Dynamics in the process of contextualization facilitated by a West-European researcher: Contextualizing the OT notion of 'sin' in the cultural context of the Kongo people in Brazzaville

Sabine Müri

OCMS, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

In order to be relevant, all theology must relate to context. This study is an example of the complexities encountered in the actual practice of contextualization. I apply and evaluate theoretical tools, and give explicit account of the practicalities and tensions arising in the process that I initiated as a cultural outsider. The research is conducted with reflexivity by which I uncover hidden assumptions that influenced the contextualization process and my interpretation of the collected data. I examine the notion of 'sin' in the Kongo culture and evaluate it through the lens of the OT understanding of 'sin'. The project was undertaken with participation groups in Brazzaville and revealed that in the Kongo context, the place of the *kanda* (community) was a key element, while *Nzambi* (God) was strikingly absent from the discussion of 'sin'. The main conclusions I draw from this practical theology research are twofold. 1) Regarding contextualization: In academic research theological and social studies are often divided into two different fields. The project reveals that the theological and the social disciplines are intrinsically connected which requires contextualization to be an interdisciplinary undertaking. Critical self-reflexivity regarding the cultural background of the researcher and the role she takes in the process is equally important as giving the cultural insiders a voice; contextualization is most fruitful when it is done by cultural insiders and outsiders together. 2) Regarding the understanding of 'sin': In the Kongo context, 'sin' is understood as any act that breaks the harmony of the community, allowing any kind of evil to enter it. This understanding needs to be transformed by the biblical view of 'sin' as always being committed before God, the creator of the world and the one to whom all human beings owe their life. The rich imagery for 'sin' in the OT cannot be captured by the one Kongo word *disumu*; a wider vocabulary must be developed.

Dynamics in the process of contextualization facilitated by a West-European researcher: Contextualizing the OT notion of 'sin' in the cultural context of the Kongo people in Brazzaville

By

Sabine Müri

M.A.
(European School of Culture and Theology, Korntal, Germany/
Columbia International University, South Carolina, USA)

Theology

Main Supervisor: **Keith Ferdinando**

Second Supervisor: **Thomas Harvey**

Third Supervisor: **Harriet Mowat**

House Tutor: **Bernard Farr**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In the University of Middlesex, London

July, 2016

Oxford Centre for Mission Studies

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed .... (Candidate)

Date .... 4 July 2016 ....
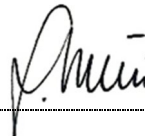
STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote.

Other sources are acknowledged by midnotes or footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed .... (Candidate)

Date .... 4 July 2016 ....

STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if approved, to be available for photocopying by the British Library and for Inter-Library Loan, for open access to the Electronic Theses Online Service (EthoS) linked to the British Library, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organizations.

Signed .... (Candidate)

Date .... 4 July 2016 ....

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my late mother Lilly Müri-Merz who instilled in me early in my life a love for God and who taught me the first steps of trusting him, seeking his guidance and assistance in all my human daily affairs.

Acknowledgment

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors whose input and encouragement enabled me to make this thesis what it is: to Dr Keith Ferdinando for his guidance and support of my PhD studies, for his patience and continued advice; to Dr Thomas Harvey for his help and guidance in the process of the research; to Dr Harriet Mowat for her valuable input in the last stages before completion.

I am indebted to Dr Mamy Raharimanantsoa and Dr Serge Locko who provided the opportunity to teach at the FTPB and to work with the class as the most important research focus group. I am deeply indebted to the participants in the focus groups and the interviewees who willingly gave of their time to talk with me about their culture and insights.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the continued financial support and patience by my donors throughout the many years of my research. I thankfully acknowledge the initial financial support by the SIL International Kenneth Pike Endowment Fund. My sincere thanks also goes to my employer, the Wycliffe Bible Translators / SIL-Congo who generously let me use working hours for conducting the field-study in Brazzaville.

My gratitude extends to Patricia and Jonathan Brown who proof read my work with great patience and care, and to Heinz Wunderli who put my graphic ideas down to paper. A special thank-you goes to Carmen Crouse who first encouraged me to start doctoral studies.

Finally, I would like to thank my dear friend Ruth Julian for her continued encouragement, accompanying me in times of difficulty and illness that threatened to end my research prematurely, but also in times of joy and laughter.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABBREVIATIONS

AR	Action Research
BDAG	Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (by Arndt, Bauer & Danker) based on the Greek-German lexicon by Walter Bauer (Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur).
BDB	Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon
BHS	*Biblia Hebraica Stuttartensia* (1997)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EACMC	*Église de l'alliance chrétienne et missionnaire du Congo*
EDNT	The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (edited by Balz and Schneider) transl. from the German
EEC	*Église Évangélique du Congo*
FTPB	*Faculté de théologie protestante de Brazzaville*
HALOT	The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (by Koehler, Baumgartner et al.)
NAC	New American Commentary
NEB	New English Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDOTTE	New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (edited by Willem VanGemeren)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
PT	Practical theology
QR	Qualitative research
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (by Botterweck, Ringgren & Fabry) transl. from the German ThWAT (Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament).
ThWAT	See TDOT
TLOT	Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament (by Jenni & Westermann), transl. from the German THAT (Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament)
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TWOT	Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (by Harris, Archer & Waltke)
WBC	World Biblical Commentary

REFERENCING SYSTEM

COR   Correspondence (letters, e-mails, etc.)

DOC-ex   Documents (exams) by students

DOC-hw   Documents (homework)

FN-AC   Field Note *Alliance chrétienne* (EACMC, women's Bible study focus group)

FN-EEC   Field EEC (catechumens focus group)

FN-Ms   Field Note Mansmimou (FTPB, theology students focus group)

IVW   Interview

NB   Note book

RDIS   Reality disjuncture ('breakdown')

TRSC   Transcriptions

For the whole list of primary resources see Appendix 2

SETTING THE SCENE – A STORY FROM THE GRASSROOTS: MARCH 2012

Brazzaville, Congo. On the morning of Sunday 4 March 2012, shortly after eight, the depot of the armoured division stationed in the Mpila district blew up in a series of explosions. In the neighbouring districts of Ouenzé and Talangaï, two of the most densely populated areas of the city, home of over 350,000 residents, thousands of people were killed and injured (Dodd & Perkins June 2012) and around 20,000 people lost their homes (Handicap International, UK March 2013). The damage to property and infrastructure was extensive.

The explosions were a humanitarian disaster; the incident also left its mark on me. When the first explosion happened I was standing at the window drinking coffee. Suddenly I heard a distant boom and felt a blast wave pushing me further into the room. Instinctively I ducked down with my heart pounding hard. When curiosity won over my anxiety I went to the door thinking that maybe a gas bottle on our neighbour's construction site had exploded. My cell phone rang. It was a friend who wanted to know if I had heard 'this'. While we were still talking, four things happened simultaneously. I heard another much louder roar, the house I was in shook as if in an earthquake, I heard glass splintering, and my friend on the phone started to scream. I could only think of two things, that war had broken out again and that my friend's house and mine had been hit by a missile. Later both beliefs turned out to be untrue. The following uncertainty as to what happened, another four explosions, worries about friends, fellow missionaries, and employees, measures taken in order to be ready in case of an evacuation, and my strange initial reaction – I wandered around in the centre where I lived, carrying with me my computer and insect repellent, looking for a safe place to be – left me deeply troubled for weeks. My distress and shock was intensified by the pictures I saw, the stories I heard, the way people talked, and by my own observations made in the streets. A refugee camp was set up in the courtyard of the Catholic cathedral two hundred meters up the road from the centre where I lived. This brought the event, *les explosions,* as they have been commonly referred to in Congo ever since, even closer to my doorstep.

Two days after the explosions the class that I taught that semester started, and I asked my students whose families had been affected. There was no response at first. Then, one of the students raised his hand hesitantly. His timidity surprised me because I knew him as an outspoken and self-confident student. I felt something in the air, but nobody responded to my further investigation that day.

Because of the severity of the explosions and the impact the incident had on the city I decided to confront my students the next day with the allegations I kept hearing on the streets, which went much like the following: The damaged districts were said to be populated only by *nordistes*, people coming from the northern part of Congo. The *sudistes* rubbed their hands maliciously maintaining that the explosions were nothing short of retaliation by fate or even God. Now the *nordistes* were repaid for their atrocities during the war; now they knew what it meant to be massacred. The rumour went the rounds that the refugee camps set up in the districts populated by *sudistes* were empty and the *nordistes* who were meant to stay there were chased away. The announcement that the President (a Northerner) would pay 3 million CFA francs (ca. 4,000 GBP) to the family of each victim fanned the flames of hatred and strong feelings of injustice. The way many Congolese in Brazzaville interpreted the explosions showed that the civil war had not been settled in their hearts and minds; old wounds of ethnic conflicts and the civil war of the 90s were reopened and showed their ugly face again.

Confronting my students with the people's talk was a risk; they came both from the North and the South. I was not sure if I would be able to control the reactions, but the hope of finding in future Church leaders sitting in my class a different attitude from that of Mr and Mrs Average was too strong to resist. Recounting in class the people's talk and asking what the students thought about it was the spark that lit the powder keg. The classroom erupted into a shrill and heated battle of words, fifteen students yelling at each other; and for a short moment I thought that the situation would get out of hand. I managed to calm down the students after a while, on

the one hand content because my intuition the day before, that there was something in the air, turned out to be true; on the other hand however disappointed because my Christian students and future Church leaders displayed the same shocking attitude as I had observed in the streets.

As a calming measure I steered away from the personal dismay of all of us to the safer waters of the impersonal and asked about the response of the Church to such tragedies in general. It did not take long before we had put together a list of (theoretical) responsibilities of the Church. The Church should provide social and spiritual assistance, assume authority by leading people to Christ and by supporting the public powers (stand up against civil rioting), show solidarity, and remind itself that it should be salt and light in the world and play a prophetic role in society. Because I had the impression that many of the students' hearts remained 'cold', and because that attitude aroused anger and even greater disappointment in me, I challenged the students with the question of why the Church should do all the things we listed. 'God commanded it' I did not let pass for the right answer, and I finally wrested from them the reply 'because of love'.

When I asked why God let that all happen, there was stirring in the class again. And then one student exclaimed, 'Well, somebody must have sinned!' Such evil, he was certain, does not happen unless it is invited in by somebody's wrongdoing. Many of the people in the streets maintained that it happened because of the atrocities against the *sudistes* during the civil war. After the class session a *sudiste* student approached me with tears in her eyes and said that what I recounted was true and that *'dans les bars, c'est la fête chez nous!'*[1]. The general hostile feelings and animosity of my students against each other stirred up a mix of anger, fear, sadness and desperation in my heart. And in the next lesson the following day I did something I do not usually do in a classroom: I preached at my students, drawing from Lk. 13:1-9.

