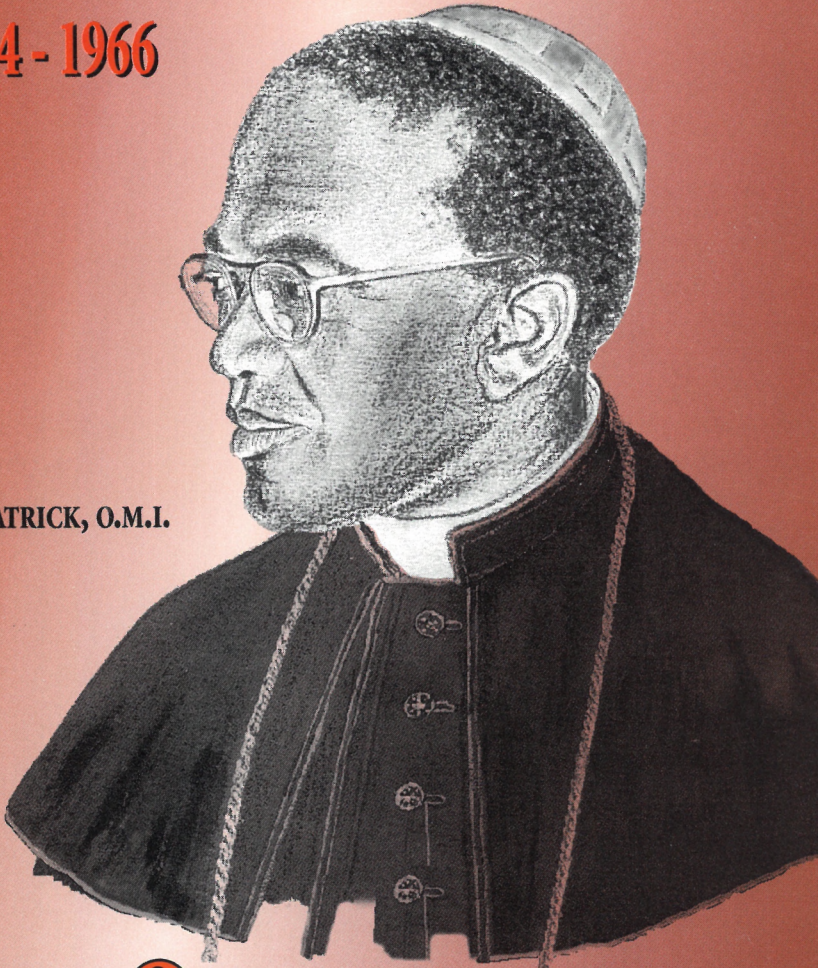



Emmanuel 'Mabathoana, O.M.I.

1904 - 1966

JAMES
FITZPATRICK, O.M.I.



OBLATE
HERITAGE

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“One of Our Own”

Emmanuel 'Mabathoana, O.M.I.
1904-1966

Fr. James M. FitzPatrick, O.M.I.

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Oblate Heritage Series
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Note: In the writing of this biography use was made of a number of recollections of the later years of the Archbishop's life supplied by Fr. Guy Gaudreau, O.M.I., who was his secretary for many years.

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Emmanuel 'Mabathoana, O.M.I.

1904-1966

Moshesh — Warrior and Statesman

One of the most under-rated warriors and statesmen in the history of Africa is Moshesh (or Moshoeshoe) of Basutoland — or Lesotho as it is called today.^(*) This area of southern Africa had been inhabited first by the Bushman, and evidence of their occupation of the land is seen in some remaining cave paintings. The distinctive “click” sound in a few words of the language, mostly place names, owes its origin also to these tribes. The Bushmen gradually died out and Bantu people, the Nguni (Zulu-speaking) group, crossed the Drakensberg Ranges and settled along the Caledon river. Later Sesotho speaking tribes joined them.

Zulu Wars — Moshesh Is Born

Life was peaceful until the renowned Zulu warrior Chaka stirred trouble in the surrounding areas. A period of great turmoil ensued — tribes split up, many fled, crops were destroyed, cattle killed and there were frequent famines.

Around 1790 Moshesh was born at Menkhoaning in northern Basutoland, and whilst still a young man took over leadership of the nation. He rallied the people, led guerilla raids against Chaka, and from his fortress at Thaba Bosiu repelled numerous attacks right up until the great battle against Mozilikatze (Mzilikasi) in 1831 who was repulsed and had to retreat.

^(*) The terms used as regards Basutoland or Lesotho may be summarized as follows:

- Basutoland - the British name for present-day Lesotho (used until Independence in 1966)
- Lesotho - the name of the country today is The Kingdom of Lesotho
- Mosotho - one inhabitant of Lesotho
- Basotho - the plural form of Mosotho
- Sesotho - the language of the Basotho.

War with the Boers: British Protection

After the Zulu menace was contained, Moshesh had to face a new enemy — the Europeans trekking up from the south. At first all was peaceful, but tension grew between the Basotho and the Boers. Moshesh the warrior became Moshesh the statesman, as he reasoned that the best hope for his country was in an alliance with the British. He negotiated their protection in 1843. But within 5 years the British proclaimed sovereignty over the neighbouring Orange Free State and later even reduced Moshesh's territory. The British renounced sovereignty over the Boers of the Orange in 1854, and Moshesh and his people were plunged into a period of constant struggles with their Zulu, Boer and British neighbours. Eventually peace was established and in 1868 Moshesh was able to have Basutoland proclaimed a British territory. It remained under British protection until the granting of independence in 1966.

Moshesh was a man of peace, despite his need at times to be a warrior, and he established a good rule of justice among those groups and tribes who formed the present-day Kingdom of Lesotho. He was a great diplomat, and a far-seeing statesman. He is venerated, and rightly so, as the Father of the Nation.

