From Béarn to Southern Africa
or The Amazing Destiny of Eugène Casalis

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By

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Translated from French by Jeanne Beckner

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FOREWORD

One of the problems faced by French researchers when they write on Southern Africa is that of orthography. The spoken languages were transcribed by missionaries of different nationalities, in this case, mostly by the French and the British. Thus, the sounds heard when they were transcribed were not written in the same way and were affected by their respective orthographies. This explains the different spellings of proper nouns depending on the origin of the documents. For example, the residence of King Moshesh is spelt "Thaba-Bossiou" by the French missionaries, as opposed to "Thaba Bosiu" in English, and in the same way, "Thaba-Nchou" becomes "Thaba Nchu." The English rendering of "Bassoutos" is "Basutos," and Eugène Casalis spells the name of Moshesh's old enemy, "Sékonyéla," when he writes in French, but he spells it "Sikonyela" in his letters written in English which are registered in the *Basutoland Records* and the present spelling is Sekonyela. The spellings may even vary as the years go by. Casalis first refers to the queen as "Mammahatou," then quickly changes the spelling to "Mamohato"; he writes "koranna" in earlier writings, then "korana" in later written works. During his lifetime the King was known by all as "Moshesh," but the historians who came after called him "Moshoeshoe." I have used the present spelling of Basotho, and no "s" in the plural for ethnic groups when not in a quote.

I have extensively quoted works written by Eugène Casalis and in order to avoid long footnotes, I have simplified my references as follows: *Mes Souvenirs* (MS), *Les Bassoutos* (LB), *Etude sur la langue séchuana* (ELS), *En service commandé* (ESC) and *Les Missions et les langues nationales* (MLN). I have also made extensive use of the *Basutoland Records* (BR) and various volumes of the *Journal des Missions Evangéliques* (JME). The quotes in the book are translated from the French except those from the *Basutoland Records* or from books written in English.

I would like to express my thanks to several people: first of all, to Didier Casalis whom I initially encountered in quite unexpected circumstances and who entrusted me with some of his great-grandfather's unpublished letters. I am very grateful to him.

Many thanks to Professor David Ambrose who frequently took the initiative and sent me several documents of great interest; in particular, several volumes of the *Lesotho Annotated Bibliography*.

My grateful thanks also go to Steve Gill, the curator of the archives in Morija, for responding so promptly to my emails asking for clarification of various historical details and to Claire-Lise Lombard at the DEFAP who was most helpful whenever I needed to consult the library of the Protestant Mission in Paris.

I am particularly grateful of course to Jeanne Beckner who gave so much of her precious time to this translation.

Heart-felt thanks to Keith Waddell who carries out wonderful missionary work with his wife Ida, in Mwandi Mission in Zambia. He re-read the whole book with an eagle-eye that equals that of the Basotho. Let us mention that Mwandi is where Livingstone preached the Gospel for the first time on the Zambezi. Later a mission was founded there by Reverend François Coillard, one of Casalis's former students at the PEMS, with the help of William Waddell, a Scottish carpenter and a remote relative of Keith.

Last but not least, many thanks to Antjie Krog, whom I met in Lesotho when she was attending the Casalis symposium that I co-organized in Morija to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Eugène Casalis' birth, and who kindly agreed to write a preface to this book.

PREFACE

ANTJIE KROG

It was to be an important day in the winter of 1969. I sensed that from my parents' excitement mixed with a distinct twinge of nervousness. We would be entering 'another country' – nobody in our family had ever set foot outside South Africa – but with hindsight I realize that the nervousness emanated from the fact that we, my parents and their five children, thoroughly moulded by Hendrik Verwoerd's apartheid ideology of the sixties, were finding ourselves in a space governed solely by black people.

Although my father was fluent in Sesotho, and often complimented by Basotho that he spoke the 'King's Sesotho' meaning the real classical Sesotho from Lesotho, they were obviously anxious about negotiating a journey through a country where they had no longer any right to privilege. And who knew whether black people, who 'could do nothing without being supervised by whites', could present a functional space – what if we needed water, a toilet, food, got a flat wheel, ran a goat over, who knew whether black police didn't wield their power as arbitrarily as white police?

As staying in a hotel owned and run by black people was simply unthinkable, we slept on a holiday farm as close to the border of Lesotho as possible. Early the next morning we went through customs: white people on 'our' side speaking Afrikaans, black people on the other side speaking Sesotho with my father, joking and laughing a lot. 'What? What are they saying?' we peppered him. 'They say I am a rich man with so many children and that it is good that I show them where the best cattle are grazing.'