> *À ce moment-là, quelques étudiants de Mansimou racontèrent à Jésus ce qui était arrivé aux soldats et aux Nordistes qui habitaient à Mpila et à Ouénzé qui étaient tué par des explosions. Jésus leur répondit : « Pensez-vous que si ces Nordistes ont été ainsi massacrés, cela signifie qu'ils étaient de plus grands pécheurs que tous les autres Congolais ? Non, je vous le dis. Mais si vous ne vous repentez pas, vous périrez tous également. Ou bien ces 13'000 sinistrés qui ont tous perdu leurs maisons,*

---

[1] English: 'In our bars people celebrate!'

pensez-vous qu'ils étaient plus coupables que tous les autres habitants de Brazzaville ? Non, je vous le dis. Mais si vous ne vous repentez pas, vous périrez tous également. (FN_Ms#03)[2]

While I was talking one half of the students were taking notes feverishly as if they did not want to miss a word. Because the majority of those students had previously shown a certain aversion to writing, it surprised me greatly. My words that morning seemed to be worth taking down; they seemed to hit home. The other half sat still as never before, listening attentively, hanging on my every word. When I registered the atmosphere in the room I almost lost concentration; it was gripping and I knew that the message from Luke 13 was needed. And it had to be delivered by an outsider.

---

[2] English: 'At that very time there were some students from Mansimou present who told Jesus about the Soldiers and the Northerners who had lived in the districts of Mpila and Ouénzé and who were killed by the explosions. Jesus asked them, "Do you think that because these Northerners were massacred in this way they were worse sinners than all other Congolese? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those 13,000 people who lost their homes – do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Brazzaville? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.'

This was an adaptation from the biblical text (Lk. 13:1-9): 'At that very time there were some present who told him [Jesus] about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were sores sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them – do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.'

1. INTRODUCTION

I have to admit that using such an opening story like the one above is unusual in a piece of academic work. Yet, in retrospect, the whole research, its conduct, the process, the findings and what I learnt from it, was an unusual experience. March 2012 was in a strange way the apex of the whole undertaking. I decided to express the experience by simply telling the actual story, because any other more abstract form to portray the intensity and power of the moment would fail. What follows now is the presentation of the research as it was conducted previous to March 2012 in a suitable form.

In this introductory chapter I focus on presenting the design of my research briefly describing the background, the research problem and the research questions that arise. I further present the main contributions to knowledge and the justification for the research. The section about the key assumptions discusses the four key issues regarding the Kongo people, contextualization, Scripture, and the notion of 'sin'.

1.1 Background

While I was conducting the research in Brazzaville, the capital city of the Congo Republic, I worked for a Bible translation institution that maintained a 'New Testament first' approach to Bible translation. Within the overarching paradigm that acknowledges the task of leading people to faith in Christ as one of the most important missionary commissions, the NT first approach makes sense. The priority of leading people to Christ is closely linked to the NT message of Jesus dying on the cross. This message begs the question however why Jesus died on the cross. The shortest possible answer is, 'because of sin'.[3] This answer seems to be satisfactory to many missionaries, which is why often the intelligibility of this message is not further questioned. It is at this point, however, that my questions start. What is 'sin' and how can I explain it? Yet these questions are tied into a bigger whole. I am convinced that the NT message of Christ's death on

---

[3] See for example John the Baptist's declaration: 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' (Jn. 1:29).

the cross can only be understood when 'sin' is understood, most comprehensively expounded in the OT; and 'sin' can only be understood when God is understood as the one presented to us in the OT: the relational and covenantal God, the creator and sustainer of humanity. Thus both the understanding of God and 'sin' will be major points of reflection in the thesis.

The understanding of 'sin' has a history in the Congo context. Missionaries of the early twentieth century complained that the notion of 'sin' which they sought to communicate was never understood by the Kongo people (Laman 1923 quoted in Ekholm Friedman 1991; van Wing 1959; Balandier 1968). According to Andersson, the Swedish missionaries' concept of 'sin' was an evil heart, a wicked character and enmity towards God. For the Kongo people however, 'sin' had to do with 'certain prescribed actions that they have omitted to carry out or… certain prohibited actions that they have carried out' and thus did not view 'sin' as 'inherent in Man' (Andersson 1951 quoted in Ekholm Friedman 1991:165). Consequently the two concepts seemed to be incompatible. Examination of the underlying philosophy of life in African societies (Tempels 1959; Parrinder 1969; 1974; Idowu 1973; Ruch & Anyanwu 1984 ; Ekholm Friedman 1991; Magesa 1998) demonstrates the gulf that opens up between West-European and sub-Saharan African perceptions of life. Mutual comprehension seems impossible. Listening to Kongo people talking about good and evil made me wonder whether early missionaries' reports about the incompatibility of their concept of 'sin' with the Kongo culture – previously dismissed as erroneous by myself in the early stages of the research – were accurate after all.

Later missionary work recognized the necessity of contextualizing Christian beliefs and practices. Contextualization was described as a 'theological imperative' (Bevans 2002), as a critical process (Hiebert 1987) of seeking forms of theological expression rooted in local culture (McKinney 2003), or as finding ways to enable people to understand the significance of core issues of Christian belief (Kraft 1978; Moreau 1995; Whiteman 1997). The notion of 'sin' is such a core issue. 'An inability to speak persuasively about sin adversely affects one's ability to

speak plausibly about all the rest.' (Priest 2007:183). Contextualizing the notion of 'sin' is a complex and challenging undertaking that needs to connect cultures, theologies, languages and practical issues of everyday life as a Christian.

The effects of not taking into consideration the cultural contexts can be felt for a long time. Biemoundongat's conclusion of early missionary work is unequivocal (2000:18):

> *Les missionnaires avaient bâti sur du sable du fait qu'ils n'avaient pas prise en considération la vision du monde du Kòongó comme philosophie nécessaire et fondement irremplaçable de l'édifice spirituel.*[4]

Because of the permanence of the Christian religious elements imposed on daily life, Biemoundongat continues, the Kongo Christians still live on two different tracks: that of faith and that of traditional values. Made sensitive to the problem of imposing Western beliefs and practices, I understand that today's generation of missionaries must not only decide what role they want to play in the host country but also how they shape that role. Such decisions cannot be taken in isolation. The nature of the missionary's role is partly determined by the people they work with and so communicating and exchanging cultural views with local people are essential. However, the question, what role a missionary should play and how that role should be shaped, equally cannot be answered without taking into consideration the missionary's own individual background and assignment. Thus that question becomes personal and makes personal critical reflection necessary, which means for this research that I need to include personal reflection on my role as a missionary (Bible translation consultant), as a researcher and intercultural theologian.

1.2 Research problem

The four background issues above – the importance of the OT view on 'sin' and God, the missionaries' complaint about the Kongo people not understanding 'sin', the necessity for contextualization, and the question of my role as a missionary and intercultural theologian – led

---

[4] English (translation mine): 'The missionaries had built on sand because they had not taken into account the worldview of the Kongo people, the needed philosophy and irreplaceable foundation of the spiritual development.'

to a description of the research problem as follows: **What dynamics come into play in a process of theological contextualization facilitated by a West-European researcher: Contextualizing the Old Testament notion of 'sin' in the cultural context of the Kongo people in Congo-Brazzaville?**

As a genuine contribution to the body of knowledge I initially aimed at turning my attention foremost to the process and practical concerns of the contextualization undertaking. Throughout the research and writing process however, this aim was pushed into the background because I felt increasingly drawn into the present day context of the Kongo people and its resulting theological implications and dynamics. The urgent need for transformation experienced in March 2012 as described above additionally turned my attention increasingly towards finding practical theological answers. The shift from observing and describing processes to finding transformative answers and understanding can be observed throughout the thesis. I will present my reflections on the process and practical concerns of contextualization, yet they will not take centre stage as anticipated. Thus, the presented study is twofold: It is about 'sin', one of the issues assumed central to the Christian faith, and it is about doing research and working across cultures as a practical theologian and missionary.

Accordingly this research does not claim to be entirely theological, aiming at a comprehensive contextual theology of 'sin'; nor to be entirely anthropological, aiming at an ethnological study of the Kongo view of good and evil or their traditional ethics; nor to be a linguistic analysis of the Kongo discourse on 'sin'; nor to be a sociological study on Kongo moral development. The connections to many related academic disciplines are obvious and some of those disciplines informed my research to some extent. However, I considered it inappropriate to cut such an undertaking into small pieces and force it into a strictly defined field of study without losing the complex reality of contextualization and its tensions and conflict of interests on the ground. Thus,

my study cuts across classic academic categories, but may best be situated in the wider field of Missiology.

1.2.1 Leading questions for data collection

In order to address the research problem I used different tools: I analysed the Kongo understanding of good ('good life') and evil ('wrongdoing'), studied the OT understanding of 'sin', applied Paul Hiebert's contextualization model for leading me through the process, and examined my position as a cultural outsider engaged in an exercise of theological contextualization. Not only were theological questions in focus, but cultural and practical problems involved in the contextualization process as well. The questions I asked for collecting the data can be put into three main categories:

(1) Cultural context: What is the Kongo concept of 'wrongdoing'? What are the key cultural elements to be addressed for communicating the notion of 'sin' to the Kongo people? What difficulties of understanding for the cultural outsider arise from the research? How do they influence the research process and how can they be made fruitful?

(2) Discourse on 'sin': What does the Kongo discourse on wrongdoing look like?[5] What are the semantics used? What does the OT Hebrew discourse on 'sin' look like? Where does it differ from the Kongo discourse on wrongdoing? How useful or misleading is the Munukutuba term *disumu*?[6] What critical response can be given to the Kongo discourse in the light of the OT understanding of 'sin'?

(3) Contextualization: What tensions arise in a contextualization project initiated by a Swiss researcher? What happens when culturally shaped (Swiss/West-European and Kongo) assumptions about theological topics are challenged by each other and by biblical texts? What

---

[5] For more details why I tried to avoid the term 'sin' in group sessions and interviews, see section 5.1.1.

[6] *Disumu* is the term widely used in the Catholic and the Protestant Church in Congo to translate the French word for 'sin', *péché*.

conclusions might be drawn of relevance to the contextualization process in general? What lessons can be learnt from working cross-culturally?

1.2.2 Contribution to knowledge

The primary contribution to knowledge of this research lies in reducing the gap between theory and practice of doing theology in context by applying and evaluating theoretical tools and accounting explicitly for the methodology, the practicalities and tensions arising in the process of contextualization. The research encourages missionaries and Christians from all parts of the world to 'bridge cultures in a globalizing world' (Hiebert 2007), to enter a contextualization process in their own (cultural) situation. It further shows how the longstanding but still rather theoretical call of doing theology in context can be met in practice.

As a spin-off from the project there are three additional contributions this study makes. 1) By choosing the notion of 'sin' as the example for the contextualization, revisiting the OT view and seeking to understand 'sin' through the lens of Kongo culture, this research also contributes to a deeper understanding of 'sin' in theology in general. The day of Western[7] Christianity's numerical dominance has passed. Western theological dominance remains, based on heritage and superior resources, but if the Western church is to serve the global church well, it must surrender the privileged position of its theology and enter genuine dialogue with Christians and theologians from non-Western traditions, and in this case with Kongo Christians and theologians. According to Mbiti, theology…

> …should strain its neck to see beyond the horizons of our traditional structures, beyond the comforts of our ready-made methodologies of theologizing; it should be with the church where it is, rubbing shoulders with human beings whose condition, outlook, concerns, and world views are not those with which we are familiar (1974b:253 quoted in Ott 2007:310).

---

[7] The term 'West' or 'Western' often causes disputes among many people depending on their background and research interests. 'West' or 'Western' in this research simply refers to the West-European and Northern American (cultural) background generalizing the two despite the fact that one single culture exists neither in Europe nor in North America. Irrespective of the particular characteristics of European and American (sub-) cultures they contrast with the Kongo culture which is the main reason for the generalization of a 'Western culture'.