Moshesh and the Founding of Christianity

In 1833, Moshesh, foreseeing difficult times ahead from the pressure of European settlement, welcomed missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Mission Society to start missions in his country. He sought and was helped greatly by their advice. In 1862 Bishop Allard, O.M.I., Fr. Joseph Gérard, O.M.I., and Br. Bernard, O.M.I. came from the South seeking permission to establish Catholic Missions. Moshesh received them kindly, granted them as land the Roma Valley, and counselled his people to listen to their teaching. Moshesh himself developed a deep respect for Fr. Gérard, and received much help and support from him in his struggles against the Boers. Moshesh himself never became a Christian but he was responsible, because of his vision and tolerance, for the establishment of the Christian religion in his country. His grandson, Chief Griffith, was to embrace Christianity by being baptised a Catholic in

1910, and his great granddaughter was to give birth to a son Emmanuel who was to be the first native born Bishop of his people.

Men of Destiny

In the political sphere Moshesh achieved nationhood for the Basotho people. In the area of the spiritual Fr. Joseph Gérard, O.M.I. brought Catholic Christianity to these people, and it remains today the biggest denomination. Both these men, Moshesh and Gérard, were founders of the country. Later on the genius, the dedication, of these two men was to come together in a unique way in one man. He was a direct descendant by blood of Moshesh, and a spiritual son of Gérard. He was a member of the Royal Family of Lesotho, and a priest of the religious family of Fr. Gérard, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

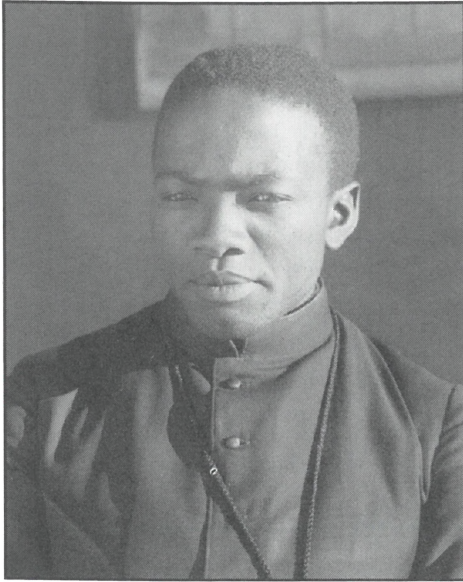
A Shepherd Is Born

Emmanuel 'Mabathoana was born in the town of Mafekeng, Basutoland, on Christmas Day 1904 — hence his preferred name, Emmanuel. His parents were Gregory and 'Me Philomena, both Catholics. His mother was a direct descendant of the great Moshesh (her maiden name being Moshoeshoe of the Mokoena group). This heritage, and his relationship to the ruling Royal Family, placed Emmanuel in a special place in his society. Until he was eight years old he lived at his grandfather's house, under the care of Nteletsana, one of the numerous wives of Paramount Chief Letsie. Like most young Basotho, he spent a number of years whilst a very young boy as a shepherd — a coincidence not without significance to his future avocation.

Fortunately, because of his family, Emmanuel was not condemned to many long years as a shepherd — which was common — but was sent to school early. His primary schooling he did with the Sisters of the Holy Family. When 13 years old he moved to the Marist Brothers College, where he proved to be an outstanding student, regularly topping his class. In 1924, aged 20, he was among the first three local students to enter St. Augustine's Seminary to study for the priesthood.

Seminary

The Seminary meant years of study, but in this Emmanuel found no problems. He had learnt Latin for two years with Fr. Odilon Chevrier, O.M.I. and had achieved such mastery that he



himself was able to teach it during his seminary days. He showed an immediate and deep interest in music — and this was to remain an abiding involvement. However the demands of Seminary life were not always easy. Once, when he was on the verge of quitting, Sr. Xavier Makhaba, the first Mosotho Sister, calmed his fears and persuaded him to remain, telling him to place his vocation under the guidance of Mary Immaculate. Emmanuel was to remember this advice with gratitude all his life.

The Oblates: The Priesthood

In 1932 it was to the Oblates' novitiate that the young seminarian went. A year of intense spiritual training led to his first vows as an Oblate of Mary Immaculate on January 6th 1933. His studies continued, and finally, at the Cathedral of Roma, Emmanuel 'Mabathoana, great great grandson of Chief Moshesh, was ordained a priest by Bishop J.C. Bonhomme, O.M.I. on June 28th, 1934. Basutoland had its first Oblate native son. It was the Oblates who had brought the faith to these embattled people, and stories of such great missionaries as Father Joseph Gérard, O.M.I., (beatified in Lesotho by Pope John Paul II on Sept. 15th 1988) were a living part of the fabric of this faith. The mission was coming of age.

Fr. 'Mabathoana liked to recall the story that Bishop Bonhomme told him. Just after his ordination as a Bishop Mons. Bonhomme had been asked to ordain some Canadian

University Professor

seminarians. This request he refused, saying: "I would prefer that my first ordination should be that of a black priest". And so Fr. 'Mabathoana would later explain with joy: "*I am that black priest: that wish fulfilled*".

After his ordination the many intellectual gifts of the young priest were put to good use in teaching at the Seminary and at Pius XII University College. This college of higher learning was established in 1945 to give to the local people the possibility of tertiary study on their home soil. It was a unique place, the intellectual powerhouse of the country, and a haven for much good as Basutoland grew into modern Africa. Here Fr. 'Mabathoana was Professor of African languages — a subject he also taught at St. Augustine's Seminary to increasing generations of priests.

His interest in and grasp of languages was amazing. He was fluent in Sesotho, Peli, Tswana, Zulu and Xhosa. As well as these African languages, he spoke then or mastered later, three European languages — English, French and Italian, as well as Afrikaans. He did much pioneering work in African languages — he became a specialist in idioms of Sesotho, and also wrote a book of grammar of that language.

At a later date (1951-1952) he went overseas to Rome and London to study. At the London University School of Oriental Languages (African languages were included in this!) Fr. 'Mabathoana found himself in the unusual position of knowing far more, both in depth and in breath, than any of the professors who were supposed to teach him. However, he enjoyed his English experience, and took advantage of his stay to visit Oblate houses and to assist in London parishes.

He also kept up his interest in music — especially in liturgical music and plainsong. He taught this at both University and Seminary, and helped to instill a love of music and liturgy into many young people with whom he shared his knowledge and enthusiasm.

Guide To His People

Apart from his purely academic endeavours, the new priest soon became known for another quality — his pastoral concern and care. The fact of his name and his royal lineage was certainly a reason for people to approach him and trust him. The fact of his being the first locally-born Oblate was also in his favour. But it was his warm personality and winning ways that were the main attractions. Here was a man set apart by his family tradition and by his status in his country, but yet one who was open, humble, approachable, always smiling, ready to listen — even to the most obtuse. Young and old, parent and child, educated and unschooled — all felt confident in coming to him for an opinion, a direction, an encouragement, a willing ear. He was a man of the people for the people. He did not eschew the traditions and lore of his country — he loved his heritage, he encouraged its preservation, e.g. he frequently advised the use of traditional medicines. He wasn't a man in an ivory tower, or one far from his roots. His realism, his common sense, his wisdom based on faith and humanity drew people to him. He gave spiritual conferences to many groups and was much in demand as a retreat preacher for religious.

Along with his teaching, and his counselling Fr. 'Mabathoana was given further responsibilities. He was made Superior of the Minor Seminary of St. Theresa, and later Vice-Superior of St. Augustine's Major Seminary. In these positions of authority he showed firmness as required, and kindness in all things.

A Bishop of Their Own

In 1950 the Holy See, wishing to regularize the various mission territories, prefectures and dioceses of the Church in southern Africa, decided to establish 20 dioceses grouped together under four Metropolitan Archbishops. At this time the whole of Basutoland was but one diocese, and attached to the ecclesiastical province of Bloemfontein. In these new divisions, a decision was made to create a second diocese in Basutoland, in the northern part of the country, centered at Leribe.



On December 11th 1952 the Holy Father by decree erected the Diocese of Leribe, and nominated Fr. Emmanuel 'Mabathoana, O.M.I. to be its first Bishop. It was announced on December 17th. Within a day the news spread through the country — a new diocese, the first Mosotho Bishop, “*one of our own*”! There was surprise, joy, celebration. Here was the first native Bishop in southern Africa — and he was from Basutoland! It was news of an ecclesiastical nature — but it also had social, even political, overtones. “Now we know that the Catholic Church is the true Church, because it is above questions of race and colour. We would never have dreamed that a black man could have been raised to such a position of dignity”, said a local leader. The papers, Catholic and Protestant, religious and secular, local and from all over Africa, hailed the appointment. The church in Basutoland was clearly reaching adulthood.

"With Mary's Help"

What of the bishop elect? He was a little stunned at all the publicity, but conscious of what his appointment meant for the Church and the nation. He also saw that his nomination as Bishop went beyond himself, since the decree of appointment, signed by Celso Costantini, Secretary of Propaganda Fide on December 11th 1952, contained this paragraph: "...the Holy See congratulates the Oblates on the occasion of this appointment, which is a tangible sign of recognition of the fruitful labors of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in so many missions, and especially in Basutoland."

The new Bishop-to-be was explicit in his attachment to his religious family. He wrote to Fr. A. Desnoyer, O.M.I., Assistant General, a month before his episcopal ordination:

"As my nomination as (Bishop) was announced during the Octave of the Immaculate Conception, and my ordination is to be on the Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin, and noting also that my nomination is an honour for the Oblates on the occasion of the centenary of their arrival in South Africa, I have chosen as my motto a phrase from Article 62 of our Rules and Constitutions — 'Favente Immaculata'."

He still remembered the advice of Sister Xavier from his seminary days — "Put your vocation under the patronage of Mary Immaculate."

March 25th was set as the date for the episcopal ordination of Emmanuel 'Mabathoana. It took place at the mission of Saint Monica — which had been founded by Fr. Joseph Gérard, O.M.I. himself, the Father of the Church in Basutoland. The ceremonies turned into a national feast — the likes of which had never been seen before in the country. Close to 20,000 people, (some who had walked for four days to be present), 10 Archbishops and Bishops, 125 priests, over 200 Sisters and 50 Brothers, the British Resident commissioner, local chiefs led by the Paramount Chief, the Regent Amelia Mantsebo Seeiso, representatives from the Union of South Africa, Canada, Germany, heads and groups from the various Churches. And in

Episcopal Ordination - A National Feast



the front row, quiet and reserved, the father and mother of the new Bishop.

The three co-consecrating Bishops were: Bishop Des Rosiers, O.M.I. of Maseru, Bishop Whelan, O.M.I. of Johannesburg, and Bishop Kelleter, C.S.Sp. of Bethlehem, South Africa. The ceremony lasted three and a half hours, and the jubilation of the immense crowd reached the high point when the new bishop was invested with his ring, pectoral cross, crozier and mitre. The shouts of joy echoed and re-echoed. No one had ever seen a black African vested like this before — a Mosotho like themselves. And as he was seated on his throne he added a note to the history of the church — he was the first residential indigenous Bishop in the whole of Africa in the modern era. Not just a Vicar Apostolic — but the residential Bishop of Leribe.

The ceremonies and the gatherings, the speeches and the feasting, the songs and the prayers went on well into the night and the next days. The whole of the nation was caught up in the joy of this moment.

At the dinner following the ordination, the new Bishop expressed his thanks to all and concluded with these words:

“Let us all be united in one prayer for the conversion and advancement of our beloved continent of Africa so that it may no longer be ‘the Dark Continent’ but one of shining light.”

Emmanuel 'Mabathoana, Bishop of Leribe, was a point of brightness, and his people were happy and proud to bask in its reflection.

Work of the Diocese

When all the shouting had died down, the Bishop was faced with the immense task of setting up a new diocese, of caring for his clergy, of ministering to his people.

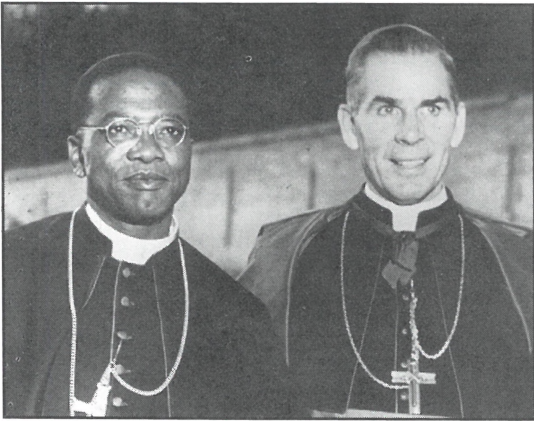
There were 42,000 Catholics (out of a population of 135,000 inhabitants), with 18 priests (8 local, 7 Canadian, 2 French, 1 Dutch). There were 4 different Congregations of Sisters and one of Brothers involved in schools in the Diocese.