I understood nothing (many children made us poor!), my mother grumbled something in front, but suddenly it became quiet in the car: we were driving into Maseru, the capital of Lesotho. 'But it looks just like us!' my younger brother said somewhat disappointed. 'Just blacker,' I said. 'And

more confident,' my mother said. And indeed as we observed purposeful and vigorously engaging pedestrians and drivers in the modern streets of the city, we received our first instruction in rethinking the black/white paradigm that we had been raised in.

We first went up a long breathtaking mountainous pass and stopped somewhere at a small church as my mother needed boiled water to make the youngest one's milk. When my father got out, a white priest with a black cassock and thick cape came out of his garden enclosure with an enormous snow dog by his side. It made an indelible impression on me: this man so high up in the mountains, white plumes coming from his mouth as he spoke in a foreign accent to my parents, his peaceful eyes, his rosy skin and the absolute exuberance flowing from him. When he brought the water a black priest coming from the small sandstone church joined him and I will never forget the ease of their interaction in Sesotho. My father formed part of the conversation but I had not before seen black and white talking and looking at each other with such a kind and pleasant deference.

Back in the car I kept on saying: I want to live like that, be like that, until my mother said, 'Read Casalis.' That was the first time I heard the name, and it was pronounced in an Afrikaans way: every letter audible and an accent on the second syllable. 'Who was he?' 'A white man that was like a kaffir,' (the word kaffir was 'normal' speak in the sixties!) but my father suggested: 'Rather a white man that was loved by kaffirs.' Then my parents had a long discussion about what Moshoeshoe might have meant when he told Casalis: "You are a true MoSotho."

It was fascinating to hear how, again with hindsight, they negotiated apartheid norms with their own undermining experiences: my father who was practically raised by black people on the farm, and my mother after having read Casalis's account of living among the Basotho fell under the spell of King Moshoeshoe. It was late afternoon when we made our last stop: Morija like a green jewel in a vast panorama of plains and blue-pervaded mountains. I was explained there who Casalis was, but nobody visits Morija without being touched in some profound way by the quiet dignified manifestation of dreaming goodness and hope within the beauty of this world.

My mother worked for months on a series of articles about Lesotho and returned several times for interviews – among them also the old Basotho

Queen. These were published in a women's magazine as a 'first' about a country governed by black people. Next to her typewriter, all the time, was the book with its yellow cover written by Casalis.

So it happened that from quite young, Casalis was a guiding light for me on how 'to live right', live as one, as truly part of black in that part of Africa.

But it was when I began my research and writing of a non-fiction book exploring African philosophy that I became aware of how, long before others who are now acknowledged and studied, Casalis picked up important elements of African philosophy through his engagement with the Basotho and especially King Moshoeshoe.

I quickly realized that the conversation between my parents about what the King could have meant when he said that Casalis was a Mosotho was touching a crucial nerve point which had more to do with an ontology than with race. In the first place it meant, of course, an acknowledgement that Casalis had identified with and dedicated himself wholeheartedly to the Basotho. But there was another more important element: at the beginning the King greeted Casalis with the normal word that the Basotho used for white people, *lekhoa.* Grammatically the word meant 'disrespectful one', somebody who caused embarrassment as he displayed no regard for others. So the term for white was not embedded in colour, but in behaviour. When a white person behaves humanely and contrary to the white stereotype it would be said that "*ga se lekgoa, ke motho"*, ("he/she is not white, he/she is a human being"). This means that when Moshoeshoe conferred the title Mosotho on Casalis, he did not say he was black, but that he was now a human being, bringing him into as it were the community of the humane people, those who live in regard for and with others.

It is regrettable that the important records of Casalis about the Basotho worldview were never taken up by the robust arguments around what constituted the basis of African philosophy. As African philosophy began to assert itself during the previous century, identifying its arguments, axis and texts, it often started, either by engaging or mostly dismissing the writings of Father Placide Frans Tempels (18 February 1906 – 9 October 1977) a Belgian Franciscan missionary in the Congo who became famous for his book 'Bantu Philosophy' published in 1945. Some philosophers, notably Paul Hountondji, saw his work as promoting an irritating ethno-philosophy; but in general it was accepted that he coherently tried to

describe and analyze, mainly through grammatical structures, a pervasive African philosophy undergirding life as he found it in large parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. His text, describing a distinctive philosophy in which the primary metaphysical category is Force (also determining morality) initiated a larger debate with western philosophy.

A hundred years earlier than Tempels, Casalis made similar observations. He quoted the king who was clearly describing 'force' as a metaphysical category: "To do good, is like rolling a rock to the top of a mountain; as to evil, it comes about by itself: the rock falls without effort to the bottom."

But there is more. In an often quoted paragraph Tempels described the intricate interconnectedness of black people with their community and surroundings.