In order to see beyond the theological horizon and to pursue a deeper understanding of the notion of 'sin', this research enters into a dialogue between theology and anthropology, two subjects of study that are often kept apart. Mbiti's general call expressed in the above quotation is put into practice, contributing to a cross-cultural discussion about the theological problem of 'sin'. Communicating the concept of 'sin' is a challenge, not only in the Kongo context but in post-modern society in Europe as well. Carson (2005:111) in his article about maintaining Christian truths in a post-modern world confirms: 'In the domain of evangelism … the hardest thing to get across these days is the notion of sin.' This thesis presents insights from a contextualization process that can be looked at as a 'form of mission in reverse' (Whiteman 1997:5): understanding the notion of 'sin' in a new way, learning from the Kongo perspective and the work across cultures, and thus getting prepared to communicate the notion of 'sin' in the West-European cultural setting.

2) The study clarifies one of the reasons the early missionaries failed to effectively communicate the gospel to the Kongo. This was due, at least in part, to a failure in their contextualization of the notion of 'sin', which resulted in a conversion based on serious misunderstandings. Although Catholic missionaries of earlier centuries reported mass baptisms, Kongo 'chiefs converted for political reasons and with them their whole groups'. According to Ekholm Friedman (1991:163f) the interest of the Kongo rulers and their subjects in the 'Whites' source of power' was primarily of a political-ideological nature. The Kongo prayed for success 'instead of being affected by guilt feelings and the need of the grace of God'. The Swedish missionary Laman observed that Kongo morality was not of a religious character and that they did not experience 'sin' in the context of their relationship with God. Instead, their guilt feelings concerned 'man himself, his family and his clan' (Laman 1923:75 in Ekholm Friedman 1991:165). On the basis of Swedish missionaries' written reports from the first half of the twentieth century Ekholm Friedman described in her chapter on the Kongo traditional religion and its encounter with Christianity how the Swedish concept of 'sin' was 'incompatible' with that of the Kongo people

(Ekholm Friedman 1991:165). My own observation is that the superficiality of the Kongo response has not greatly changed. This research uncovers reasons why the Christian faith could not 'penetrate deep into the soil' (van Wing 1959 quoted in Balandier 1968:79)[8] and suggests ways in which the key Christian concept of 'sin' can be better communicated in order to touch more than just the 'surface'.

3) This research also fills a considerable gap in the relevant literature on the Kongo concept of wrongdoing and 'sin'. As section 2.3 will establish in more detail, there is little research published that deals with the Kongo view of wrongdoing and 'sin'. However, 'sin' is a key concept in the Bible, and understanding and communicating it in a relevant way in the Kongo culture is essential for the growth and maturity of the church in Congo-Brazzaville.

Generally speaking the study aims at meeting the longstanding but still rather theoretical call of doing theology in context in very practical terms, encouraging missionaries and Christians from all parts of the world to 'bridge cultures in a globalizing world' (Hiebert 2007), to enter a contextualization process in their own (cultural) situation.

1.3 Limitations

Although my research has reached its aims, I am aware of its limitations and shortcomings. First, due to unexpected time constraints caused by illness and social upheaval, the contextualization process, specifically step 3 of giving a 'critical response' (see chapter 7), was cut short. Having more time for deeper reflections would have most certainly led to results closer to the Kongo people's realities. Second, the research was conducted with people living in a capital city. Thus, the collected data hardly represents the thinking and views of the people from the more traditional rural areas. Third, unexpected difficulties regarding my role and social status arising in the

---

[8] The Belgian Catholic missionary Van Wing applied the picture of a tropical rain that 'touches the surface without penetrating deep into the soil' for illustrating his observation that Christianity had only superficial influence on the life of the Kongo people.

earlier stages of the research first hindered the development of a contextualization process. Thus it made it necessary to choose a main focus group where I would better fit in with my assigned status which limited the diversity of research participants. Consequently, the number of participants was small – twenty-five catechumens and fifteen women (of which only a minority contributed to the data collection) and eighteen theology students – and might not represent all the different social levels. Finally, the majority of the focus group participants came from the *Église Évangélique du Congo* (EEC), a Reformed (-Presbyterian) denomination. Since my own Church background is the Reformed (or Protestant) Church in Switzerland, the present study is theologically located within the Reformed tradition. The data collected neither reflect all the different nuances found in the many (Protestant, Reformed and/or evangelical) denominations in Brazzaville (Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, Salvation Army, etc.), nor do they present Catholic perspectives, nor Pentecostal views. Since Africa has become a hotbed of charismatic activity (see Asamoah-Gyadu 2013), group participants of Pentecostal background might have been more representative.

Despite these limitations, the findings and conclusions of the study provide a valuable contribution to knowledge and will most certainly resonate with researchers from other contexts and situations. The subsequent section will present the outline of the thesis.

1.4 Outline of the thesis

As I will explain in more detail the research was set up to be conducted in cycles. For the sake of an organized presentation in a thesis however, the results are forced into a more linear order. After setting the scene in the introduction chapter, I will discuss research issues which include a review of the literature read that had important implications for the design, conduct and interpretation of the study. Because literature also played a decisive role in the evaluation phase of each cycle which is taken into consideration throughout the writing, not all literature will be presented in the 'literature review' (chapter 2); additional literature will be discussed in the main body of the thesis.

The chapter on the research methodology will discuss the chosen theoretical framework of Practical Theology and the overarching research paradigm of the study, including my ontological and epistemological assumptions and the methodological premise of hermeneutic phenomenology (chapter 3). It will be followed by a presentation of the research procedures (chapter 4) that will focus on presenting the methods with which I collected and analysed the data.

For the sake of organization, the discussion of the data – the field research results from collecting data in Congo Brazzaville and the findings resulting from studying the OT notion of 'sin' – will be presented in two separate chapters. Chapter 5, representing step 1 of the contextualization model (exegesis of culture) concentrates on the Kongo view of wrongdoing and 'sin' and the links made (or not made) to *Nzambi*, God; chapter 6, representing step 2 of the contextualization process (exegesis of Scriptures) focuses on the OT Hebrew discourse and understanding of 'sin' and God's involvement in it. The ensuing chapter 7 aims at giving a critical response to the data presented in the two previous chapters, which denotes step 3 of the contextualization model. It also presents the implications of what the findings, the analysis and the discussion of the data uncover. The concluding chapter 8 will rehearse the research problem and its subsequent questions for the data collection, sum up the main findings and offer recommendations. Several appendices and the bibliography will complete the thesis.

1.5 Key definitions

Definitions adopted by researchers are often not uniform. Therefore, in this section I define five areas and key terms important to my research and underlying the formulation of the research problem in section 1.2. Because of the complexity of the areas, the following sub-sections are extensive in parts. The definitions given serve to delimit the study and to describe certain assumptions that I bring to the research. The definitions given concern the area of contextualization, the term 'sin', the Congo and the Kongo people, my understanding of worldview and culture, and Scripture.

1.5.1 Contextualization

It is without question that all human beings live in a cultural setting into which the word of God and the Christian faith need to be incarnated appropriately (Moreau 2005). The process of incarnating God's word is known as 'contextualization'. According to Whiteman (1997:2) contextualization 'captures in method and perspective the challenge of relating the Gospel to culture'. Or, as Moreau (2012:19) formulates it more informally: 'Contextualization is at the "mixing point" of gospel and culture.'

Before the term 'contextualization' was introduced in the 1970s, words such as 'adaptation', 'accommodation' or 'indigenization' were used. 'Contextualization' eventually replaced the word 'indigenization'. The latter was perceived as static, past-oriented with an emphasis only on traditional culture. 'Conversely, contextualization was perceived as capturing the dynamic of the process, reflecting not only the traditional culture but the contemporary issues as well' (McKinney 2003:6). The word 'contextualization' was first coined by the Theological Education Fund (TEF) and stands for the seeking of forms of theological expression that are deeply rooted in local culture (TEF 1972:31 quoted in McKinney 2003:6). 'Contextualization is a new way of doing theology, at least on the conscious, reflexive level' (Bevans 2002:16). It is 'a reflection and action from the perspective of one's worldview, culture, values and historical situation' (Bunyi 1989 quoted in McKinney 2003:6), and it 'is part of an evolving stream of thought that relates the Gospel and church to a local context' (Whiteman 1997:2). Because contextualization focuses on communicating Christian beliefs to 'a particular people through their language, thought forms, worldview and way of life' (Moreau 1995:121), the process of understanding culture is an imperative. Not all theologians have accepted the terminology of contextualization (Bevans 2002:26). In order to describe the process of developing theological thought, I did adopt the term 'contextualization' however, because the term describes a theology that is on the one hand centred in the biblical Scriptures, and on the other hand is related to a particular cultural setting.

The fact that the cultural settings in today's globalizing world become increasingly

dynamic, involves additional challenges to contextualization. According to Ott (2015), early approaches to contextualization focused on finding expressions of the Christian faith in quite well-defined contexts. The dominating questions were how to effectively communicate the gospel, and to what extent the gospel should preserve or reshape traditional culture. In a globalizing world, where people no longer exist in rather isolated contexts, it becomes evident that the focus of earlier approaches to contextualization needs shifting. It is not that the questions previously asked are irrelevant in the twenty first century or that conventional approaches to contextualization are jettisoned. But rather, as Ott suggests, that

> …for the majority of the world impacted by globalization new additional models are necessary to address the new challenges brought by globalization. (2015:44)

Ott's call for developing new contextualization models has yet to be heard and put into practice on the ground. Coming across this call only recently, I realize that my research project, whose data collection started in 2009, might have taken a different turn, if Ott's article had been published earlier. This not being the case I did what I thought most appropriate for launching my project: I chose a contextualization model upon which it seemed most suitable to found the research, namely Paul Hiebert's model of 'critical contextualization' presented in more detail in chapter 4.

1.5.2 'Sin'

In this research the term 'sin' takes central stage. When I started to study the term as it is found in the Bible I realized that there are not just numerous terms used with various meanings, but that there is also a metaphorical shift occurring within the Scriptures. The two predominant metaphors used in the OT are those of defilement and of a weight or burden. The NT speaks in a different idiom, describing 'sin' as a debt. The shift from 'sin' as a weight to 'sin' as a debt was heavily influenced by the linguistic, legal and historical specificities during the Medo-Persian era (539-333 BCE); 'sin' has a history (Anderson 2009).

16

It is however not only the shift of metaphors that proves a definition of a biblical understanding of 'sin' to be a complex issue. As the thesis will demonstrate, the OT offers a wide variety of terms. This is also true for the New Testament (NT). For talking about 'sin' the NT has available different Greek terms. The most commonly occurring terms are found in the word groups related to the nouns *hamartia* (missing a mark, failure to achieve a standard), *adikia* (doing damage, legal wrongdoing, unrighteousness, injustice), *parabasis* (violation of the law, deviation, transgression), *paraptōma* (offence, failure), and – less common but most influential on considerable theological controversial debates on 'sin' throughout the last centuries – *opheilēma*, (debt) (Balz & Schneider 1990 [EDNT]; Metzner 2011; Sklar 2015). The Apostle Paul is the most articulated writer concerning 'sin', especially in his Epistle to the Romans (Williams 2005; Nel 2014). Paul speaks of 'sin' (*hamartia*) usually in the singular describing it as a power, an active force in the human beings (Bauer 1970). Acting like a person, 'sin' reigns (Rom. 5:20) and enslaves (6:6); it calls up for service (6:12) and pays wages (6:23); it inhabits human beings (7:17) and takes them captive (7:20) (Williams 2005; Nel 2014; Karrer 2001). Williams underlines that Paul understands 'sin' not as an activity or a culpable failure or error, not a deliberate weakness of will. 'Sin' in Paul's terms is a form of enslavement that disables will and judgment. but something that disables both will and judgment (Williams 2005).