The new Pastor of the Diocese set out on a visit of all the missions. Whilst his reception at each place was rapturous — e.g. at Pontmain Mission, 400 horsemen and 2000 men on foot escorted him to the Church — he saw the many and serious needs of the diocese. He singled out as the most pressing, the shortage of clergy, and determined that the establishment of a minor seminary for preparatory training should be a first priority.

A Bishop on the Move

To draw the attention of others to the needs of the Diocese, and to raise funds for various projects, especially his much-loved minor seminary, Bishop 'Mabathoana made a number of visits to Europe and to North America. He was tireless in these efforts, as he was absolutely committed to encouraging a local clergy and providing for their training.

He moved through many countries of Europe, appearing and appealing. He linked up with Bishop Fulton Sheen in the United States to find a platform through the Propagation of the Faith. He covered Canada so well that he called it his “country of adoption”. At this time he wrote:

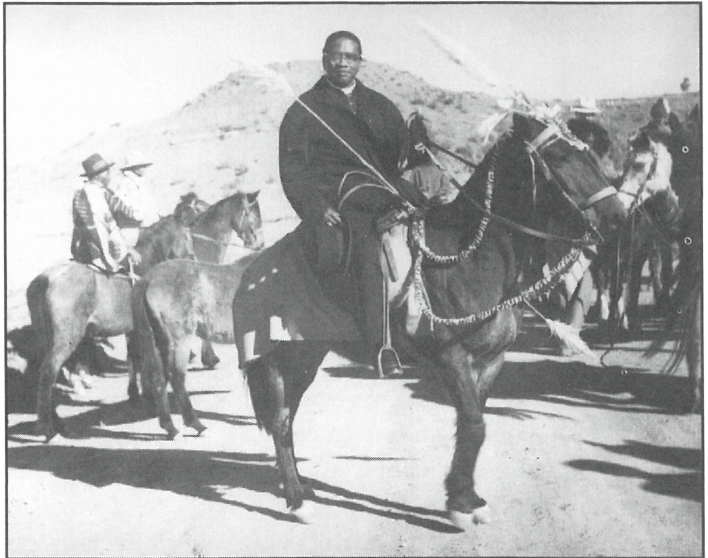


“I am prepared to show the purple (his Bishop’s robes) so that in any way the missionary work of Basutoland will be better known.....My hope rests in these young black priests whom we are preparing for the diocese”.

People responded generously in many countries, and different Oblate Provinces

gave considerable sums of money to help. He was able to establish his minor seminary, which became the seed-bed for many vocations to the priesthood for local young men.

At home he continued his pastoral visits around the diocese, frequently having to go on horseback to missions and villages inaccessible by other transport. More and more he reached out to his people, and their respect and love for him grew apace.



Music and Liturgy

The Bishop's love for music was not stifled amidst the cares of the diocese. In the early years of his episcopate he found time to compose around forty hymns, including the National Hymn in honour for Our Lady of Fatima. His liturgical sense led him to compose a number of motets which were greatly appreciated. He composed a Mass to commemorate the Martyrs of Uganda, and also a Mass in honour of St. Cecilia. This Mass became very popular throughout the country, and is still constantly sung. Were Bishop 'Mabathoana alive today he should perhaps have gone further in marrying the Sesotho and the Christian spirit — as he was enamored of both. However, his first efforts in liturgical music laid a foundation for future Africanization of the liturgy. Even now, much remains to be done.

His precision of language and his literary skills were also put to use in preparation of liturgical texts for local use. He worked on a translation of the Roman Missal and the Ritual. His translation of the Ritual was enthusiastically received by priests not only of Basutoland, but also by those working with the Basotho in South Africa, and among the Batswana and Peli peoples, as these languages are very similar.

Archbishop of Maseru

Pope John XXIII, seeing the development of the church in Basutoland, determined to restructure the dioceses. The major Diocese, based on the nation's capital Maseru, was to be raised to the status of a Metropolitan Archdiocese, and a third and new Diocese, centered at Qacha's Nek, was to be established.

The plan went ahead — but the choice of men to lead the Dioceses was a surprise. The veteran Bishop of Maseru, Mons. Des Rosiers, O.M.I., was transferred from Maseru to the new Diocese of Qacha's Nek which embraced the difficult mountainous territory on the east of the country. Bishop 'Mabathoana was transferred to Maseru and promoted to the rank of Archbishop. Not only did the local people deem the establishment of Maseru as an Archdiocese as a national honour and a sign of confidence in the local church, but they

were overjoyed that their own native son was to be the first Archbishop. Again Emmanuel 'Mabathoana was a cause of pride for all the Basotho nation — this descendant of Chief Moshesh was to be chief pastor of the Catholic Church in the nation.

When Basutoland was all one diocese the Bishops resided at Roma — the original mission given to Fr. Joseph Gérard, O.M.I. by Moshesh. Roma is 33 kms from the capital Maseru, and is the site of the Seminary, Pius XII University College, the Oblate Scholasticate, and of many convents, schools and religious houses. However, now that the country had been given an Archiepiscopal See based on the capital Maseru, the new Archbishop felt that he should reside in Maseru. He was reluctant to move because of tradition, and because of his love for Roma. However, realizing the growing importance of the nation's capital, he made the move to Maseru, leaving with sadness the Roma Church, the “pro-Cathedral” as it was so frequently called, the Church in whose grounds lay buried the body of the saintly Fr. Joseph Gérard, O.M.I.

L. J. C. ET M. I.



Maseru — A New Challenge

As his diocese was now a Metropolitan See with two dependent Dioceses, and as the Church was growing rapidly, Archbishop 'Mabathoana was faced with increasing administrative pressures, many of which presented special challenges.

- **PROBLEMS WITH APARTHEID** — The Archdiocese of Maseru owned a farm (Villa St. Joseph — *Farmdale*) over the border in the Republic of South Africa. This property was run to support the Archdiocese. However when Archbishop 'Mabathoana became head of the Diocese a problem arose. He was black: black people couldn't own land in the Republic of South Africa! Eventually, after a lot of bureaucratic wrangling, it was made clear to the South African authorities that *Farmdale* was owned by the Archdiocese as such as a 'moral person', and not by the Archbishop personally.

It is of interest to note that the question of apartheid in South Africa had a special significance for Archbishop 'Mabathoana. Basutoland is completely surrounded by South Africa: it is a small enclave saved by having been a British Protectorate. In his work the Archbishop had to deal with many South African authorities — and they had to deal with him. At that time it was a shock to these people to have to treat at the same level with a black person in such a position of authority. They were not used to it, and Archbishop 'Mabathoana had many a wry smile at their obvious discomfort.

The Archbishop himself was a person who was genuinely "colour-blind". He looked to persons themselves, not the colour of their skins. He respected and rejoiced in the basic equality of all. He did not see colour as a qualitative difference, least of all as a mark of automatic superiority or inferiority.

He himself, indeed, treated the matter of colour lightly and with balance, as was evidenced by an incident in Canada. On one of his visits there he was officiating at a Solemn Mass, and was standing outside at the end of the procession of priests and servers waiting to enter. It was a hot humid summer day, and dressed in full vestments, with mitre and crozier, the Archbishop, like the rest, was perspiring heavily. With an impish smile he remarked to the group of young

altar servers around him: “*Look, the chocolate Bishop is melting!*”

- **PROBLEMS WITH Foyer Missionnaire** — This organization, based in Canada, had been established to help the missions of Basutoland. Some of the gifts received for the missions had been invested in land in Canada at Lac des Ecorces. Because of a disastrous financial upset, the *Foyer Missionnaire* failed, and all of a sudden the Archbishop, with very few funds at his disposal even for daily expenses, found himself saddled with a debt of more than \$US 300.000. Embarrassed, yet hopeful, he wrote to all the missions, asking the urgent help of the people; and they gave generously of what little they had. The General Administration of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and the Oblate Province of St. Joseph’s in Canada gave substantial gifts, and within a few years the Church was bailed out of the *Foyer Missionnaire* failure.



With the British Resident Commissioner

- **PROBLEMS AROUND INDEPENDENCE** — Basutoland, thanks to the astuteness of the great Moshesh, had been able to maintain its identity and national cohesion by throwing in its

lot with the British presence in southern Africa. However, the time for sovereign independence was approaching, and this came to reality during the years that Archbishop 'Mabathoana held the See of Maseru.

'Mabathoana himself was a man who had shown himself, both in word and in deed, a staunch Mosotho, convinced of the value of his national heritage and committed to preserving and advancing its culture. As head of the major Church of the nation, as a direct descendant of Moshesh its founder, and as a man of acknowledged wisdom, the Archbishop was a key figure in Basutoland. Every word he said was scrutinized, and the nascent political parties all vied for his attention. He had to tread a cautious path.

The transition to independent status was fraught with special problems. The move was to a democratic form of government, but there was the system, already in place for years, of local chieftainships. The chiefs were hereditary owners of land and controlled its use. They frequently were the arbiters in disputes, and were accepted leaders in their areas. There was the further complication of the kingship of the whole country. Moshesh had been head of the nation, and is revered as King Moshoeshoe I. His descendants have succeeded to the throne, but with lessening authority. When the matter of independence from Britain was being negotiated the position and power of the monarchy was a major issue — an absolute monarchy (a head chieftom with direct power) or a constitutional monarchy? The then royal incumbent was anxious to retain as much power as possible: a big section of the country, whilst wishing to retain the monarchy, was determined to see its role as separate from government, in the style of the monarchy in England. This led to serious constitutional clashes — and indeed the country is still not clear of these problems.

Archbishop 'Mabathoana had performed the elaborate royal marriage of the Paramount Chief, Constantinus Bereng Seiso, in 1962, and a year later had baptised his son and heir,

David Mohato Seeiso, at the royal palace at Matsieng. Being close to the royal family put the Archbishop in a difficult position, as he constantly strove for impartiality and non-involvement in the actual politics of the independence movement.

He also had to set his clergy a clear line of action, and urged them to steer clear of politicking. When reports came to him of abuses of position by certain priests and religious he was direct and uncompromising. On September 1st, 1964, midst the heat of independence debates, he sent a confidential letter to every Priest, Brother and Sister, leaving no room for doubt in the matter:

“...If we were to judge our ways of doing in connection with the political world, would we not find that, under certain circumstances we have lacked the meekness of Our Lord and imitated the harshness of the apostles who wanted to call down fire from heaven upon the villages of Samaria? From the pulpit, in the confessional, in our letters, in our classrooms, in conversations, in our writing to the Press, have we not shown that we are biased in favour of ONE party, instead of being above ALL parties?. Have we not broadcasted news to suit ourselves, without being sure of the facts, accepting reports before a prudent investigation has substantiated their value? Have we not denounced, condemned, excommunicated, or simply refused absolution where the Church has not pronounced itself? Have we not called certain groups by names I cannot repeat here, while the children of these group members were listening? On the other hand, have we prayed for all those we have criticized that they may receive God’s light and change their ways? Can we say that, though we condemn their evil attitudes and ways, we really love each one of them, trying to convert them to love their neighbour as God loves them? If we have not, then Our Lord could repeat to us what He said to the Apostles, “You do not know of what spirit you are.”

After speaking his mind so definitely and warning them, he put before them what he saw as their duty, their special contribution:

“My dear Missionaries, you have worked tremendously in the vineyard of the Lord. The fruition of our labours is at hand in the social field. Let us persevere in our endeavours in the glory of the Father’s love. Let us act in such a way that each Mosotho, no matter what his creed, may say of each of us: “They are our Fathers, our Sisters, our Brothers, not in name only but also in deed, because they really love our nation.”

These were the words of a leader, of a man of determination, of a man of faith, and they had an immediate salutary effect.

Standing at the centre of so many conflicting interests Archbishop ’Mabathoana was a potent force for rationality and peace in the fragile period leading up to independence, and especially in the highly volatile political jostling by various groups manoeuvring to gain power on the advent of independence. However, following the first elections, Archbishop ’Mabathoana was quick to come to the defence of the Church when he judged that it was being unfairly attacked. He was a man passionate in his sense of justice, and he issued a public letter *To all the citizens of Lesotho* in which he spoke straight to the point and did not mince his words:

“In our pastoral letter written in Rome on the 21st November 1964, we said that after the elections, all citizens should respect the decision of the nation and co-operate with the new Government. We regret very much the present anti-Government propaganda being spread by the Congress party.

The leaders of the Congress party have publicly proclaimed that their aim is to fight the Church...They blame the Priests for losing the election and accuse them of having sponsored the cause of the National Party through the pulpit and the confessional. The first tactics of the

enemies of the Church are always to slander its Priests, as was done by the Nazis in Germany. As the Shepherd of the Church in Lesotho, I am morally bound to defend her and wholeheartedly refute these slanders levelled at my Priests."

He went on to excoriate the Party for trying to interfere in internal church matters, to defend the right and the duty of a priest "to point out to his christians all dangers against their faith and morals". He ended, as was his custom, with a plea for mutual understanding and for "peace and harmony, in a truly patriotic and self-sacrificing spirit".

In all aspects of the move to independence, in democratic elections, and in the establishment of sovereign nationhood, Archbishop 'Mabathoana proved himself a just and fearless leader. In a country where sometimes political assassinations have, unfortunately, been the order of the day, he stood firm, calling for justice, speaking his mind publicly, and working for reconciliation. The strain of this period weighed heavily on his already delicate health. But he kept on giving of himself fully. The role he played in mediating peace in the transition to independence was a major contributing factor in his early and sudden death, as we shall see. The Kingdom of Lesotho (for this was its new name after formal independence on October 4th, 1966) owes a great deal to this gentle man who rose to lead his people strongly and wisely in a crucial period of their development. His great-great-grandfather would have been proud of him!

Whilst Archbishop 'Mabathoana had to deal with a number of difficulties, he also moved ahead with the development of the Church in his Archdiocese and in the whole country. Some special projects can be noted.

- **BASOTHO VOCATIONS.** When he was appointed Bishop of Leribe his first priority was the training of local clergy and religious. Now in Maseru this same concern claimed his active



interest. He sought the help of various religious congregations overseas for personnel for his missions — but in general with little success. He spoke about the recruitment of local vocations at every opportunity, and took an avid interest in his students. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate had been the founders, the builders, the developers, the heart of the priesthood of Basutoland since the beginning, and they were receiving and training local native clergy — the Archbishop himself being a prime example. The Oblates had also been the founders of the diocesan clergy by establishing and conducting St. Augustine's Seminary. Archbishop 'Mabathoana gave new impetus to the recruitment of native clergy. In 1962 when the Oblates set up their own separate Seminary to leave more scope for St. Augustine's to be a National Seminary for diocesan clergy, the Archbishop spoke at the dedication declaring that: "*The formation of local clergy is a matter of life and death for the Catholic missions.*" He was always a champion of this cause.

-THE SESOTHO-LANGUAGE PRESS. Convinced of the importance of the local language, the Archbishop appealed for and received help from the *Presse Missionnaire* of France to assist the local Catholic Sesotho paper, *Moeletsi oa Basotho*. This

had been established by the Oblates, produced in the local language, Sesotho, and was the most widely-read paper in the country. He also received aid to produce a Sesotho edition of the New Testament. Both of these, together with his translations of the Roman Missal and the Ritual, along with his own Sesotho Masses and hymns, illustrate his major influence on Basotho religious literature and liturgy.

-AID AGENCIES. Before independence, it was not allowable to call officially on international organizations for aid. However, Archbishop 'Mabathoana, seeing the need for overseas aid, worked with the local government to modify this. He was able to have established *Caritas Lesotho* to channel aid in areas of special need, e.g. shared gardens in villages, the piping of water, etc. It was he also who was able, in May 1965, after a crippling drought and its consequent famine, to procure saving food and medicine through *Catholic Relief Services*. This same agency established infant health care centres all throughout the country — again because of the Archbishop's appeal.

-CATECHISTS. As a tangible memorial to commemorate the centenary of the Church in Basutoland, in 1962, the Archbishop obtained funds to build a Community Centre in Maseru. This was blessed by Bishop Des Rosiers, O.M.I., at the Archbishop's invitation, and opened by King Moshoeshoe II during the centenary celebrations. A major purpose of this Centre was the training of catechists. Archbishop 'Mabathoana had seen the importance of this and had worked hard to make it a reality. He acknowledged that "*the lack of missionary personnel forces us to confide a third of our Christians and also our catechumens, to these lay catechists*". He valued their contribution to the Church's mission, and sought to provide the best training possible for them.

-EMMANUEL HOSTEL. Archbishop 'Mabathoana always had a lively sense of the needs of the poor, and made it a constant

endeavour to do what he could, within his means, to raise them up to a better life. As the nation developed, many young girls from the countryside came into Maseru seeking work. They arrived with limited, or no, funds and were not used to the ways and demands of city living. To provide them with a chance to build a more secure life, the Archbishop organized the establishment of a residential hostel for these girls, as a support and a haven. He got together an interdenominational committee to finance it, but it was only after his death that it was finished. His successor, Archbishop Morapeli, O.M.I., named it fittingly *Emmanuel Hostel*.

-UNIVERSITY ADULT EDUCATION. The Catholic Bishops of Southern Africa had established the Pius XII University College for higher education — the first such establishment in the country and had subsequently entrusted its running to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Archbishop 'Mabathoana himself had for many years been a professor there. When the University moved on its plan to develop the Roma Valley it hoped to establish a department of Adult Education. Some of the administrators were against the idea, but the Archbishop enthusiastically endorsed it, giving it all the moral support he could. It was a concept close to his own heart, and essential for the future development of the nation. The University College of Pius XII has now become the National University of Lesotho, and the Department of Adult Education is one of the most active sections of the University with 40 staff and close on 15,000 students.

By these, and many other projects, Archbishop 'Mabathoana cultivated the Church in Basutoland, and especially in his own Archdiocese of Maseru. He was a man who had not only an appreciation of the past; he had also a feeling for the future, and a canny sense of what needed to be put in place now to bear fruit later. Missions, schools, administrative structures all felt his touch and concern. He planted well.

Centenary of the Church

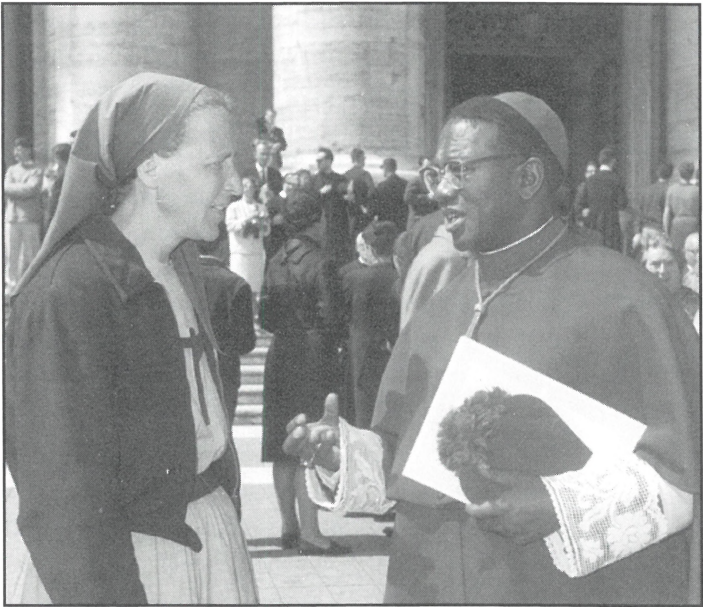
In 1862 when the first Oblate missionaries, Bishop Allard, Fr. Joseph Gérard, and Brother Bernard, had come to bring Catholicism to the Basotho nation, they had been welcomed by the King. However, some of the Paris Evangelical Mission Society ministers had tried to stop them establishing the mission. They resorted to scurrilous stories about the Catholic Church and even about the Oblate missionaries themselves. However Moshesh was happy to have the Catholic missionaries among his people. On hearing the argument of the ministers that they had already brought the light of faith to the people, the king disarmed them charmingly: *“But isn’t it a fact that two candles give more light than one?”*

The Catholic Church, planted by those early Oblate missionaries, and further cultured by French, Belgian, Dutch and Canadian Oblate missionaries, now saw an increasing number of local Basotho priests rising to take over the reins.

In 1962 the Church celebrated its Centenary, and Archbishop ’Mabathoana presided over the celebrations. These went beyond merely a recognition of religious history — they were a celebration of national achievement and a foretaste of impending independence. Bishop representatives of many African Churches, government and diplomatic personalities, all gathered to salute the fruits of the labours of these early pioneers. Their efforts had been brought to fruition through the faith of the Basotho people, and by their fidelity. It was a time to celebrate the light of faith referred to by Moshesh, and hoped for by the newly consecrated Bishop ’Mabathoana on the day of his episcopal ordination. It was another moment of grace for the Church of Basutoland.

Vatican II

Whilst the missions of Basutoland were growing, there were major developments in the wider Church. On January 25th 1959 Pope John XXIII, at the Basilica of St. Paul’s Outside the Walls in Rome, startled the Catholic world by summoning a General Council. This was to be a gathering of the Bishops of the whole world to consider the life and mission of the Church.



.In Rome for the Council

The last such Council had taken place from December 1869 to July 1870. The interest and expectation, not only of the Catholic Church but indeed of all Christian denominations and non-Christian bodies, was felt also in Basutoland. As the work of preparation for the Council got under way, Archbishop 'Mabathoana was chosen to be a member of the Commission on the Missions, reinforcing his oft-repeated phrase "*We (Basotho) also are missionaries*". He travelled to Rome with the other Bishops from all nations and saw again the broad sweep of the Catholic world. Like many of the bishops there, he was perhaps overwhelmed by the complexity and rapidity of the changing Church, and not fully aware of all the implications of what was occurring. Yet, through it all, Archbishop 'Mabathoana was convinced of the in-rushing of the Holy Spirit, and he kept an open heart and mind. To him it was an occasion of wonder and joy.

On his return to his Archdiocese he dedicated himself with extraordinary vigour to sharing the grace and the excitement of

In Touch With His People

this wonderful gathering. He set out on a visitation of every one of his 42 missions to talk to the people about the Council and to share with them his faith experience. This tour of his Archdiocese brought to his faithful a vivid sense of the Church and a realization that they were an integral part of it. After all, hadn't their own Mosotho Archbishop been there in their name?

One of the great joys of Archbishop 'Mabathoana was to be out among the people of his Archdiocese. He personally continued to do the rounds of the churches administering the Sacrament of Confirmation. Never robust, he suffered from severe leg ulcers, and weak lungs, but he still travelled, often indeed on horseback, to be a priest to his people. These journeys, however pleasing, took a toll on his health.

He was constantly looking for occasions to mix and talk with people. He was a typical Mosotho in his love for long conversations, feasts, parades, singing, spectacles, story-telling, lively liturgies. He was at home with the people and they felt the same with him. There are hundreds of Basotho who tell of personal encounters, of shared confidences, of time spent with this most amiable pastor of souls. He encouraged all his priests to give of their time to the people, to join in and to lead celebrations, to be always at the disposal of the faithful. The Archbishop himself set the example.

September 19th, 1966

As the Bishops of the Dioceses of Basutoland had not yet been organized into an autonomous Episcopal Conference, they met with the Bishops of neighbouring South Africa. On September 19th 1966 the Archbishop set out to attend a meeting of the Administrative Board of the South African Bishop's Conference in Pretoria. He boarded a South African Airlines plane to fly from Bloemfontein to Johannesburg. Shortly after take-off he suffered a massive heart attack, and despite efforts to revive him with on-board oxygen, he was pronounced dead on the arrival of the flight in Johannesburg.

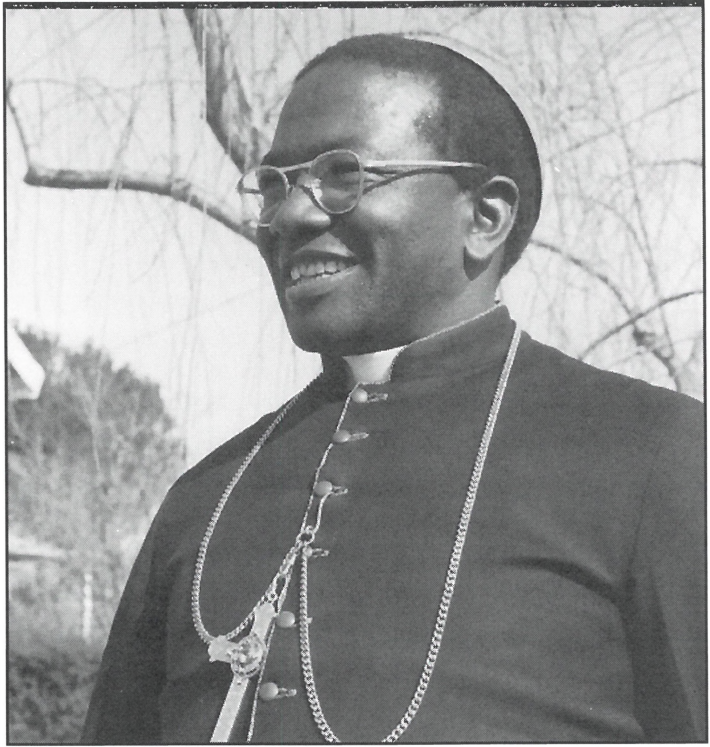
A Nation Grieves: His Funeral

He was 62 years old — 5 years as Archbishop of Maseru, 13 years a Bishop, 32 years a priest, 33 years an Oblate of Mary Immaculate.

His sudden death, outside his beloved homeland, sent a wave of grief throughout Basutoland. People ran into the streets in disbelief. Could it be real? He was only 62. Truly, a wailing was heard in the land. The outpouring of sorrow at his untimely death was eloquent testimony of the place he held in the nation, in the Church. It seemed as if part of the soul of the people had been cut away.

His body was embalmed in Johannesburg and brought back to his homeland. A three-mile long procession met the cortege at the country's border post and moved to his Cathedral, Our Lady of Victories, Maseru, for a first Requiem Mass attended by Church and State dignitaries. The body lay in state in the Cathedral, and the next day the Solemn Liturgy of the Mass was celebrated. Archbishops and Bishops from many parts of Africa, the Prime Minister, Chief Leabua Jonathan, Paramount Chief Moshoeshe II, members of the Cabinet, representatives of the Republic of South Africa, heads of Religious congregations, priests, religious sisters and brothers and an immense crowd of people joined in the three-hour liturgy. The body was then taken for burial, according to the late Archbishop's express instructions, to the church at Roma — the church in which he had been baptised, in which he had received his First Communion and the Sacrament of Confirmation, been ordained a priest, and celebrated his First Mass.

As his coffin lay open before the altar at Roma, his mother (who died in 1978, aged 103) called for a cloth, saying: "*There's dust on his face*". Then, with gentle maternal care, she wiped his face, his eyelids, his cheeks, his hands. This beautiful gesture was a sign of the love she had for this man who, whilst raised to great honour, was still her son. She had brought him into this world with tenderness: she now handed him on to the next with



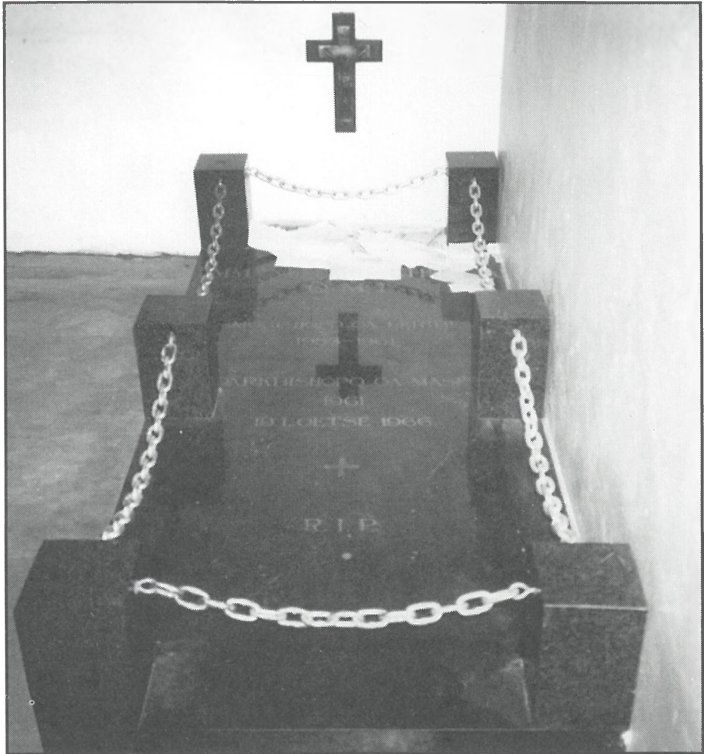
dignity. Condolences, expressions of sympathy, tributes, testimonials poured into Maseru from all parts of the world, from ecclesiastical and civic leaders, from the ordinary people who had been uplifted by him in so many ways. His was no ordinary passing.

**A Nation
Remembers:
His
Resting
Place**

Just 19 days after the death of Archbishop 'Mabathoana Basutoland became Lesotho, the Protectorate became the Kingdom. He had worked so hard to steer the fledgling nation through all the potential shoals and rapids on its way to independence, and to smooth the troubled waters. And he had done this with grace and charity, with wisdom and justice, with love and pride. He had been a man of substance in his people's and his nation's history.

All his life he had stood close to his God as he reached out to serve his people. Sharing his gifts of heart and of grace he had been a symbol of his belief and a model of devotion. With an unusual joyousness he had served both God and man. His love for his people was matched by their love for him. He had been a man of faith for God and for the Church.

His body lies in the soil of Roma — the gift of his ancestor Moshesh to the first Catholic missionaries. Day by day, even now 30 years after his death, the people of Lesotho come to visit his grave. On it they place flowers of remembrance, and hundreds of letters of request for his intercession before God. Emmanuel 'Mabathoana — Mosotho, Oblate, Priest, Bishop — has certainly not died in the memory of his people. And isn't that the ultimate tribute of this world?



**Archbishop 'Mabathoana's Tomb in the Roma Church
With Letters of Petition for His Intercession.**

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