> Nothing moves in this [African] universe of forces without influencing other forces by its movement. The world of forces is held like a spider's web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network. (Mosley 1995, 72–73)

This intricate connectedness was confirmed in the 1980's by Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye as 'being held by most of the scholarship involving cultures of Africa, as the most outstanding trademark as well as the most defining characteristic.' Casalis also formulated this 'web' of forces, but much more acute and practical, and negative, it has to be said, taking connectedness further by describing its effects in the moral realm:

> "The heart is deeply corrupt. They will endure acute suffering without a groan or a murmur. Hunger, thirst, fatigue do not alter their serenity. *Morality among these people depends so entirely upon social order, that all political disorganization is immediately followed by a state of degeneracy, which the re-establishment of order alone can rectify*. The sudden and premature introduction of new laws and customs, and the imposition of strange authority, are, for some, equally fatal to their moral character. … The external appearances of moderation and decency constitute in the eyes of natives what they call *botu*, the title or dignity of man. … Moral evil is ugliness, odious, because it destroys and spoils and is caused by man's weakness. Among all the virtues natives appreciate kindness the most. They had words to express liberality, gratitude, courage, prudence, veracity, patience, but had only a vague idea of self-denial, temperance and humility." (my italics)

Hundred and eighty years later theologian and philosopher Keith Ferdinando working in Central Africa also described this phenomenon

albeit more positively: … 'sin in many African cultures is defined not so much in terms of the nature of the act itself, but rather of its consequences …Thus to say that 'sin' disrupts harmony and causes suffering is tautologous … An act that disrupts the harmony of the cosmos in a way harmful to the interests of man, is *ipso facto* evil; if no harmful consequences are entailed it is therefore probably inaccurate to speak in terms of 'offence' or 'sin'.

Wrong doing as a detraction from wholeness rather than sinning against God, surfaced in the conversations with the two French missionaries Casalis and Thomas Arbousset. Moshoeshoe, famous for trying to avoid wars, regarding wars as 'the biggest evil of southern Africa' (for disrupting harmony), asked Casalis how could nations which recognized Jesus still fought wars. Casalis answered that they might fight wars, but they fought differently: Christianity made people care for the wounded as there was no personal hatred in the hearts of soldiers. (!)

When Arbousset noted later in a diary how a particular Basotho clan peacefully accepted a leader instead of the rightful chief, he remarked rather scathingly "In any other country, endless wars would have followed; but here, where no-one fights a war for a principle, the outcome seemed natural."

These are just a few examples, but it seems that within the historical framework of the harsh British and racist brutal Afrikaner cultures and despite the sympathetic French missionaries, much of what Moshoeshoe had been saying was misunderstood and his remarkable consistent striving to get people to live reconciled, accommodating lives in peace and prosperity, went largely mis-interpreted. Nobody tried to fathom: if there was so much goodness and intelligence in the thinking of this 'heathen' king – what was the basis of it? If Christianity was the only mainstay for goodness in the world, what made Moshoeshoe the man he was? For the king's unwillingness to convert was blamed on an arrogance that refused to acknowledge that he was a sinner; his desire to have both denominations baptising him was seen as an old inability to make up his mind; receiving *sangomas* as well as missionaries on Thaba Bosiu was evidence that one could take the native out of the bush, but never the bush out of the native; his maneuvers to avoid wars, was seen as cowardice; his insistence to live a life with and like his people was seen as being too weak to commit to the stern demands of a civilised Christian life; allowing his people to do cross border raids was seen as part of the sly dishonest

nature of a thief; his refusal to reprimand his people when there were complaints about their behaviour, was regarded as part of his immoral nature.

The point I want to make here is twofold: long before others, Casalis's sensitive and empathetic ear picked up crucial threads of a different kind of ontology among the Basotho, but secondly, despite all his goodwill, love and dedication, it did not automatically gave him access and appreciation for an ontology other than the one he grew up in, but which delivered impressive ethics. Nowhere in the available English texts could I find any evidence that Casalis was aware that he was in the presence of some ethical basis if not superior, then at least equal to his own.

In this way, Casalis therefore remains an example for me living in a country where black people more and more confidently assert themselves, namely: that one may endeavour to live 'as one', as part of black, be accepted by black, but as a *lekhoa* one also has to let go of much and try to form a new kind of embedded selfness, a one-in-many connected towards wholeness, to be *ga se lekgoa, ke motho*.

In conclusion: it is with great joy that I anticipate this book. Like most of South African scholars unable to read French, it feels as if the history of Casalis and therefore also important parts of that of Moshoeshoe, formerly spread across Sesotho, French and English languages are now coming together, making it possible for us to move closer towards the kind of embedded community originally imagined and established by King Moshoeshoe 1.

Antjie Krog
DAAD fellowship
Berlin 2013

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INTRODUCTION

To put Africa into words is to bring it into history[1].
—Alain Ricard

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in the western world were a time of "post-colonial repentance," which explains the controversy which was aroused in France by the *Loi du 23 février 2005* (Law of February 23, 2005), which acknowledged in its fourth Article "the positive role of the French presence overseas." However, the amazing story of Eugène Casalis, the Protestant missionary who was born in Béarn, at the foot of the Pyrénées in the early nineteenth century and whose name is inextricably linked to the founding of the nation of Lesotho, demonstrates that there were at least some cases where the "French presence overseas" was—and still is—viewed positively. Proof of this attitude is to be found in the commemorative stamps issued by Lesotho in 1983, celebrating the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the missionaries. Of course, we are here in a specific geographical and historical context since France had no political or economic stakes in the region. Therefore, the French missionary presence in Southern Africa fell within a Christian mission context, a purely apostolic approach, without any accompanying colonialist overtones.

Sent out by the *Paris Evangelical Missions* to the Cape Province in 1832, Eugène Casalis would become, through a series of unexpected circumstances, the friend and personal advisor of Moshoeshoe, King of the Basotho, for whom he would play a leading diplomatic role. His friendship with Moshoeshoe and his special status as a citizen of a country not involved in local conflicts enabled the establishment of an exceptional collaboration between himself and the King, based on a relationship of mutual trust. Throughout his 23 years in Southern Africa, Eugène Casalis did his best to help the King develop his country, unite his people, and partner with the British to resist the Boers. The result was the creation of an autonomous entity that became on October 4, 1966, the independent Kingdom of Lesotho, an unexpected enclave surrounded by South Africa, whose current ruler, Letsie III, is the direct descendant of Moshoeshoe.

[1] Alain Ricard, *Le Sable de Babel*, CNRS editions, Paris, 2011, p. 149.

What extraordinary combination of circumstances brought Eugène Casalis from his native Béarn to Southern Africa? That is what we will see in that which follows.

Commemorative stamp issued by Lesotho in 1983

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH (1812-1832)

Early Childhood

Eugène Casalis was born on November 21, 1812 in Orthez[1] in the province of Béarn, in the *département* then called Basses-Pyrénées (now called Pyrénées-Atlantiques), in the south-west of France. He belonged to a fervently Huguenot family who had suffered under the measures taken against the Protestants after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in 1685. The *Roi soleil* (Sun King), unlike his grandfather Henri IV - and, it must be said, in very different circumstances- believed that there should be only "one King, one Law, one Faith." Thus, he suppressed freedom of worship for Protestants. Consequently, many Huguenots fled France to the so-called "countries of refuge" in order to be able to practice their religion. Those who remained became "new Catholics," often under duress. Children born of marriages not recognized by the State, were considered to be illegitimate and were disinherited. Their parents were forced to have their children baptised under threat of their removal from the home and eventual detention in convents. However, a number of Protestants out of principle refused to do this. As a result, an underground church called *l'Eglise du désert* (the Church of the Desert) was created with itinerant preachers who remained in hiding, in order to hold worship services in remote locations, although this was punishable by being sentenced to the galleys or by imprisonment. Ironically, during the same time period the Irish Catholics found themselves in a similar reverse situation -victims of the Protestants- which was just as difficult.

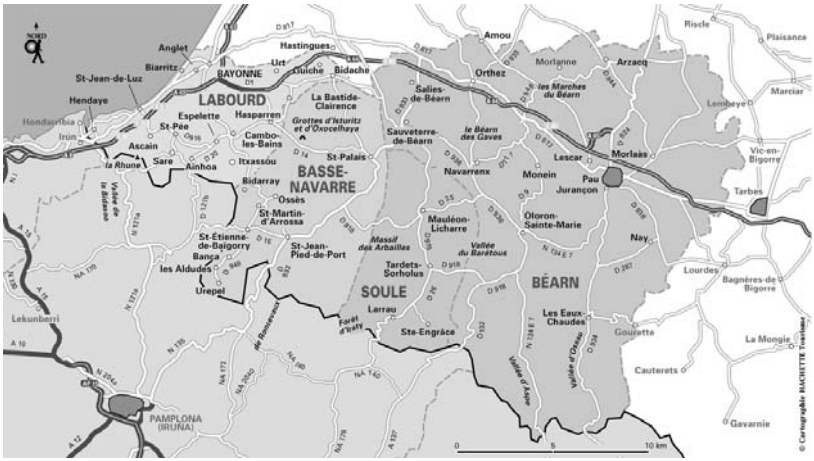
Eugène's paternal grandfather, Jean Casalis, a native of the village of Araujuzon, for a short time was "tempted to escape the difficulties which