The Apostle John also speaks of 'sin' in the singular (unlike the synoptics) and understands it as slavery (8:31-36) and spiritual blindness (9:39-41). The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews deals with the topic of 'sin' in the context of sacrifice, interpreting the work of Christ as purification from 'sins' (1:3). He calls for a strict break with 'sin' that deceives, seduces and ensnares (Heb. 3:13; 11:25; 12:1). The concept of conversion also sheds light on the NT understanding of 'sin'. Jesus for example starts his ministry with the call to repentance (*metanoeō*, to turn around or change one's mind; see Mk. 1:15), a term suggesting that the people have 'turned away' from God (Bauer 1970).

The diversity of the NT makes it difficult to define 'sin' in a few paragraphs. It is however striking that the NT predominantly looks at 'sin' from a soteriological perspective and forgiveness (see also Karrer 2001). The evolution of the metaphor of 'sin' as a debt and the finding that the biblical notion of 'sin' is multi-faceted and diverse challenged me to delimit the scope. Because I considered the OT understanding of 'sin' as fundamental, and because I repeatedly observed that the Kongo context holds many affinities with the OT Hebrew culture, I decided to concentrate on the OT description of 'sin', further delimiting it to the First Temple period (mid-tenth century B.C. – 587 B.C. when the Babylonians destroyed the city of Jerusalem).[9]

'Sin' is a heavily loaded term. The undertones, connotations and meanings it might carry depend greatly on a person's background and experience. The term will be put into inverted commas throughout the whole study[10] which expresses my concern not to reduce the meaning to one's assumptions unthinkingly.

1.5.3 Congo and the Kongo people

I conducted my research among church-related Munukutuba speakers in the southern part of Congo[11]. This area, together with the Lower Congo in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), from present-day Kinshasa to the city of Matadi and the coastal area from Pointe-Noire down to Angola, is the contemporary core area of the Kongo[12]. That area was part of the ancient Kongo kingdom with its capital city São Salvador. At its maximum extent in the sixteenth and

---

[9] Anderson suggests that the metaphors for 'sin' were replaced in the Second Temple period (520/515 B.C. – 70. A.C.) heavily influenced by the Aramaic language of the Persian rulers (see footnote 45, p.217 in sub-section 6.2.3.2).

[10] Except for quotations that do not put the term into inverted commas in the original.

[11] There are two sovereign neighbouring states that use the term 'Congo' in their name. The countries are the Republic of Congo, the former People's Republic of Congo, also called Congo-Brazzaville, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the former Zaire, also called Congo-Kinshasa. Both countries derive their name from the former Kongo kingdom. In this thesis I use 'Congo' to refer to the Republic of Congo. The Democratic Republic of Congo is referred to as DRC.

[12] 'Kongo' refers to the ethnic and linguistic group and its culturally and linguistically related sub-groups living in the southern part of the Republic of Congo between Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire including the Loango coast and the region of the Lower Congo in DRC (for geographical details see Figure 1.5-1).

18

seventeenth centuries the Kongo kingdom covered a vast area from the Niari-River in the north (Congo), including the later independent kingdom of Loango on the coast, to the Kwango-River in the east (DRC) and to Luanda in the south on the Atlantic coast in contemporary Angola (Randles 1968; Thornton 1983; 1998; Balandier 1968; see Figure 1.5-1 below).

The borders of the present-day independent states in the Kongo area go back to the Berlin Conference in 1884/85 where African land was distributed among the European colonial powers. The whole region of the Lower Congo was divided among three colonial powers: France obtained the northern part, Portugal the southern part plus Cabinda, and the lower reaches of the Congo River up to Stanley Pool[13] went to the 'Congo Independent State' under the control of the Belgian king, Leopold II (Ekholm Friedman 1991:57). This division was exclusively based on political and economic interests irrespective of ethnic considerations.

---

[13] Stanley Pool is also called Malebo Pool and designates the lake-like widening of the Congo River upstream from today's Brazzaville and Kinshasa.

Figure 1.5-1: Ancient Kongo kingdom 16th-17th century[14]
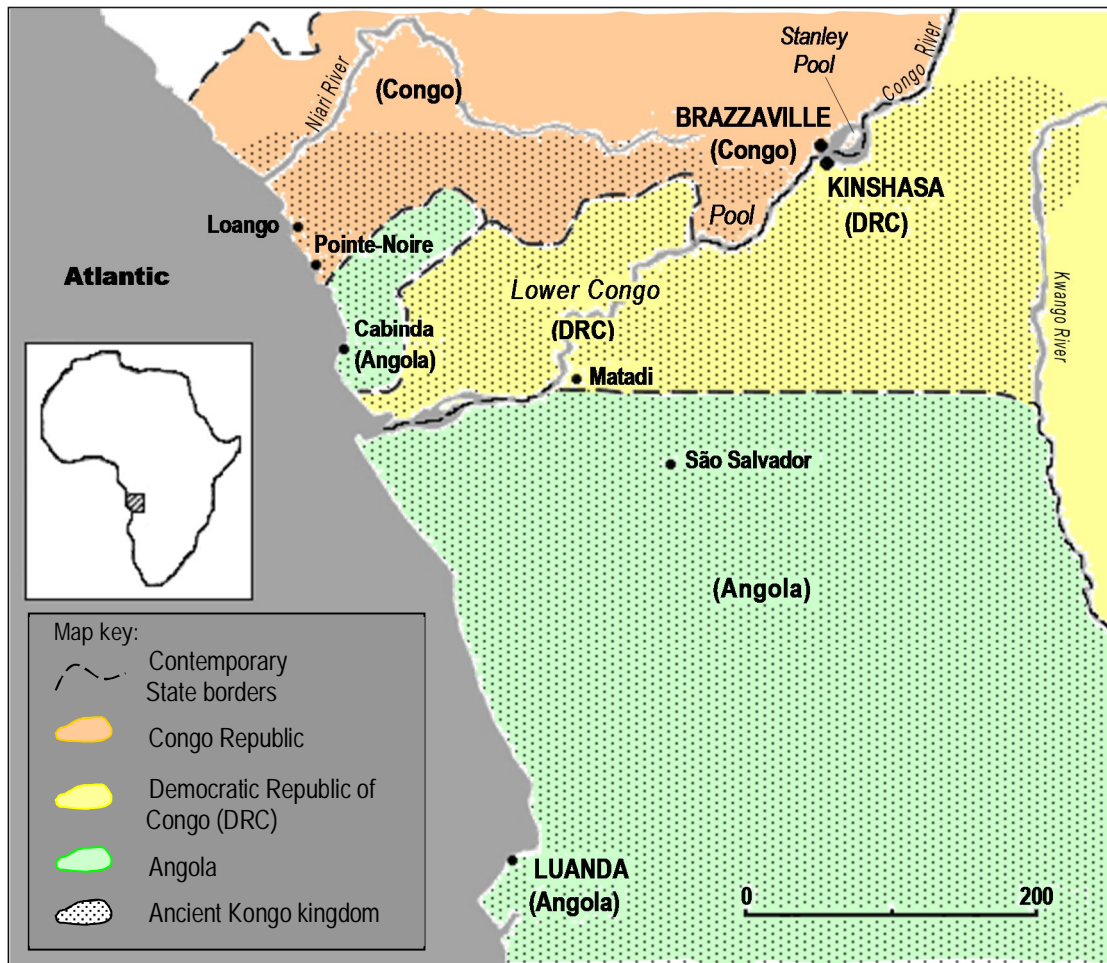
The Kongo people, often referred to as 'Bakongo'[15], are presumed to be a unified ethnic group (Mufwene 2009:215) of Bantu origin. However, the Kongo kingdom comprised many different ethno-linguistic groups and sub-groups that still exist today. The origin of the Kongo people is still a mystery with different explanations, depending on political and economic

---

[14] Source: The Kongo kingdom's most extreme limits are taken from the map in Randles (1968:22). The map drawn in this thesis: © Sabine Müri, 2009.

[15] The term 'Kongo' or 'Bakongo' is often confusing and sometimes even misleading. There are many controversial discussions about identity, language, ethnicity, history and geographical questions concerning this ethnic people group (see for example Hersak 2001:615f). Usually the term used in literature is 'Bakongo'. This form applies the grammatically correct term by using the prefix *ba-* indicating the plural form. In order not to become trapped by difficulties of grammatical and orthographic correctness in the Kongo language, I refrain from applying the singular or plural prefix to that term.

interests (Hilton 1985:32; Thornton 1983:94; 2004:32–35).[16] The term 'Bakongo' itself was probably created by colonial administrators and Christian missionaries, perhaps by association with the ancient kingdom of Kongo (Mufwene 2009). After its abolition in the new colonial environment, the Kongo kingdom became the Kongo 'tribe' that was both larger and less historically defined than the kingdom had been (Thornton 2004:35; MacGaffey 1986:22f). Even though most of the Kongo identify themselves according to the various discrete ethno-linguistic subgroups to which they belong[17], there is also an overall sense of Kongo identity that can be observed, which separates Kongo people from 'others'.[18] This is reinforced by the widespread use of Munukutuba as lingua franca[19] in all areas of the former Kongo kingdom.

My research was conducted exclusively in the southern part of Congo. The relatively rich literature I found on the Kongo (van Wing 1938, 1959; Laman 1962; 2000; Balandier 1965; Janzen & MacGaffey 1974; MacGaffey 1986; Ekholm Friedman 1991) mainly concentrated on the area of the Lower Congo in DRC. During colonial times the term 'Lower Congo' included the southern part of today's Congo and designated a much wider geographical area than today's

---

[16] Laman suggested that the people of the western and central African region (including the Kongo people) had their origin in the southern part of Sudan around Lake Chad and the Chari River (2000:15).

[17] By referring to Balandier (1963) Soret (1959:3) lists the following groups living in Congo-Brazzaville as making part of the Kongo group: Laari (Laadi), Fumbu, Koongo, Suundi, Gangala, Beembe, Keenge, Doondo, Kamba, Kunyi, Yombe and Vili. MacGaffey (2000:70) notes that cultural unity of Kikongo speakers, including the Vili, Kunyi and Beembe people was recognized by Laman in 1916, after extensive journeys investigating language and history.

[18] An exception might be the Vili people at the Atlantic coast around Loango and the Yombe people of the Kwilu region who 'generally do not refer to themselves as Kongo globally' (Hersak 2001:615). Another critical voice seemingly questioning the overall sense of identity referring came in the form of a statement made in a semester paper by a theology student from a class I have been teaching during my research: '*Le clan où l'on appartient n'a pas les mêmes réalités que l'autre clan bien que tous faisant parti de la culture Kongo.*' (DOC-ex1#S17). English: 'The clan to which one belongs does not represent the same realities as the other clan, although they all belong to the Kongo culture.'

[19] Munukutuba (or Kituba) is a Bantu language and is spoken as first or second language in Congo by more than 50% of the population mainly in the southern part of the country in the urban centres between the capital city of Brazzaville and main economic city of Pointe-Noire on the coast (Lumwamu & Ndamba 1987). Munukutuba is considered to be a variation of the vernacular language Kikongo that is often referred to as *le vrai kikongo* (the real Kikongo) or *kikongo originel* (the original Kikongo). Munukutuba is officially called Kituba. Most of the Congolese population however prefer to call the language Munukutuba in order not to confuse it with the Kituba variation spoken in the neighbouring DRC. The Munukutuba spoken in Congo and the Kituba spoken in DRC are dialects of the same language and are not to be confused with the above mentioned Kikongo (Müri & Bidounga 2009). Munukutuba is a simplified form of Kikongo and is called a *koiné* by language experts (see for example Lumwamu 1986). Because of the population's preference for calling their language Munukutuba, this thesis adopts that name instead of the official name Kituba.

Lower Congo in DRC (see Figure 1.5-1 above). Moreover, because the political borders decided at the Berlin conference were artificial and did not reflect any culturally relevant or ethno-linguistic divisions within the Kongo kingdom, I did not consider these borders as having substantial effects on the Kongo worldview as a whole (see also Julian 2004:31). Therefore, literature that focused on the Kongo in DRC in the past was also considered relevant for my research on the Kongo people in Congo-Brazzaville, yet not without critical examination of its applicability.

Irrespective of Hersak's criticism of the tendency in literature to 'amalgamate sources from various sectors into a single Kongo universe' (2001:616) I decided not to concentrate my research on one single sub-ethnic group with its corresponding vernacular language because of the rather complex socio-linguistic reality in the area that tends to make ethnic differentiation problematic. One factor in the socio-linguistic complexity is the increasing urbanization of the population in Congo. Not only does the majority of the population live in urban centres where tradition and identity become increasingly blurred, but also the younger people no longer speak their parents' vernacular language (see Ndamba 2000; Nkouka 2000), which means that verna-cular languages are losing their capacity to serve as a distinctive marker of ethnicity. Besides French, the official language of the country, the Kongo living in the southern part of Congo have widely adopted Munukutuba as lingua franca. Many people, and certainly the great majority of the younger generation, are increasingly more fluent in Munukutuba than in their parents' vernacular language.

The churches throughout Congo have adopted a similar practice: The languages spoken are predominantly French (as the official language), followed by Lingala and Munukutuba, the two official national languages. In the southern part of Congo and especially in the Kongo areas (with the probable exception of the sub-group of the Laari people in the Pool region), French and Munukutuba (or the more original Kikongo language for Bible reading) are the two church

languages of choice. In recent research on language use in Congo (conducted by missionary colleagues) the majority of the pastors who were interviewed expressed their concern about excluding a lot of people from the church service if specific vernacular languages are used.

On account of the socio-linguistic situation in the Kongo area and the widespread use and the high degree of understanding of Munukutuba, I chose to carry out my research among Munukutuba speakers. French (in which I am fluent) and Munukutuba (which I have studied in depth) are the languages in which I conducted the research. Unless otherwise stated, quotations from French are put in italics with an English translation presented in a footnote; expressions in Munukutuba are also given in italics with a free translation following in brackets.

1.5.4 Culture and worldview

Conducting research in Congo with Kongo people means working across cultures. Hence 'culture' and the related term 'worldview' are key terms and are frequently used throughout the study. Both are ambiguous terms that need some clarification. How I understand them is explained in the following.

The term 'culture' has a varied history. According to van Binsbergen (2003) the most common meaning of culture is the popularization of an anthropological concept coined by Tylor who defined it as a…

> …complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. (Tylor 1871 quoted by van Binsbergen 2003:465)

For a long time culture was an academic technical term describing a total, bounded, integrated and non-performative form of human existence, 'a nearly impregnable fortress'. This classic image – according to van Binsbergen largely discarded by anthropologists in the meantime – produced a view of Africa 'as a gaudy patchwork quilt of fundamentally different "cultures", each of which constitutes an integrated, bounded totality' (van Binsbergen 2003:461). When I started my research, I also had that classic, holistic understanding of culture in mind. It was only later that I started to recognize the flaws of that view (see 7.4.1, p.250).

Closely related to culture is the concept of 'worldview'. It has its roots in Western philosophy, history and anthropology. In Western philosophy the German word *Weltanschauung*, became the standard word to express the basic idea of worldview as…

> …a point of view on the world, a perspective on things, a way of looking at the cosmos from a particular vantage point. (Wolters 1985:9)

A *Weltanschauung* is usually understood as shared by a group of people (ethnic group, nation, class, period, etc.).[20]

Another root of the concept of worldview lies in the study of history. Nineteenth century historians were interested in looking at the structure of the world around them. Questions were asked about how cultural patterns emerged and spread or why some died out while others persisted for centuries or millennia. The term *Weltanschauung* was used to refer to the deep, enduring cultural patterns of a people (Hiebert 2008:14).

By examining different cultures in depth, anthropology studies, the third root, found that below the surface of speech and behaviour are beliefs and values that generate what is said and done. Anthropologists unearthed deeper levels of culture that shape beliefs and assumptions by which communities organize and categorize things into a coherent understanding of what is perceived as reality. Countless anthropological studies established that people did not just label things differently, but lived in radically different conceptual worlds.

The term 'worldview' has its limitations. Julian (2010:58) points out that the term has become…

> …devoid of meaning because it has been used in ways that are either too limiting (e.g., the 'Christian worldview') or too powerful (e.g., the driving force behind why a people group acts in a certain way).

Moreover, the world most people live in becomes increasingly fractured, influenced by postmodernity and globalization. Uniform worldviews hardly exist anymore. Taking into consideration the limitations of the concept of 'worldview' I still use it because despite the

---

[20] Wolters (1985:9) argues that the term 'tends to carry the connotation of being personal, dated, and private, limited in validity by its historical conditions'. This is however not the position I take.

24

fractured societies, there are still cultural foundations that hold them together. In concrete terms I refer to 'worldview' in this research as what the Kongo people take as given realities, their assumptions and values in their communities, the 'blueprint' (Geertz 1973:169) or 'mental maps' (Walls 2012:155) they use to explain the nature of things, and that guide their behaviour.

Figure 1.5-2: Illustration of worldview and culture (Julian 2010)

Clothes, food, music, means of exchange, communication, etc.

Surface level: Observable parts, visible forms of culture

Cultural systems

Systems: medical, family, judiciary, education, etc.

Structural (functional, rational) level: Thoughts, ideas, beliefs, rationales, etc.

Worldview

Concepts about God, the world, life death, etc.

Foundational level: Premises, attitudes, basic goals and drives, starting points in reasoning, reacting, and motivating, etc.

In order to explain the term worldview to the theology students with whom I worked for collecting data, I adopted the image used by Julian, the 'floating islands'[21] (see Figure 1.5-2 above). The illustration shows three levels of culture, an assumption taken from Luzbetak (1988) and Mushete (1991), in which worldview, as a part of culture, builds the foundational level. The foundational level is where 'the underlying premises, emotionally charged attitudes, basic goals

---

[21] Justin Kimpalu, a Congolese investigator of culture who taught me the Munukutuba-language used the idea of floating islands to describe culture. Cultures are like the *Kongo ya sika* ('new Congo'), small islands of grass and weeds that can be observed floating on the water of the Congo River. What can be seen at the surface is only small compared to the root mass that is hidden from view, yet holding the island together (see Julian 2010:57, 60).

and drives, starting-points in reasoning, reacting, and motivating' are found (Luzbetak 1988:78); they are rarely questioned or reflected upon. Moving up a level, the structural level is reached where the ideas are found that give reason and purpose for what will ultimately be acted out at the surface level (Julian 2010:59). The latter is the observable part of culture that grows out of the structural level.

This view of worldview and culture is not uncontested. In section 7.4. I will venture to question the understanding of culture as I have just described it. Today's globalization and its impact on societies make it most probably necessary to revise the above concept of culture; when I started the data collection however, this was the paradigm on which I based my cultural research. Whatever concept is adopted, I think it is important to understand that the categories through which reality is filtered, the culture's assumptions and values as well as the acceptable emotions in a community, dwell on levels below the surface; they are invisible and problematic to access. This implies that if a contextualization project such as mine remains at the surface level without penetrating or taking into account the worldview of the group, no change will happen at the deeper levels but the project will stay on the outside, on the surface only. I consider such kind of contextualization is not worth pursuing. As I will explain in more detail in the methodology (chapter 3), what I take as 'truth', the way I understand God, interpret biblical texts, or live the Christian faith, is influenced by my assumptions and preunderstandings deriving from my worldview. In this sense all theology is rooted in culture which is the reason for using a qualitative research approach that allows me to tackle some of these assumptions and pre-understandings.

1.5.5 Scripture

The research problem formulated on p.8 designates the OT from which I draw for contextualizing the notion of 'sin'. In section 1.1 I already briefly explained why I turn to the OT for data

collection. This sub-section presents some basic thoughts regarding my understanding of Scripture.

The OT and the NT form the biblical canon that I assume to be authoritative to the Christian church in the sense that it is a witness to and a 'vehicle' of God's authority (Wright 1991:23). Authority belongs alone to God, and not to a book. God however has invested his authority in that book (as he did in Christ, in the apostles and in the church through his Spirit); it is 'breathed' by God. 'All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof for correction, and for training in righteousness' (2 Tim. 3:16)[22]. The whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation is at the same time also culturally conditioned. The Scripture was written in specific cultural settings and languages of particular times.

In the Bible God reveals himself. Therefore I understand his Word not communicating a 'thing' in the form of abstract sets of truths unrelated to space and time, fixed doctrines or dogmas, but communicating a person. The climax of God's self-revelation is found in Christ, the incarnate Word of God. God's self-revelation also implies that this revelation is not at my (human) disposal but a free gift of grace, as Brunner suggested (1964:71). Even though we 'have' God's word in written form, it must always be received anew in the various cultural settings and local situations, which is in a nutshell what contextualization is about. Contextualization is giving and receiving God's word in a specific context. By doing so I stand before the biblical text not as its master, but as its advocate (paraphrasing Brueggemann 1993:11). It is to give voice to the biblical text rather than using it to explain and justify previously fixed dogmatic principles. Contextualization is not to twist, press, tailor, or gerrymander God's word until it is comfortable with the recipient cultural setting (see Brueggemann 1989:2), but to challenge and confront the culture. The questions I ask of Scripture in contextualization however emerge from the (cultural) context where the contextualization takes place.

---

[22] The Greek words used leave it open as to whether 'all scripture' actually means 'every *single verse* of scripture', 'every *part* of scripture' or scripture *as a whole*.

On a more personal level I appreciate the Bible as a book of personal renewal, as the book of tears and laughter, the book through which God resonates with my pain and joy, enabling me to resonate with his pain and joy (Wright 1991:30). What was written in the OT and NT in former days was written for instruction, so that 'by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures' I might have hope for today – to the glory of God (Rom. 15:4).

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter introduced my study by first setting the scene by recounting the events from March 2012. The ensuing section presented the background of my research introducing the problem of not questioning the intelligibility of the message that Christ died on the cross because of 'sin'. A further problem is the misunderstanding between European missionaries and the Kongo people regarding 'sin'. I also pointed out that a purposeful reflection on one's own (cultural) background is important when working and researching across cultures.

These issues led in turn to the formulation of the research problem in section 1.2. More details were added in order to stress the twofold objective of the study. In order to pursue the indicated direction, questions further modelling the data collection were presented. The main contributions to knowledge are to be found in filling the gap in the relevant literature; in uncovering reasons why the early missionaries' conception of 'sin' resulted in being misunderstood by the Kongo people; in working towards a deeper, transformed understanding of 'sin' in general, and in reducing the gulf between theory and practice of contextualization.

After presenting the limitations of the research (1.3) and the outline of the thesis (1.4), key definitions underlying the study were discussed (1.5). That section concentrated on three terms used in the formulation of the research problem: contextualization, 'sin', Congo and the Kongo people; they were supplemented by reflections about worldview and culture and my understanding of the biblical Scripture.

On these foundations I proceed with the discussion of the relevant literature in the following chapter.

2. CRITICAL THEORETICAL ISSUES AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter serves to discuss theoretical issues significant for my study and to present relevant literature that had important implications for the design and conduct of the research (Robson 2011). Because literature also played a decisive role in the evaluation phase of each research cycle (see 4.2.2), not all relevant literature is presented here; additional works will be discussed in the main body of the thesis where appropriate.

2.1 Issues and literature regarding the characteristics of practical theology

The first part of this chapter is characterized by an extensive, critical examination of practical theology (PT). In order to understand the reason for the extensiveness of that part it is important to know my personal history with PT, which is presented in the following.

My history with PT was marked by the challenge to find the right academic discipline for my research project. At the beginning of my studies I soon found myself in a dilemma because I was challenged to choose between a theoretical and a practical research methodology. Because I insisted on holding theory and practice together, I was tutored to choose action research (AR) as the appropriate research approach. However, I kept feeling uneasy with my project being labelled 'action research'. Eventually this uneasiness led to an intensive investigation into the possibility of PT being an alternative approach, a highly challenging journey. The inner conflict I faced during my search for clarity is illustrated by the following quote by the Reformer Martin Luther: 'True theology is practical… speculative theology belongs with the devil in hell.' (Tappert & Lehmann 1967:22, talk no. 153). These provoking words aptly express part of my irritation towards a certain kind of academic attitude that smiles condescendingly at studies that deal with the practical. The quote also stands simultaneously for my annoyance with the kind of practitioner who sneers at academic theory. The following sub-sections 2.1.1 – 2.1.5 account for the results of my struggles to find an academic discipline and a research approach that hold the two poles – theory and practice – in creative tension, stimulating each other to excellence.

2.1.1 Historical background

Because I consider the historical background quite relevant for understanding the concerns discussed I first turn briefly to the history of PT and AR.

2.1.1.1 History of practical theology

PT has a long history. The earliest Christian thought did not make any distinction between 'practical theology' and any other kind of theology; theology as a whole was understood as 'practical theology' (Maddox 1991). This ended however with the emergence of Universities in Europe in the thirteenth century where it became common to distinguish between speculative theology situated in the University context, and practical theology which reflected on spirituality outside of the University context.[1] In the sixteenth century, PT found its way back into the University as a simplified summary of academic theology addressed to 'mere pastors'. In the seventeenth century PT became a separate discipline understood as an academic study of Christian **actions**, distinct from the speculative theology that studied Christian **beliefs**.[2] PT was understood as general Christian practice and identified as moral theology. This changed in the nineteenth century under the influence of Kant's distinction between theoretical and practical reason.[3] According to Maddox (1991:160) Kant's analysis of practical reason had the possibly unintended effect that PT became the field of applied theories developed by Systematic Theology. Another influence on the understanding of PT was Schleiermacher's theological encyclopaedia published in 1811. Schleiermacher replaced the traditional manuals on pastoral ministry with practical theology: the theory or technique of church leadership (Meyer-Blanck

---

[1] *Speculativa* is the Latin equivalent of the Greek *theoria*.

[2] The distinction between Christian actions and Christian beliefs can be traced back to Aristotle's idea of distinguishing *theoria* from *praxis*. 'Aristotle praises the life of *theoria* to the detriment of practical *arête*: all men need the necessities of life, but the wise man can engage in *theoria* by himself.' (Adkins 1978:297) *Arête* means 'excellence' and is often associated with moral excellence. In Aristotle's view the life of *theoria* is superior to any other.

[3] Kant's 'Critique of Practical Reason' was first published in 1788.

2011a).[4] In the first edition of his short outline of theological study[5] he called practical theology 'the crown of theological studies', not in the sense of being the pinnacle of importance of theological undertaking, but in the sense of being the last of three stages in theological education[6] (Forrester 2000). For Schleiermacher PT was an entirely technical discipline and had no influence on how theology was studied (Forrester 2000; Nowak 2002). This led to the narrowing of its subject field to ecclesial practice and later on to the practice of clergy (Kurian 2012). PT became pastoral theology, emphasizing the technical aspects of the profession. When Karl Barth (1963:183) identified practical theology with preaching, homiletics became the central discipline of PT, taking its content from exegesis and dogmatics (Meyer-Blanck 2011a). Barth's emphasis on preaching and teaching God's Word however did not seem to have a long-lasting impact on the curriculum of PT in the Universities in general. In the late 1960s PT became more and more an empirical 'action science'[7], and the disciplines of science of religious education and pastoral care attracted the main attention (Meyer-Blanck 2011a). In an article published in 1977 the German theologian Helmut Gollwitzer[8] argued that the most critical agenda for theology was the recovery of the vital relationship between theological reflection and Christian life in the world (Maddox 1990)[9].

---

[4] Literally: *'Die praktische Theologie ist demnach erschöpft in der Theorie des Kirchenregimentes im engeren Sinn und des Kirchendienstes.'* (Schleiermacher & Schmid 2002:117). English: 'The practical theology is thus exhausted in the theory of the government of the Church in the narrower sense, and in the service of the Church.' (Translation mine)

[5] Original title in German: *Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums*.

[6] Schleiermacher described three levels of theological studies, 1) philosophical theology, 2) historical theology, 3) practical theology. He used a metaphor describing philosophical theology as 'root', historical theology as 'body' and practical theology as 'crown'. In the second edition of his encyclopedia however he cut out the term 'crown' because of the danger of misinterpretation. He wanted to prevent the erroneous assumption that in comparison with practical theology, the two other disciplines of philosophical and historical theology were of secondary importance, whereas the contrary was true. (Nowak 2002).

[7] Originally a German term, *Handlungswissenschaft*.

[8] Gollwitzer (1908-1993) was a Barth disciple and Protestant theologian in Germany. During the Nazi regime he was a well-known member of the Confessing Church movement.

[9] Maddox refers to the article written by Gollwitzer in 1977 'Theorie und Praxis im theologischen Denken' in *Evangelische Kommentare* 10, pp.522-525.

The call for theology to become again a practical discipline at its very core was not restricted to the theological faculties in Germany, but it set the agenda for the resulting debates in the 1980s and 1990s in Europe, the USA and South Africa. One of the two main topics of the discussions began to develop on the identification of the subject field, dealing with the question of what kind of practice PT is concerned with. The other epicentre dealt extensively with the understanding of practice and its relation to theory and whether PT was simply an 'applying' discipline or whether it should develop its own field of study. Since the debates in the 1980s and 1990s PT had been widely accepted as being an academic discipline with different perspectives, pastoral ministry[10] being only one of them. According to Maddox, the main issue in PT today is the development of various models and scientific theories. The larger commonality of all of them is the stance that theological theory is irrelevant unless it is linked to everyday practice; and that both, theory and practice, need to be critically reflected upon if they are to have transforming impact on the Church and the people.

One of the most recent PT models has been developed by Cameron, Bhatti, Duce, Sweeny & Watkins (2010). It is an example of combining features of PT and AR; the model is known as TAR (theological action research). It seeks to 'better enabling properly theological-practical research and development' (2010:60). The authors define TAR as follows:

> Theological Action Research is a partnership between an insider and an outsider team to undertake research and conversations answering theological questions about faithful practice in order to renew both theology and practice in the service of God's mission. (p.63)

The partnership of insiders and outsiders and the research being embedded in a process are the hallmarks of TAR. Among the different features of TAR one finds the collaborative work

---

[10] The definition of the academic subject field is still unclear today; the universities maintain their own understanding of PT. In general Schleiermacher's 'ecclesial paradigm' is still the foundation of PT in many Universities; PT is mainly a preparation for pastoral ministry. (Meyer-Blanck 2011a:274). In German-speaking Europe the inclusion of other disciplines such as sociology or psychology into PT 'has been uncontroversial, as has been the refusal to treat practical theology as an applied science.' (Meyer-Blanck 2011b:275). However, there is no agreement on a scientific theory of PT as a whole. There is a new strand of PT that has emerged in more recent years that considers the nature of religious worldviews in society and aims at offering theological appraisal of them by means of empirical-theological analysis and construction (Kurian 2012).

between practitioners and academics, asking theological questions about the work of church organizations and faith-based agencies, and facilitating change in belief and action. Despite its proximity to PT, I understand TAR to respond to matters different from the concerns to which the presented study turns its attention.

2.1.1.2 History of action research

The description of PT above showed that it has many things in common with AR. The concern of everyday practice and the question how it relates to theory and science are the big issues that PT shares with AR. In contrast to PT, the development of AR is much more recent.[11] Many influences formed AR into the many-faceted research approach as presented today. Eikeland (2012) traces the ancestry of AR broadly back to philosophical pragmatism (represented by Greenwood & Levin 1998), critical theory (represented by Carr & Kemmis 1986) and experimentalism (represented by Kurt Lewin). Political activism (promotion of democracy), critical theory, phenomenology, hermeneutics, feminism and post-modernism further prominently shaped AR. It is often used in the fields of education, health services and community development and seeks to bring together theory and practice. It offers a combination of generating (theoretical, scientific) knowledge with developing professional practice in collaboration with others (Rapoport 1970; Reason & Bradbury 2008; Somekh 2008).[12] In the literature AR is often labelled collaborative inquiry, participatory, practitioner, emancipatory, native, interactive, or intervention research. Vaccarino (2006:7) maintains that such labels are 'variations' on the same

---

[11] Its origin seems to be obscure. Generally AR is considered to originate with Kurt Lewin in the 1950s (Kemmis & McTaggart 1988; Holter & Schwartz-Barcott 1993; Zuber-Skerritt 1993; Heron 1996; Richardson 2001; Koshy 2005; Somekh 2008). Janet Masters (1995) and Vaccarino (2006) list social reformists who preceded Lewin and influenced the emerging new method of inquiry. McKernan (1988) argues that its roots go back to the science-in-education movement of the late nineteenth century. Although the origins of AR are unclear, what can be surely said is, that the work of Kurt Lewin is a 'major landmark in the development of action research as a methodology' (Koshy 2005:2).

[12] O'Brien (2001) differentiates four main streams of AR: 1) Traditional AR that stems from Lewin's work; 2) Contextual AR or Action Learning (according to Richardson 2001 Contextural AR entails reconstituting the structural relations among actors in a social environment; 3) Radical AR with a strong focus on emancipation and overcoming power imbalances; it includes participatory AR and feminist AR; 4) Educational AR that focuses on professional development and operates mainly out of educational institutions.

principle. Eikeland (2012:11) supports this assessment and says that 'the differences are mostly terminological or simply designate different aspects of a complex practice'.

Although there are as many definitions of AR as there are action researchers, the following key elements are often used to differentiate AR from the more conventional type of research: improving or researching your own practice or situation; linking reflection and action; constructing theory from practice; participation in decision making; collaboration among the members of the group as a 'critical community'; learning by making mistakes in a 'self-reflective spiral' of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, replanning, etc. (Koshy 2005; Altrichter et al. 2002; Zuber-Skerritt 1993).

Many more details are needed if one is to grasp the many-faceted character of AR. In the following I present a selection of the characteristics that are pertinent to my research project and that are also relevant to PT concerns. These are the correlation of theory and practice, participation and collaboration, reflexivity and the cyclical approach to research.

2.1.2 Correlation of theory and practice

As the term **practical** theology suggests, practice is a prominent concern in PT as well as in AR. The language used in PT however differs from that of AR. In PT the two poles of theory and practice are often understood as the two poles of Christian beliefs (also doctrine, tradition or text) and living out those beliefs (also context or experience). The concern for practice is embedded in terms such as living situation, context, human history, application to everyday life, etc. According to Farley (1987) the key point of PT is the interpretation of situations because all human beings exist and act in situations (culture, marriage, death, war, etc.). Hermans (2004) insists that responding to the situation under scrutiny can only be done by applying the insights from other academic disciplines to human practice. He also points out that practice is not the monopoly of PT but that other theological disciplines reflect on practice too. Forrester (1990:8) repudiates the idea of the practical theologian receiving from biblical and systematic theologians ready-made

results or doctrines in order to put them to work. He underlines that the contributions by practical theologians are distinct because they arise from a special concern with the contemporary context, relevance and relation to practice. Similar to Forrester, Browning (1991:57) understands PT not as an application of the theoretical sub-disciplines of theology but as the 'culmination of an inquiry that has been practical throughout'. PT answers the question of what the practice should be in an actual situation and 'brings the general fruits of… [other theological disciplines] back into contact with the concrete situation of action' (Browning 1991:55).

Groome (1987) widens the focus from the concrete situation and suggests putting the primary locus for theology in 'human history' as it unfolds in the world because the world is the arena of God's activity[13]. Forrester (1990:5) suggests that PT should be understood as 'that branch of theology which is concerned with questions of truth in relation to action'. Taking up the reciprocity between theory and practice, he explains that theological understanding leads to action, but also arises out of practice. Similarly Volf (2002) who insists that Christian beliefs – which I understand in parallel with theology and theory – normatively shape Christian practices, and that engaging in practices leads to deeper understanding of these beliefs; the Christian practices however are ultimately grounded in the Christian beliefs about God. Loder (1999:370) speaks for many practical theologians when he writes that if theology is separated from practice, it collapses upon itself in irrelevance; and if practice does not maintain the spiritual unity with theology, it loses its way for lack of discernment.

The correlation between theory and practice is undisputed in PT literature. The question however what the relationship looks like in reality or what weight should be given to theory and practice respectively, is a controversial matter and is at large discussed in the so called correlation model and its variations, widely used in contemporary PT.[14] Although certain correlationalists

---

[13] On first sight his understanding looks like a political or liberation theology approach which usually takes the practice of people in history as the point of departure for doing theology and often emphasizes 'praxis' over doctrine. Groome however does not advocate that practice is to be chosen over theory.

[14] Representatives of the 'critical theoretic correlation model' are Farley, Groome, Tracy and Browning; representative of the 'critical praxis correlation model' is Chopp. Swinton & Mowat describe a PT model that they named 'revised model of critical correlation'. The different variations of the correlation model go back to Paul

claim to treat theory and practice as equal interlocutors (for example Groome 1987), the practical theologian is often tempted to choose theory over practice or practice over theory, a fact that is highly critiqued by Hastings (2007). He firmly advocates holding tenaciously on to both theoretical and empirical resources and argues for a bipolar unity of theory and practice that complement each other. At the same time Hastings discerns the cultural captivity of correlationalists and criticizes the 'inordinate impact of the Enlightenment rationality' on their models. According to him that kind of rationality underwrites 'a fatal deistic disjunction between God and the world' (Hastings 2007:7 quoting Torrance 1976:2). Correlationalists consciously or unconsciously supporting such thinking fail to account for divine agency in their PT models and display great difficulty in speaking of God or offering any account for divine initiative (see also Fowler 1985).

Hastings' reproach addressed to the representatives of the correlation model displays the complexity of the correlation of theory and practice. The concern for practice in PT implies an interplay of theology and the social sciences since inquiries into practice are traditionally the realm of the social sciences. The two disciplines traditionally place their epistemological premises on different grounds which puts PT in a constant tension that can be observed throughout all the PT literature. In order to resolve that tension many practical theologians develop '*tertium quid* solutions' (Loder 1998)[15] or take 'experience' as the baseline for pulling together theology and the social sciences. According to Loder (1999:362f) such solutions lead away from the theological centre of PT. Holding onto the bipolar unity of theory and practice

Tillich's 'method of correlation' that aims at 'uniting message and situation' or correlating 'the questions implied in the situation with the answers implied in the message' (biblical text), or correlating 'questions and answers, situation and message, human existence and divine manifestation' (Tillich 1973:8). For a short critique see Peacore (2008).

[15] According to Loder *tertium quid* solutions are PT models that seek out a 'neutral' or non-theological baseline (philosophical, empirical, experiential, or other) for meeting the interdisciplinarity of theology and the social sciences. Examples given by Loder are Tillich's existentialism, Farley's phenomenology, Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach, Fowler's structuralism, Groome's ontological approach, and Browning's process approach (Loder 1998, referred to by Hastings 2007).

puts the PT researcher into a constant tension that I felt throughout the whole project. Details on how I dealt with those tensions are given in the methodology chapter in section 3.1 (p.54ff).

Another controversially discussed issue arises when the question is raised whether PT inquiry should take its direction from theory to practice or from practice to theory, and what weight should be given to theory and to practice. Hermans (2004) for example insists on doing theology from text to context or from theological theory to human practice. This stance reflects Barth (1963) who understood the discipline of PT as always taking the direction from God to mankind, from the text to the context – never the other way round – but always containing both. Its form is given 'through the experiences of whatever psychology, sociology, or linguistics may be most trustworthy at a given moment' (Barth *CD* III/2:183). Chopp chooses the opposite direction that starts with practice.[16] Browning calls for a practice-theory-practice design not only of PT but of theology as a whole. His model goes 'from present theory-laden practice to a retrieval of normative theory-laden practice to the creation of more critically held theory-laden practices' (Browning 1991:51); it is the direction which 'follows the natural move of human thought' (1991:9). The question of direction is also an issue in the different models of contextualization (see the models mapped by Schreiter 1985; see also 2.2, p.46).

As in PT the issues of theory and practice are widely discussed in AR. Although at the core of most AR projects there is a dual agenda that is situated in both theory and practice/ action[17], I got the impression that many AR models are not committed to treating theory and practice as equal interlocutors but put emphasis on practice. Although a unified AR approach does not exist, its different ancestries are united in their dissatisfaction with a disengaged concept of social science and with research 'feigning value neutrality and zero practical reactivity' (Eikeland 2012:14); their common demand is for more practically conscious and relevant research versions.

---

[16] Chopp's 'critical praxis correlation model' includes de-ideologizing of scriptures, pragmatic interpretation of experience, critical theory of emancipation and enlightenment, and a social theory to transform 'praxis' (Chopp 1987:132).

[17] The two terms 'practice' and 'action' are used interchangeably in this chapter.

Reason & Bradbury (2008:4) claim that theory without practice (or action) is meaningless; consequently AR is about working toward **practical** outcomes. Most of the AR literature puts emphasis on inquiring into the practices of people, of institutions or of the researcher herself, aiming at improving or changing those practices (Koshy 2005). Because action researchers accentuate practice almost to the breaking point, theory sometimes seems to be side-lined. Although theory has its own importance in AR, it only comes into play paired with the practical; the theoretical and the practical interplay. Reason insists that good theory arises out of practical experience; it articulates qualities of practice and challenges the researcher in her professional and personal life (Reason 2001:185). In AR theory is often described as **emerging** from the researched practice; it is not **applied** to practice. A more helpful description is given by O'Brien (2001) who points out that theory and practice correlate in a cyclical movement in which theory informs practice, practice refines theory in a continuous transformation.

Reading through PT and AR literature I came to agree with Hastings that it is apparently difficult for researchers from Western European and Northern American cultures to pass beyond the hardened theory vs. practice research options.[18] Having grown tired of the nearly endless debate about the theory-practice duality I came to conclude that if one wants to succeed in uniting the two poles the reflections on theory and practice need to be grounded in what Hastings calls the 'Chalcedonian logic' (2007:32) that functions as the ground for the analogy between theoretical and empirical resources, or between theology and the social sciences (see also van Deusen Hunsinger 1995; Loder 1999; Swinton & Mowat 2006).[19] Applying the Chalcedonian logic to

---

[18] The western European dual thinking of practical and theoretical sciences has its origin in the Greek duality between the *praxis* (or *vita activa*) and *theoria* (or *vita contemplativa*) and Plato's theory of Ideas that resulted in the thought that 'practice must conform to theory; practice is of the lower order (except ruling) and is not constitutive of truth, thus practice cannot be dignified as wisdom or science' (Forrester 1990:5). Aristotle affirmed the superiority of theory over practice although he had a more positive view of practice, emphasizing 'practical wisdom' that he called *phronesis* which related to action. More explanations of the term *phronesis* see 3.1.1.3, p.56).

[19] Hastings refers to the Chalcedonian formulation of Christ being one person in two natures, being of one substance (*homoousios*) with God and at the same time one substance with humanity. The two natures of Christ are marked by 'indissoluble differentiation', 'inseparable unity' and 'indestructible asymmetrical order' (Barth *CD* III/2:437).

the research project at hand has consequences that are explained in more detail in sub-section 3.1.2, p.59.

2.1.3 Participation and collaboration

The above presented premise that theory without practice is meaningless, looks at research done at a distance as insufficient, irrelevant, or even distorting and invalidating. The dissatisfaction with 'detached research' is at the root of the emphasis on AR being research **with** people and not **on** people (McKernan 1988; Marshall & Reason 1994; Heron 1996; Reason & Heron 1997; Reason & Bradbury 2008 and many others). AR is carried out by a partnership of research participants (co-researchers) or insiders (practitioners) to the situation under scrutiny, and outsiders or external researchers (Eikeland 2012; Somekh 2008).

Because the action researcher includes practitioners in all phases of the inquiry, AR is at times referred to as practitioner-based research (or practitioner research); Heron (1996) and Reason (1994) describe it as co-operative inquiry or collaborative research (see also Heron & Reason 2006). Participation and collaboration are key terms in AR projects. 'Collaboration implies a strict equality principle' (McKernan 1988:188) which means that practitioners are not just 'cooperating' clients but active and equal participants; all team members share and contribute to the planning, implementation and reporting of the research with their unique skills and expertise (McKernan 1996:12). Consequently researcher and research participants collaborate in defining the research problem, collecting data, drawing conclusions from the inquiry and disseminating the findings (Heron [n.d.]; McKernan 1988). All individuals involved in the situation that is under scrutiny are 'knowing and contributing participants to the research study' (Hunter 2007:153 quoted in Gilmer [n.d.]:2).

Whatever label given – practitioner research, co-operative inquiry, collaborative research, etc. – AR is participatory in nature which led Kemmis & McTaggart (2005) to develop their own model of AR calling it 'participatory research'; AR addresses 'research issues in partnership with local people' (Gibson 2004). Although the issue of partnership occasionally arises in PT as well,

discussions on participation and collaboration are hardly put forward. Groome (1987) suggests that theology should not be retained exclusively by trained theological and scriptural specialists, but that the findings should be examined by the whole Christian community.[20] Chopp (1987:124) however warns against the 'romanticization of the congregation' and sharply critiques the determining of the experience of a certain group as **the** 'common human experience' (Groome 1987; Tracy 1987). Chopp claims that the members of the congregation are not able to examine or correct the theologian's findings because they share the same society that makes them blind to different thoughts or realities. However, her alternative suggestion about how a congregation or community should be involved or participate is not clear.

2.1.4 Reflexivity[21]

Another characteristic of AR also pertinent to this study is reflexivity. Whitehead's contribution (1987) supported my intention of being explicitly reflexive (details see 3.2.1.2, p.66) and of putting assumptions into dialogue with the research and the resulting outcomes and views of the groups and individuals with whom the research was conducted. Whitehead suggests that since we are 'informed and deformed' by the culture that surrounds us, we should clarify the deposits

---

[20] Groome builds his suggestion on the premise of Anselm's definition of theology as a 'faith seeking understanding'.

[21] In the social science and AR literature the researcher often finds terminological ambiguity when reflexivity is discussed. I observed that reflexivity, reflectivity, reflection, self-reflexivity, self-reflection and other combinations are seemingly used interchangeably. They are also used to qualify a wide variety of things (Hamati-Ataya 2013:672), and the authors rarely give explanations about the difference between reflectivity and reflexivity. At times action researchers differ between reflection that happens after an event (a 'thinking back', turn one's view back on the event) and reflexion that is used during an event, an investigation of the researcher's interactions 'via introspection as they occur' (Ryan 2005 [n.p.]). However, I do not follow this differentiation. I adopted the understanding of reflexivity as the 'taking account of the effect of the personality or presence of the researcher on what is being investigated' (Oxford Dictionary Online at <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/ reflexive?q=reflexive> [last accessed 23.07.2014]). To be reflexive (or self-reflexive) I understand to be aware of my own biases and to aim at discovering how they affect the observed, or what Sandelowski & Barroso (2002:216) explained: 'Reflexivity implies the ability to reflect inward toward oneself as an inquirer; outward to the cultural, historical, linguistic, political, and other forces that shape everything about inquiry; and, in between researcher and participant to the social interaction they share.' In this thesis self-reflection, self-reflexivity and reflexivity are used interchangeably.

of convictions and biases we carry with us and bring them into explicit dialogue with the hopes and biases that arise from our religion or our cultural life (Whitehead 1987:38)

Reflexivity is typically propagated in AR research. Reason & Bradbury (2008:4) for example are convinced that just as theory without action is meaningless, 'action without reflection is blind'. Mason (2002:7) calls the researchers to take stock of their actions and role in the research process and subject them 'to the same critical scrutiny as the rest of their [research] data'. Heron (1996) describes the researcher and the research participants as not only co-researchers but also co-**subjects**. Consequently self-reflection becomes part of the research process; it is a vital element in AR. McNiff is one of the most radical representatives regarding self-reflection (or self-reflexivity). She describes AR as a 'practical way of looking at your own work to check that it is as you would like it to be', as an 'enquiry conducted by the self into the self' (McNiff 2002:8). For Carr & Kemmis (1986:162) AR is simply a form of self-reflexive inquiry 'in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situation in which the practices are carried out.'

I found that this variation of AR is the most criticized by conventional researchers. The literature that critically evaluates AR either warns against or sharply rejects self-reflexivity as a research tool (see more details in 3.2.1.2, p.66). Nevertheless, despite the many pitfalls of self-reflexivity, it constitutes a key element in AR. It asks the researcher and the participants to critically 'reflect on issues and processes and make explicit the interpretation, biases, assumptions and concerns upon which judgments are made' (Vaccarino et al. 2006:10). Action researchers who are less radical than McNiff or Carr & Kemmis who seem to equate AR with self-reflexive research, use reflexivity in combination with other research tools; they do not address their functioning as researchers only, but simultaneously inquire into other people's lives (Vaccarino et al. 2006:7). Reflexivity in AR is not an isolated activity but is embedded in a cyclical research process often reiterating planning, action, observation and reflection, an issue to which I turn in the following sub-section.

2.1.5 Research cycles

One of the hallmarks of AR is that it does not proceed in a linear way as conventional research usually does, starting with a hypothesis, followed by fieldwork, an analysis thereof and finishing with a closing conclusion. AR instead advances through cycles, 'starting with reflection on action and proceeding round to new action which is then further researched' (Wadsworth 1998; Vaccarino et al. 2006:13). Based on Lewin's work (1946:38) who described the AR as proceeding 'in a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of planning, action and the evaluation of the result of action', many authors describe the cycles as containing the steps of planning, acting/observing, evaluating/reflecting, refining and learning from the experience, re-planning, acting/observing, etc.; it is a continuous process that connects intellectual inquiry and practical improvement, reflection and action and in which discoveries can be critically checked and developed (Altrichter 1999; 2002; Dick 2002; Ferrance 2000; Heron & Reason 2006; Johnson 2008; Kemmis & McTaggart 1988; Koshy 2005; Vaccarino et al. 2006; Zuber-Skerritt 1993). The different models of AR cycles all stress the dynamic process of the AR approach to research. Gummesson (2003:485) suggests that because of the dynamic process, the cycle is 'better described as the hermeneutic spiral' in which data is interpreted and re-interpreted in a 'never-ending trial-and-error process of both theory generation and theory testing'. Dick (2002:163) discusses the advantages of the AR spiral and stresses two points. 1) Each spiral provides a chance to test previous interpretations against the new collected data; 2) Within each turn the researcher develops plans that are directly tested in action; each turn is a miniature test of the assumptions regarding epistemology, methodology, the situation and action that guided the researcher's plans. The main function of the spirals is 'to provide flexibility and responsiveness for effective change' (Dick 2002:163).

The models described in the AR literature are numerous. Koshy (2005) most helpfully presents and summarizes the models by Elliot (1991), Kemmis & McTaggart (2000), MacIntyre

(2000) and O'Leary (2004). The cycles the most influential to my research were the ones suggested by Dick (1993) and O'Leary (2004) which are presented in the following.

The research cycle described by Dick (see Figure 2.1-1 below) reflects the process through which I went when I was still a novice in organizing the sessions with the participating groups.

Figure 2.1-1: Intend-act-review spiral by Dick

Figure 2.1-1: Intend-act-review spiral by Dick
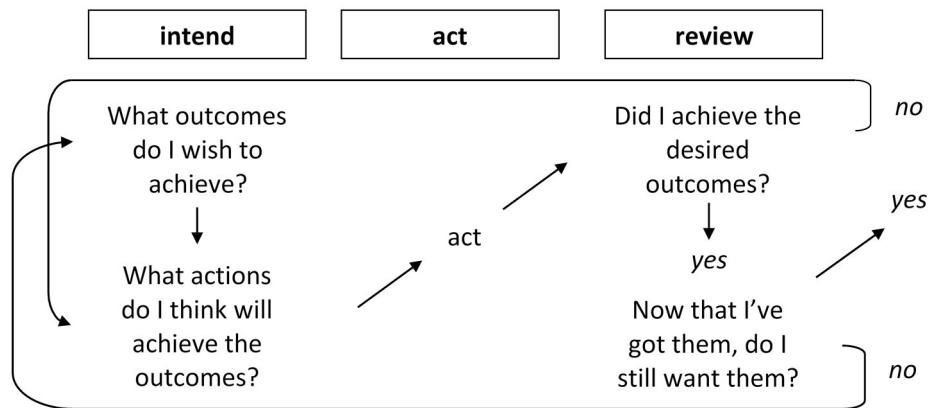
Although as the research progressed I no longer saw my project as fitting AR, I continued to proceed in cycles adapting the AR spiral described by O'Leary (2004:141; see Figure 2.1-2 below), eventually developing my own model (see 4.2.2, p.85).

Figure 2.1-2: Research cycle by O'Leary

Figure 2.1-2: Research cycle by O'Leary
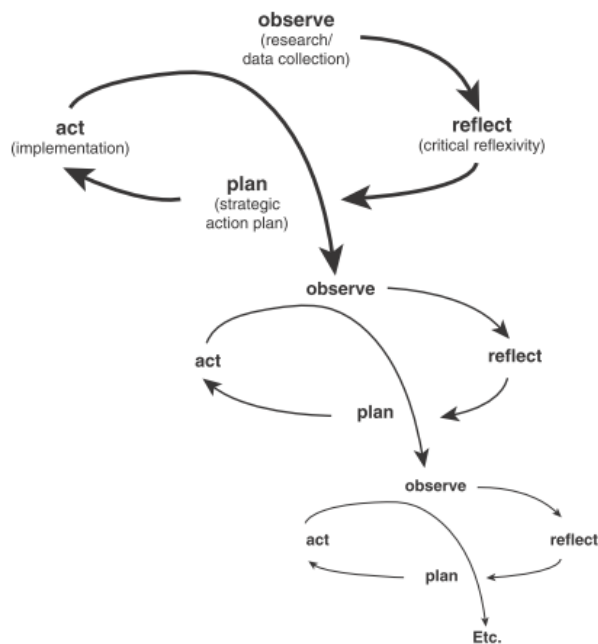
As the chapter on the research procedures will show, O'Leary's model had much influence on the way I went about the data gathering and analysis process.

2.2 Literature on contextualization

The literature on the theory and practice of contextualization is vast and still growing. I think it is a hopeless venture to review all the resources available today. In section 1.5.1 (p.15) I outlined briefly important presuppositions regarding contextualization. Within the limitations of this literature review I thus consider it the most appropriate to deal only with the theory (or models) of contextualization and point to three main sources that provide comprehensive overviews and rich sources for further orientation: Stephen Bevans, Robert Schreiter and Scott Moreau.

The books by Bevans (2002) and Schreiter (1985) are standard works. Bevans' map of 'contextual theologies' shows how the different models of contextualization operate; it is the most commonly used. In the revised and expanded edition from 2002 he examines four 'clusters of issues' surrounding contextual theology: 1) issues of theological method, 2) issues of basic theological orientation, 3) issues of criteria for orthodoxy (issues of 'syncretism') and 4) issues of cultural identity over against theologies already in place in a culture (2002:16ff). These clusters form the structure for investigating the six models of 'contextual theology': the translation, anthropological, praxis, synthetic, transcendental and countercultural models. According to Bevans, the translation model (also called accommodation or adaptation model) is the most commonly used and 'usually the one that most people think of when they think of doing theology in context' (2002:37). The translation model insists, according to Bevans, that 'there is always something from the outside that must be made to fit inside; there is always something "given" that must be "received"'.[22]

---

[22] