writes:

"From the Roman Catholics Moshoeshe appears to have expected nothing. He seldom discussed politics with them, and their writings suggest that they were disinterested in the subject. Indeed they were men of such simple devotion that their most urgent advice as danger threatened was that Moshoeshe should entrust himself to the protection of the Virgin Mary. From the Protestants however, he expected more".

Before Moshoeshe I died in 1870, his wish was to be baptised by missionaries from the Protestant Church, the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church which by now was present in Bloemfontein. He feared that should he be baptised by only one church; this would sow divisions amongst his people. However, just two days before the baptism ceremony was to take place at Thaba-Bosiu, Moshoeshe I died.

The Gun War

Following his death in 1870, Moshoeshe I was succeeded by his first-born son Letsie I. It was during Letsie's reign that a Magistrate was put in the Quthing district where Moorosi of the Baphuthing was Chief. Moorosi strongly held the ideology of Moshoeshe (one nation under



one paramouncy, supported by chiefs of other clans). Therefore, Moorosi was not about to concede power to a magistrate and a rebellion ensued. After months of fighting, Moorosi lost the battle, was decapitated and his head was sent to King Williams Town. This barbaric act shocked the Paramount Chief and all Basotho who were astonished by the brutality of the Cape Colony (Gill, 1993:127-128; Hincks, 2009:269-270). As a direct result of Moorosi's rebellion, the Cape Colony's Prime Minister, Sir Gordon Sprigg, announced that all Basotho would be disarmed in order to "protect the peace". Hincks (2009:272) further notes that all Missionaries once again came to the defence of the Basotho in this unfair request and even sent a delegation to the Cape that included a well-known Christian, Nathanael Makotoko and PEMS missionary Irenè Cochet.

Basotho refused to give back the weapons they had worked for. Consequently, in 1880 the Gun War started, greatly costing the Cape government. The Cape government spent over £ 3 000 000 during the Gun War. Apart from that, Sprigg's government fell and hopes of a federation of white states came to nothing (Gill, 1993:129 see also Sanders, 2010). This war put Letsie in a somewhat awkward situation. Outwardly he showed support for the Cape Prime Minister, yet secretly he incited the rebellion. The war was led by Lerotholi, the son of Paramount Chief Letsie I and heir to the paramouncy with aid of Chief Masopha, Letsie's younger brother and Joel, a son of Chief Molapo. By April 1881, the Cape Colony accepted a peace settlement that would see the Basotho keep their weapons.

Age of Mission and Development

Following the Gun War, and with times being relatively peaceful, both the Protestant and Catholic churches shifted their focus away from the politics of the state and rather towards development. Their role as advisors and diplomats on behalf of the Basotho was abandoned. The main focus for the PEMS missionaries under the supervision of Adolphe Mabilie became development. The Protestants began training large numbers of teachers, as well as missionaries. They founded a newspaper *Leselinyana* (Little Light) and the *Morija Printing Works*, which would be instrumental in the publishing of a wide range of literature, inclusive of the translated Sesotho Bible. A girls' school and a technical school were also funded by the church and supported financially by a new government following an official hand-over by the Cape to the British (Gill, 1993:138-140).

The Catholic Church, like the Protestants also focused more on the expansion of missions and became an attractive alternative to most of the chiefs, who perceived the Protestants as more democratic and opposed to Sesotho culture and tradition. The Catholics were more accommodating in this regard (Gill, 1993:141).

Letsie I who reigned 1870-1891, was succeeded by his first-born son Lerotholi who reigned from 1891-1905. Lerotholi was succeeded by Letsie II whose reign was from 1905-1913. Letsie II was succeeded by his younger brother Griffith Lerotholi ruled 1913-1939, and was infamous for his love of brandy and concubines. Griffith Lerotholi however, probably became the most significant figure in the history of Lesotho because he was the first principal chief to be baptised. His baptism led to him recommending that chiefs under him also join the church, particularly the Catholic Church where he had been baptised because it was accommodating of Sotho culture unlike the Protestants who viewed Sotho culture as barbaric (Gill, 1993:163-164).

The main problem with the conversion of Griffith, especially to the Catholic Church, is that it would have many unforeseen consequences, some of which, as history has shown, have been quite bitter especially for the Protestants. Most of the educated people in Griffith's reign were Protestants or products of the Protestant education system. They were also mostly commoners who looked forward to the Westminster style of democracy, while the Catholic Church advocated the retention of "chiefly privilege", thus dividing Basotho into two camps. As history would show, for a long period of time, the dichotomy brought about since the reformation, would play itself out politically in Lesotho with two main political parties being established. The



Basutoland National Party (later called Basotho National Party BNP) which would enjoy support of the Catholic Church and the Basutoland Congress Party (later called Basotho Congress Party BCP) which would be strongly supported by the Protestants and their followers (Gill, 1993:164).

It is also important to note that Griffith's reign was not just riddled with disaster, there are also a lot of positive developments that took place during his reign. Because he was now Catholic, inroads into development by the Catholic Church came about. The Paramount Chief gave the Church land, resulting in the building of new schools. In 1910, the Catholic Church only had 10 schools nationwide. However, between then and 1922, the number of Catholic schools had risen to 100. These were followed by numerous other developments (Gill, 1993:173 & Hincks, 2009:510). The developments made by the RCC also resulted in a spirit of competition with the Protestants, who had established themselves as "the national church" (Gill, 1993:173; Hincks, 2009:510).

Griffith Lerotholi was succeeded by his son, Seeiso Griffith who ruled for just one year 1939-1940. Because his son Bereng was too young to assume the throne, Seeiso's senior wife, 'Mants'ebo became regent. She ruled from 1941-1960. It was during this reign of Chieftainess 'Mants'ebo that the Roman Catholic Church's proximity to the throne and government was elevated. Hincks says that the "Catholic missionaries became de facto advisors to the Regent 'Mants'ebo (Hincks, 2009:552). Chief Leabua Jonathan, a descendant of Molapo, younger brother to Letsie II, and second son of Moshoeshoe became prime minister/premier of Lesotho. He also was Catholic and therefore had sentiments towards the Catholic Church.

Early to mid-1960s: Formation of Ecumenical Bodies

In the early 1960s, with independence coming ever closer for African states, there came a shift of ecumenical organisation in Lesotho. Of note are three organisations that came to have significant relevance and contributions to building the nation of Basotho (Hincks, 2009:616). The first of these organisations is the Lesotho Ecumenical Association (LEA) which was formed by students from various denominational backgrounds such as the Lesotho Evangelical Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican and Methodist Churches. The objectives of the LEA were to have a mutual understanding and unity between the churches in Lesotho, and to discuss issues such as traditional theology, including baptism and eschatology. The association also delved into issues of justice, church-state relation and peace (Hincks, 2009:616-617).

The Heads of Churches as an ecumenical body was established in 1964, when the leaders of the mainline churches including the LEC, RCC, Anglican and Methodist churches came together due to influences of LEA. They issued a joint statement to all the Christians in Lesotho concerning the upcoming elections. This statement would be known as "The Voice of the Church Concerning Elections". The third ecumenical body, which is Christian Council of Lesotho (CCL), was formed on the 7th of August 1965 by local churches that wanted "an ecumenical council that will deal with local agendas and also address local needs while at the same time being integrated within regional and global for the purpose of wider communication and solidarity" (Hincks, 2009:616-618).

In the period 1833-1965, the two main churches in Lesotho were the Protestant Lesotho Evangelical Church which was formed out of the Paris Evangelical Mission and the Roman Catholic Church. During this period, it would seem the church was more concerned with playing advisor to the King. The church also worked to ensure that peace was established and that Moshoeshoe's interests, particularly his lands were protected. It can also be argued that without the influence and advice of the church, Moshoeshoe's land could have been integrated into the Republic of South Africa. The Catholic Church on the other hand did not do much regarding church state relations. Leanya (2013:62-63) observes rather, that this church seemed content with association with the royal family following a mass exodus of the royal family from the LEC to the RCC.



1965-1985: Independence and State of Emergency

As preparations for independence got underway, Chief Leabua Jonathan thought that the Basotholand Congress Party (BCP), would win the elections. In order to counter the BCP and their plan to do away with the monarchy, Chief Leabua sought that the Paramount Chief and soon to be King Moshoeshe II, be given power over the police and armed forces, “to ensure that democracy would be maintained” (Khaketla, 2000:62). To the surprise of many however, the BNP won the elections and circumstances immediately changed. Chief Leabua, being the Prime Minister and advisor to the Regent Queen ‘Mant’sebo, did not favour Bereng (Moshoeshe II) assuming the throne, instead he favoured Leshoboro, older brother of Bereng born of the third wife of Seeiso. Although Bereng was younger in years, his mother was the second wife and therefore had seniority, thus according to Sesotho culture and tradition, Bereng was the rightful heir as ‘Mants’ebo only had daughters. Much to the dismay of Chief Leabua, Bereng was crowned King Moshoeshe II. This made Chief Leabua develop hostility and hatred towards the young king (see Gill, 1993:214-216; Khaketla, 2000:62-68).

Chief Leabua now sought to make the king a constitutional monarch, citing that the king wanted executive power and sought dictatorship. This was however false, and orchestrated due to Leabua’s preference of Chief Leshoboro to assume the throne. As Khaketla (2000:73) states, Moshoeshe II wanted a state that would have the King as Head of State, who would be advised by a government that is responsive to the desires of his people. To galvanise his power, the new premier introduced various controversial Bills within the new constitution of Basutoland: “The Emergency Powers Bill, The Internal Security (Public Meetings and Procession) Bill, The Printing and Publishing Bill and The Societies Bill”. Of these bills, the Emergency Bill is most significant as it empowered the Prime Minister to declare a State of Emergency whenever he felt like it and it also allowed him “to arrest, remove or exclude anyone he chooses from Lesotho”. Worst still, this Bill made provision for Chief Leabua to suspend the Rule of Law without the approval of parliament (Khaketla, 2000: 147). As history would record, during the 1970 election results broadcasting, the worst fears of some Basotho would come to pass with the implementation of the Emergency Powers Bill coming into effect.

According to a statement made by Chief Leabua on the process of elections on Radio Lesotho, the elections were “conducted in an atmosphere of peace and quiet throughout the country” and he was pleased with the behaviour of Basotho as is noted by Khaketla (2000:207).

As election results came in, it became clear that BNP with 23 constituencies won, had lost to BCP which had won 35 constituencies with the MFP managing only 1. With Chief Leabua ready to hand over power to the BNP lead by Mokhehle, meetings were held with cabinet ministers and permanent secretaries to inform them of the new developments. It was at one of these meetings where apparently, Deputy Prime Minister, Chief Sekhonyana ‘Maseribane and Minister of Finance, Chief Peete Peete expressed that they would rather die than hand over power. In this meeting, Fred Roach, the Officer in charge of the Police Mobile Unity (PMU) and J.H. Hindmarch, Commissioner of Police were present. “Unfortunately for Basotho and Lesotho, the two white police officers who commanded the police gave their support to ‘Maseribane and were prepared to stand behind Chief Leabua Jonathan if he seized power”, which he did through a declaration of a State of Emergency (Gill, 1993:221; Khaketla, 2000:211-212).

The state of emergency led to a reign of terror whereby many people being detained. These included high ranking government officials. One such victim is Nkherepe Molefe who was a Deputy Commissioner of Police under British rule. The reason for his arrest was that “as a former high ranking police officer and a member of the MFP, he had a large following in the police force and therefore a security risk”. Other civil servants were forced to resign or face being fired. Over 800 competent civil servants were fired, losing all their benefits, pensions, gratuities and anything else due to them.



In true Animal Farm style as depicted in George Orwell's novel, Chief Leabua had been training the youth of the National Party known as the "Young Pioneers," in what was said to be a "farming training camp" (Khaketla, 2000:262).

This group is said to have organised themselves into armed gangs, visiting the homes of known opposition party members. These armed thugs terrorised people by luring them out of their homes in the middle of the night and taking them out into the fields, beating them up and leaving them for dead (Leanya, 2013:74). Clearly the actions of the government enabled human rights violations which were also perpetuated by the state as well. This state of affairs led people to resist, setting the stage for what Khaketla terms a "reign of terror". This reign of terror led to many people being detained without prosecution (Khaketla, 2000:267).

The Church's Prophetic/Pastoral voice

The Heads of Churches, due to raising concerns over the events that were playing out, wrote a letter to the Prime Minister and also read in churches expressing their concern over these incidents of human rights violations which were justified as protecting Basotho's "Christian heritage". Following a letter sent to Chief Leabua Jonathan, the Christian Council of Lesotho also wrote a letter to Chief Leabua Jonathan after the state of emergency had been declared. The letter read:

"We, the leaders of the church in Lesotho, respectfully greet you in the Name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Although the proclamation of the state of emergency is, according to your radio message, calculated to maintain peace and order, it is in our considered view that unless the people are fully informed, it may defeat its own ends. We urge, with all the power at our command, that the emergency be lifted as soon as possible in order to help restore the rule of law.

We are convinced that the state of emergency is likely to encroach upon the fundamental rights of the individual.

In view of the urgency of the situation, it is our strong desire to see you personally and to discuss these issues with you today."

Following that letter, Chief Leabua agreed to meet with the Heads of Churches where the following points were raised by the church leaders:

1. That Chief Leabua should take the nation into his confidence and give them detailed reasons for the steps he had taken.
2. That a meeting between His Majesty the King and Chief Leabua be arranged at once, in order to iron out any differences that might exist between them.
3. That a meeting between himself and the leaders of the Opposition be called to try to work out a compromise solution to the crisis.
4. That the country's Constitution be re-instated, and the courts be allowed to function normally.
5. That any people who were suspected of misbehaviour at the time of elections be brought before the courts and charges preferred against them (Khaketla, 2000:295 & Hincks, 2009:659).

The attempts of the church leaders were in vain as the government paid no attention to their efforts of restoration of peace. The church leaders therefore released a statement which would be read in churches during Sunday services due to censorship when attempting to have the statement read on national radio. The letter stated:

"We, who officially represent a great multitude of Christian believers in Lesotho, greet the people of the nation. We are deeply aware of the fears and the sufferings of many of our people at this time. We feel the deepest pain and grief, and have a sense of great shame on account of all the forms of



brutality and cruelty which, in recent days, have scarred the good name of the Basotho nation. We appeal to all concerned, in Christ's Name, to bring to an end all such forms of cruel and violent handling of our fellow human beings. We beg all Christian people to pray earnestly that this will be done" (Khaketla, 2000:296-297 and Hincks, 2009:659).

Not only was the exchange between church and state in the crisis of 1970 complex, but it was also very intense: Whilst the "Church played a prophetic and sometimes pastoral role, vis-à-vis the government, the government pursued and intimidated or co-opted policy vis-à-vis the church" (Hincks, 2009:658-659). Besides its initial letter to the premier, the CCL is said not to have been very active. It was rather the Lesotho Ecumenical Association (LEA) that stood out in confrontation of the government. The LEA as the most vocal prophetic voice amongst the ecumenical groups, discussed issues such as Peace, Justice, History and Church and State Relationships (Hincks, 2009:660). After a failed attempted coup of 1974, the CCL and HOC came to the fore as prophetic voices to the nation. The CCL voiced its concern for the suffering families of those who had been killed, detained or exiled, and those whose houses had been burn down (Leanya 2013:78). The CCL went even further seeking proper legal representation for the first 32 people who were standing trial for high treason. The CCL also established a Relief and Rehabilitation Programme, which received funding and support from Amnesty International, the South African Council of Churches and overseas church partners (Lesotho Sodepax Conference 1975, also in Hincks, 2009:668).

On 11 March 1982, the church, through the HOC, in continuing its prophetic and pastoral work renewed its call for Christians, politicians, government and chiefs to pray for peace. The King was also invited and participated in the "Day of Recollection and Prayer for Peace." By 1985 the HOC was also sponsoring ecumenical peacemaker seminars which were primarily for clergy but also included community leaders. These seminars were focused on reconciliation and facilitated by the Transformation Resource Centre in Maseru (Hincks 2009:698). Although history shows that the CCL and HOC worked together to confront and rebuke the government of BNP under the leadership of Chief Leabua Jonathan, it is important to note that the Roman Catholic Church, which was close to the BNP government, enjoyed a status of privilege during this time, while the Lesotho Evangelical Church, which had BCP members as its main members was highly persecuted. These divisions which are centuries long also played out in the alignment of these specific churches to political parties that were at loggerheads. This era polarised Basotho, so much so that even today, there is talk of *Manational le Macongrese* (*Nationalists & Congress*) in the political arena, even though Lesotho is now at a stage where coalition governments have become the norm.

Era of Military Rule: 1986-1993

The First Military Coup

On the 20th January 1986, the Lesotho Defence Force staged a coup to oust Chief Leabua and his government. Reasons given for the coup include that the army was concerned with the increasingly militant BNP youth wing. Another plausible reason is the tightening of the blockade into Lesotho by Pretoria, which caused a fear of economic strangulation. The most plausible depending on how one views geo-politics, is the fact that Chief Leabua needed to leave office as he refused to come to an agreement with the Apartheid regime on what would later be known as the Lesotho Highland Water Project (LHWP), a project South Africa desperately needed in order to secure water for its economic hub of Johannesburg (Matlosa & Pule, 2001; Machobane, 2013). The army after taking over power put Major General Metsing Lekhanya as



head of the Junta. He quickly signed the LHWP agreement with South Africa and all political refugees from South Africa were deported to Zambia.

The army gave the King executive and legislative powers. However, these powers were to be exercised in consultation with a six-man Military Council, which retained veto power. The King also had a Council of Ministers, amongst which E.R Sekhonyana, B.M Khaketla and M.T Thabane were part. According to Hincks (2009:739), this Council was made up of “qualified persons from a cross-section of political persuasions and religious denominations.” During this time, the HOC visited the King Moshoeshe II trying to convince him to return the country to civilian/democratic rule. The king was enjoying his new found power and had no intention of engaging the BCP in dialogue, something the HOC believed was essential, for as long as the LLA existed, they believed there could be no peace (Pherudi, 2004:68-69. See also Hincks, 2009:699). The military junta like the previous administration banned all political party activities, paving the way for an unopposed government with the King and his knights.

The Church gets involved

The HOC met with the Military Council about engaging in talks with the BCP, but those efforts were in vain. Hincks asserts that the Lesotho Liberation Army² (LLA) and BCP leaders were willing to meet, but the new government, similar to the Jonathan regime, wanted the meeting held in Lesotho. The government also said that the exiles were free to come back under the amnesty order that it had given, but again failed to provide safeguards or any kind of reintegration programme. As the promise of a return to democratic rule became a dream, again the HOC tried to intervene. Dialogue with the HOC was however cut short in 1988. The Military Council insisted that the church was too divided in itself and should rather go and fix its own house before engaging in national affairs (Hincks, 2009:740).

With the church silenced, tensions grew between two factions of the military council (Machobane, 2013:114; Pherudi, 2004) . One faction which consisted of King Moshoeshe II's cousins, sought a change of government which would be traditional with the king in charge while the other faction claimed a return to democratic rule was the better alternative for Lesotho. The tensions culminated in the exiling of the king to London at gun point for claims that he wanted a “Swazification”³ of Lesotho (Machobane, 2013:114-115). With Moshoeshe II stripped of titles and exiled, the College of Chiefs, together with the Principal Chiefs decided to install Mohato, Moshoeshe II's 1st born son as king. Although hesitant to assume the throne while his father was alive as it is taboo, Mohato, officially called Letsie III became king in order to preserve the monarchy (cited in Gill, 1993; Pherudi, 2004; Machobane, 2013 & Leanya, 2013).

The Second Military Coup

On 30 April 1991, Major General Lekhanya was escorted to the national radio which is Radio Lesotho by junior officers. He was given a resignation speech to read to the public live on air while facing the barrel of a loaded gun. Lekhanya was succeeded by Colonel Phisoane Ramaema who later became Major General. Ramaema's biggest goal was to oversee transition to a democratically elected government, choosing also not to deal with the issue of the reinstatement of Moshoeshe II as king (Gill, 1993; Pherudi, 2004; Machobane, 2013 & Hincks, 2009). It is also important to note that since the church had been silenced by the army, it said nothing during this time. Whether it be because the new administration was hell-bent on returning the country to democratic rule or it was out of fear no one actually knows.

² The Lesotho Liberation Army was the armed wing of the BCP similar the Mk'honto we Sizwe, the military wing of the African National Congress.

³ That is to say Moshoeshe II wanted Lesotho to become an absolute monarchy just like Swaziland where the king has executive powers and is above the constitution.



1993 onwards: Democratic dispensation

The year 1993 marked the beginning of the democratic dispensation in Lesotho. This recent history is only looked at until 2002, which is fairly recent. During this time, the most significant events in Lesotho's history include the King's Coup, the 1998 political uprising known as *Sepheho sa Langa* (Findings of the Justice Langa Report), and the emergence of a coalition governments (Langa, 1998).

On 15 August 1994, Letsie III issued a decree suspending certain provisions of the constitution, dissolved parliament and deposed Mokhehle's democratically elected government. This was because the previous day, both the BNP and MFP had written to the King asking him to dissolve parliament and to reinstate Moshoeshe II as king (Swatuk, 1995:10). King Letsie III also staged a coup, which was supported by members of the LDF, and suspended parliament. Letsie III also resigned during this time making way for his father to assume the throne once more (Gay, Gill & Hall, 1995). Both the HOC and the CCL tried in vain to intervene by promoting national dialogue and a spirit of reconciliation following the events of 1994 that brought instability. The main reasons for this failure were mistrust, divisions and unwillingness to compromise by the church.

1998 elections

In 1998, Basotho once again went to the polls to vote. Prior to and in preparation for the elections, the CCL organised an ecumenical monitoring team in conjunction with the different denominations to help in the monitoring of the election. Although there were reported irregularities, the elections were considered free and fair by observers, both local and international (Hincks, 2009:749-750).

The winner of the 1998 elections was announced as the newly formed Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD), a splinter party from the BCP. BNP, BCP and MFP disputed the results of the election, crying foul play and that the LCD had rigged the elections. The three parties went on to form what would be known as the *Setlamo Alliance* (Hincks, 2009:750). These three parties took the matter before the IEC and the king, demanding new elections. The letter to the King stated that within the findings of the Setlamo Alliance, there was report of destroyed "electoral outcome documents at the dump near the Caledon River adjacent to the Maseru Sewer Dams." By law, electoral documents cannot be disposed of that quick after an election had been held. Furthermore, the alliance had also done an election audit through OF&A Consultants, a South African company, which reported a manipulation of the elections (Mats'asa, 1998:2). The parties went further, taking the matter to the High Court and the Court of Appeal to try force new elections, however, this was denied.

Tensions rose in the capital as the BNP, BCP and MFP parties rallied their supporters from all over the country to come to the capital Maseru and march to the palace as an appeal to the King. "BNP youth league members, discontent former LLA members who had been dumped by the now ruling leadership of the LCD, BCP youth, intellectuals and some chiefs" were amongst those who responded to the call of the alliance. They made their way to the palace, blocked the streets and rendered the capital ungovernable (Hincks, 2009:750-751).

The Church speaks

The LEC released a statement at this time, warning politicians that in the past, the blood of many Basotho had been spilled as a result of politics. The church reminded Basotho that King Moshoeshe I had established the nation on the basis of peace, even going to the extent of calling peace his sister. The statement also reminded both political leaders



and the nation that God commands that people should not kill each other, but rather that they should love their neighbours as they love themselves (Moholi, 1998). The LEC church also stated that it did not support the participation of the church in party politics, noting also that the people of Lesotho want “Justice, Peace, Freedom and Reconciliation”. The church also warned politicians on all sides that their continued disagreement regarding the elections was undermining the people’s fundamental rights by causing them to live in fear and that the church could not stay silent within such a charged political atmosphere, where the property of people was being destroyed because of their political affiliation, or lack thereof (Moholi, 1998).

In following the footsteps of the LEC, the CCL also released a statement, saying that it was the right time for negotiations which would lead to the “truth of God because the political problems faced by Lesotho are not yet as bad as those in other African countries.” The CCL also expressed its expectation that the ongoing investigation would confirm or dismiss the allegations of bad administration of the elections by the IEC and provide recommendations that would satisfy all parties concerned (Moholi, 1998).

In 2002, again Basotho went to the polls to vote. Due to the experiences of 1998, this time the church was better prepared. Both the RCC and the LEC made strong statements, which were read in the churches and to all who were stakeholders in the upcoming elections. The Heads of Churches also held a prayer of peace with the leaders of all political parties that was led by the LEC’s Reverend JR Mokhahlane. In his speech, Mokhahlane reminded the leaders of the political parties that the church is mandated by Jesus Christ to facilitate and build peace on earth and therefore, in Lesotho also. He also went on to remind the leaders that the presence of the church in Lesotho was as a result of an invitation by King Moshoeshoe I, the founder of the nation who went to the extent of paying 200 cattle to procure at least one missionary in his quest for peace. Mokhahlane stressed that the leaders must remember that Moshoeshoe referred to peace as his sister and in order to obtain peace, he put the lives of his heirs at risk. Reverend Mokhahlane also told the leaders that peace is the foundation on which the country was built; hence, it is still relevant to bring unity amongst the Basotho who had been divided and shocked by the 1998 events. Mokhahlane further asserted that peace should be for all and that the church expected that no one’s rights would be infringed upon, as this could lead to disaster, as in the case of 1998 (Mokhahlane, 2002). Since the 2002 elections, Lesotho has been relatively peaceful. The church continues to play an active role both pastorally and prophetically.

Conclusion

This paper sought to locate the prophetic and pastoral voice of the church in Lesotho from the arrival of the church in 1833 to 2002 which can be considered as being recent. This is important in the context of Lesotho as the church is mostly referred to in passing, yet the role the church has played in the development and history of Lesotho is great. The church has been an ambassador for Lesotho politically, a protector of Lesotho’s interests such as land, it acted in an advisory role, and also rebuked the state where necessary.

The church in Lesotho has definitely matured. With the inception of the CCL and the HOC, the church grew into an organised ecumenical body that was ready to fight on behalf of society to see the return of democracy and responsible statesmanship that would bring peace and stability back to Lesotho. The prophetic and pastoral voice of the church have been present and in the public domain. Therefore, the church in Sotho society has played a critical and indispensable role in peace making and political stability. The relevance of the church in Sotho society is therefore indispensable. The church in Lesotho has had a very pronounced voice both prophetically and pastorally, being a beacon of hope and



fighting to protect the rights of Basotho and calling into order politicians and governments during the developmental history of Lesotho as a country. In celebrating 200 years for Basotho, the work the church continues to do in Lesotho and amongst Basotho should also be celebrated. The significance of the gospel and this institution have contributed to the nation building project that started in 1824.

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