[1] He was born at number 60 in the rue Saint-Gilles, which corresponds today to number 68.

weighed on his fellow co-religionists by going to settle in America,"[2] but his mother dissuaded him and he settled in Orthez "to attend to business." Eugène's maternal grandfather, Jean Labourdette, a native of Salles-Montgiscard, who had long been the regional secretary for the synod, married a Miss Brunet from Orthez. She had been abducted at age seven from her family, by order of a *lettre de cachet*, and had been imprisoned in the Ursuline Convent of Pau in order to learn the "true" religion. She remained there until the age of eighteen, but when she was returned to her family, she reconnected with the religion of her birth and married Jean Labourdette with whom she had many children. Her thirteenth child, Marthe Benjamine, married Arnaud Casalis in 1810. They had one son, Henri, in 1811, a second, Eugène, the following year, and three daughters thereafter, Adèle, Henriette and Léna.

In the meantime, the religious situation in France had significantly improved. It is a little-known fact that, in November 1787, Louis XVI had signed the Edict of Toleration for Protestants which conferred upon them legal recognition. Unfortunately, the Revolution prevented its implementation, and it was not until 1801 that Protestant worship was legalized, when the First Consul signed the *Concordat*, an agreement with the Catholic Church, as well as the *Articles organiques* making Protestantism legal, thus helping to bring about the return of a religious peace in France. Even though an era of tolerance had begun by the time Eugène was born, the Napoleonic era somewhat disrupted life in the Basses-Pyrénées. Shortly after the birth of their second son, Marthe-Benjamine and Arnaud Casalis, who were merchants, had settled in Bayonne, because they traded with Spain. However, the blockade of the city in 1814 by the Anglo-Spanish forces of Wellington forced them to leave the place, and thus it was they went to Toulouse. In the haste of departure, young Eugène's nurse dropped him head-first on the pavement. His parents feared the worst, but he recovered without any side effects, although he remained a sickly child, and so was not *a priori* predisposed to missionary life. However, his physical weakness did not prevent the development of an extremely high- spirited character, as well as violent rages which he confessed that more than one of his classmates had to put up with.

[2] This quotation, like all those in this section not accompanied by a footnote, are translated from Eugène Casalis' book *Mes Souvenirs* ("My Memories"), from its most recent edition, Edipro, Hendaye, 2011.



Map of Pyrénées-Atlantiques

The Hottentot Venus

At the beginning of this stay in Toulouse, three years after his birth, an event occurred which aroused little excitement in the Béarn countryside but which caused a sensation in the French Capital. This was the death in Paris of a young woman, Saartje Baartman, known as the Hottentot Venus. She came from South Africa, a country which was at the time almost completely unknown, thus no one could have possibly suspected that it would play such a pivotal role in the destiny of the young Eugène. Saartje was born around 1789 in what is now the Eastern Cape Province, at a time when the indigenous peoples, the Khoekhoe and the San, were under the domination of the Dutch settlers, the Boers. The Khoekhoe were shepherds, more or less settled on the land, and had been nicknamed “Hottentots” by the first Europeans. The San were nomadic hunter-gatherers who were called “Boschimans” by the Dutch, then “Bushmen” by the English. According to colonial and Christian practice, the young Aborigine was given a Dutch first name, Saartje. This was but the beginning of a long process of alienation. Around 1810, she was in domestic service on a farm belonging to a certain Peter Cezar. One day, the brother of the latter, Hendrik, brought a surgeon from the British Navy, Alexander Dunlop, to the farm in order to have the young girl examined. Since the beginning of the colony, explorers had been highly intrigued by some physical features specific to Khoekhoe women: a marked steatopygia, a dramatic accumulation of fat on the buttocks, and macronymphia, an

exceptional hypertrophy of the labia of the vulva. This came to be called the "Hottentot apron," and led to extensive literary coverage from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. The two men managed to convince Saartje to go with them on tour in England. Upon his arrival in London, Cezar began to exhibit her in a cage, like a beast. The treatment she suffered roused members of the African Association of London to denounce the degrading conditions in which she was forced to live, and in the end they took Dunlop and Cezar to court. In the months after the trial, no one knows what happened to the young woman, but in mid-1814 she was found in Paris where she had been sold to an animal exhibitor named Reaux, who displayed her immediately, much to the fascination of the Parisian public. Reaux, however, was anxious to provide a scientific backing for his star attraction. In between two lucrative freak show exhibits, Reaux took Saartje to be examined -free of charge- by scholars of the Museum of Natural History. In March 1815, at the request of Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, she was subjected to examination by a group of painters and scientists, including Baron Georges Cuvier, the founder of comparative anatomy, whose lectures Eugene Casalis would later attend. Shortly afterwards, the young woman fell seriously ill and died on January 1, 1816, of a disease that Cuvier described as "inflammatory and eruptive." It is believed that she was 26 years old.

Scientists requested from the police that her body be entrusted to them, all in the name of the "progress of human knowledge." Twenty-four hours after her death, Saartje's body was transported to the Museum. Cuvier made a plaster mold of her entire body, then for sixteen hours he dissected the corpse, removing from it the brain, vulva and anus, which were then placed in formalin. He then extracted the skeleton and proceeded to rebuild it bone by bone. Two years later, he published his famous *Observations sur le cadavre d'une femme connue à Paris sous le nom de Venus hottentotte* (sic) (Observations on the corpse of a woman known in Paris under the name of Venus hottentotte). The article was intended to support the scientific theories of the time regarding the hierarchy of races, highlighting the similarities between the young Hottentot and monkeys.[3]

[3] The adventures of the Hottentot Venus do not stop there. Her posthumous fate was still bound up with that of the freak exhibition. At first, the mould of her body and her skeleton were displayed in a hall of comparative anatomy at the Museum, then they were sent to the ethnographic museum of the Trocadéro, to finally end up in a hall of anthropology of the Museum of Mankind after 1937. It was only in 1974 that the remains were removed and put into storage. At the beginning of the 21st century, the South African government asked for the restitution of Saartje's

We shall see to what extent Eugène Casalis evades these racial prejudices which were the norm, however, during the nineteenth century.

Childhood

As soon as the political situation had stabilized, the Casalis family returned to Bayonne, but the absence of any forum for public worship for their children prompted Eugène's parents to send him to an aunt in Orthez. The aunt was already taking care of his grandfather Casalis, who was at that time eighty years old. Eugène has vivid memories of Sundays spent with his "venerable ancestor" when they went together to *la Porte de fer* (The Iron Gate), as the Protestant church of the city was then called. In the early months of his stay, his aunt took charge of his education. She spent several hours each day making him read and teaching him the Psalms of David, the Fables of La Fontaine and of Florian, and telling him gripping stories taken from the Bible and French history which were "appropriate for moulding the mind and heart of a child."[4]

He was seven years old when his parents learned that a Protestant school in Orthez was going to open, based on the Lancasterian method. This is where they decided to enroll their children. This method, unknown in France, except in Protestant circles, was designed by a Briton, Joseph Lancaster, who created in England a private elementary school for poor children, in the late eighteenth century. The pedagogy of Lancasterian schools was based on the idea of having the more advanced pupils instruct the younger ones. This worthy innovation increased the literacy of a larger number of children. In the early nineteenth century, particularly in the United States, the method became very popular, and the *Society for the Promotion of the Lancasterian System for the Education of the Poor* was created in 1808. At the time of the founder's death in 1838, there were nearly 2,000 of these schools. Eugène would later incorporate this early experience into his teaching of the Basotho.

His enrolment in the school was marked by an incident that made him feel guilty for a long time afterwards. His grandmother Labourdette wanted to visit the school to assure herself that it would be suitable for her

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remains from France who repatriated them in 2002. An official funeral was then organised in South Africa in the presence of the entire government.

[4] In this section, this quote and the following ones are drawn from *Mes souvenirs*, called *My Life in Basutoland* in its English translation.

grandchildren, and her zeal proved to be almost be fatal: she missed a step and fell, “breaking her thigh” - probably her hipbone - and remained crippled for the rest of her life. Eugène, who was very attached to his grandmother, felt deeply guilty and said that his greatest happiness, in those years, was “pushing her wheelchair and sitting on a stool at her feet.” He would watch her take pinches of snuff, which were thought to give protection from the plague, and he would beg her for stories of the desperate years when she dealt with the constabulary officers charged with apprehending illegal Huguenot pastors. In *Mes Souvenirs*, he wrote: “My first interest in religious matters is due in large measure to the impression made on me by the austere and valiant piety of my grandparents.”

His religious vocation came to him very early, coupled with an attraction to “people of colour.” He noted:

> Whenever I saw a Negro or a mulatto, which by the way, rarely happened to me, I felt the greatest sympathy for him; I wanted to stop him, to have him sit beside me, to ask him his story. This interest seemed all the more extraordinary, since these strange men, then so little known in our small provincial towns, were largely rejected by the general public.

He traced the origin of this attraction to a missionary novel that he loved, *Gumal and Lina*. He was impressed by an illustration in the book which portrayed the young black Gumal in the African forest, who, after having just been baptised, raised his arms to heaven, and carried away by grace, exclaimed: “I am a Christian!”

In order to better care for their children in school, Eugène’s parents had left Bayonne and returned to Orthez. However, a sister of Madame Casalis, Madame Maze, who was strongly attached to the reformed religion, had remained in Bayonne, and, as there was no Protestant church in the city, she opened her living room on Sundays to some local Protestant worshippers. With the return of peace at the end of the Napoleonic wars, the number of Protestants increased dramatically, so that the aunt’s premises were no longer sufficiently large. Insofar as Louis XVIII, accessing the throne, had confirmed by charter freedom of worship for non-Catholics, a plan to open a Protestant preaching point in Bayonne was proposed. Madame Maze then launched calls to bring a pastor. A serendipitous combination of circumstances enabled her to attract one of the most eminent preachers of the religious *Réveil* (the great Awakening) of the time, Henry Pyt, the brother-in-law of Ami Bost, himself one of the pioneers of the *Reveil* in France. What was known as *Réveil* was a

movement born in England in the late eighteenth century, the goal of which was to shake the faithful out of their spiritual slumber, in some way to awaken them.

On his way to Bayonne, Pastor Pyt stopped at Orthez where he was hosted by Eugène's parents. "This day was to decide my entire future career," later confided Eugène, who was fascinated from the very first by the man, who was so tall, with such an athletic build, so blond and with such mild blue eyes. He was thus delighted with his parents' decision to send him to Bayonne to be educated by the pastor. He was then 10 years old and would remain there until the age of 18. This was the year 1822; and he did not know then that the *Société des Missions évangéliques de Paris* or SMEP (Paris Society of Evangelical Missions or PEMS) had just opened in Paris: it was the first missionary society founded by French Protestants, and it was to play an important role in his life.

Beginnings of the Protestant missions

Let us return for a moment to the context of the birth of the first European Protestant missions.

Protestant missionaries appeared on the international geopolitical scene much later than their Catholic counterparts. The fact that the great geographical discoveries had begun well before the spirit of the Reformation swept across Europe, meant that the first European works of evangelisation among the indigenous peoples were due to the Catholic powers, Spain and Portugal first and foremost. For the French, like for the Spanish and Portuguese, evangelisation was an integral part of the settlement plans for their conquered territories. But after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, which marked the beginning of English and later British sovereignty of the seas, two Protestant countries, England and the Netherlands, soon came to dominate the seaways. Both countries entrusted the monopoly of the exploitation of their colonies to private companies, among them the *East India Company* (British) and the VOC (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Dutch), whose interests were primarily economic and, for this reason, evangelisation did not constitute a priority.

If Catholic missions expanded greatly from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onward, it was not until the end of the eighteenth century that Protestants launched themselves into the business of evangelisation. It must be said that the churches which came out of the Reformation did not

benefit from the same kind of infrastructure as the Catholic religious orders. Chaplains and pastors were indeed assigned to work for the companies, but they were there to minister to the settlers and not to the local populations. The companies proved very reluctant to develop relationships with the first missionaries because, says Jacques Blandenier, these religious workers, "sought above all else the salvation of the pagans, and not [...] the enrichment of a nation."[5]

These first Protestant missionaries were strongly influenced by the pietistic movement, centered at the University of Halle in Germany. Through pietism, Protestants were made aware that missionary preaching was the duty of every Christian. The very first mission was founded in India, in the early eighteenth century by two Danes, who were former students at Halle. At the same time, the Protestant movement of the Moravian[6] Brethren, a direct fruit of pietism, established the *Mission of the Moravian Brethren* and it was they who pioneered the mission field of Southern Africa with the arrival of the first Protestant missionary, Georg Schmidt, on July 9, 1737.

At that time the European presence in Southern Africa was still recent, dating from 1652, when the Dutch had created a refuelling station on the present site of the Cape for ships en route to Indonesia. This station was rapidly developed and transformed into a thriving colony. The settlers, who called themselves *Boers* (farmers), becoming more and more numerous, chased the aboriginal KhoeKhoe—or Hottentots—from their ancestral lands, or attempted to enslave them. Schmidt had heard about the degeneration of the Hottentots, and, despite the reluctance of the Dutch Reformed Church and of the white settlers (who considered the Aborigines not as human beings but as *Schrepels*, that is to say, "black livestock[7]"), he wanted to bring them the message of Christ. He moved to Baviaans Kloof in Cape Province, where he founded a small Christian congregation. He taught the members to read and write and began to baptize the first converts. This displeased the Dutch clergy who, arguing that Schmidt had not been ordained and could not therefore administer the sacraments,

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[5] Jacques Blandenier, *Précis d'histoire des missions*, volume 2, Editions de l'institut biblique de Nogent, 1998, p. 561.

[6] This movement is placed in the context of the tradition of the teaching of Jan Huss (1370-1415) and his hussite followers. Moreover, Moravia and Bohemia were places of refuge for the persecuted Vaudois.

[7] Jacques Blandenier, *op.cit.*, p. 30. The author adds: "…to undertake to evangelise them was considered an affront to human dignity by many among them."

forced him to leave the country after seven years of ministry. In 1792, however, the Moravian Brethren were able to return to Baviaans Kloof where they re-established a mission post with a church, a school and workshops, thus triggering once more the hostility of Boer farmers. Nonetheless, their teaching attracted a growing number of Aborigines to whom were assigned land to cultivate vegetable gardens. The mission station grew so much that by the early nineteenth century, the village had become the second largest town in the province after the Cape, living almost in self-sufficiency and highly active in the production of local handicrafts and cutlery, the wheelwright and tanning industries thriving in particular. In 1835, Eugène Casalis spent a few days in this village and movingly testified to the spiritual and material success of the missionary work which had been done. Renamed Genadental,[8] the small town prospered until a law was passed in 1909, the *Communal Reserve Act*, which prevented mission inhabitants from owning property, thereby causing its decline. However, the memory of the Moravian Brethren in South Africa is still alive and well,[9] as testified to by these words of Nelson Mandela:

> One thing impressed me concerning the history of Genadental, that in the dark ages when we were stripped of our soil, Genadental and its missionaries deliberately took a different direction like a light in the night. They proclaimed the equality of men before God ... I am also a product of the mission. We are indebted to the different churches which provided schools, while the government showed absolutely no interest in the education of Africans, Coloureds and Indians.[10]

The late eighteenth century saw the development of a strong Protestant missionary activity, especially in the English-speaking sphere. This must be situated in the historical and societal context of a "conquering" England, but where voices had cried out at all levels of society and for several years, to bring an end to slavery. In 1774, John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, published *Thoughts upon Slavery*. William Wilberforce, a young Member of parliament who had converted to Methodism, supported him politically. Wilberforce was the first to introduce an abolitionist bill in Parliament in 1791 and a few years later, his writings impressed the young Eugène who wrote: "I shuddered at the

[8]During his visit in 1806, Governor Janssens gave it this name, meaning "Valley of Grace," which to him seemed more suitable. At the beginning of the 19th century, black teachers were trained there. At the present time, Genadendal is a village of black farmers which also has a small museum.

[9] The residence of the Head of State bears the name of Gnadental.

[10] Jacques Blandenier, *op.cit*., pp. 236-237.

tale of the horrors of the Black Slave Trade, which Wilberforce and Baron Staël unveiled with such righteous indignation."[11] The following year, William Pitt the Younger protested forcefully against slave trafficking in a famous speech to the House of Commons: "No nation in Europe [...] has plunged so deeply into this guilt as Great Britain.[12]" The Bill was finally passed in 1806. In drafting the text, Wesley and Wilberforce were thinking especially of the Blacks. The Hottentots, for their part, found their champion in the person of Zachary Macaulay, Secretary of the *African Institution*, an institution that militated against slave trafficking worldwide. Macauley remains famous for the trial that he instituted in 1812 against the two men who had exhibited Saartje Baartman, the Hottentot Venus (previously mentioned), denouncing the racist and sexist exploitation of which she was the object. The media coverage of this trial and the impact it had on the nation helped direct the attention of both the public and the churches to the fate of the Aborigines of Southern Africa, especially after 1814 when the English bought the Cape Province from the Dutch.

In the religious sphere, the greatest representative of the English missionary movement was undoubtedly William Carey, considered to be the father of modern evangelical missions. Raised in the Anglican Church, Carey became a Baptist in 1783 and, in 1789, inspired by the missionary journal *Practical Accounts* published by the English Moravians, he published a manifesto: *An Inquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, urging Christians to go and evangelise the peoples of the earth. As a result of that, the *Baptist Missionary Society* was founded in 1791, and, in the years that followed, many other societies were born. One in particular, the *London Missionary Society* (LMS), founded in 1795, deserves closer attention, both for its activities in South Africa and for the role it played in Eugène Casalis' destiny.

It is important to note at the outset the spirit in which this new missionary society was founded. Pastor David Bogue, in his constitutional speech, emphasized the purely evangelical nature of the enterprise:

> Do you believe, writers and philosophers, that our great purpose is to gratify your curiosity, fill up your map with names, put the finishing touches to your geographic systems, render more accurate your stories of man and the various forms of society? Do you really think, shopkeepers,

[11] MS, p. 32.
[12] Quoted by Rachel Holmes, *The Hottentot Venus*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007, p. 78.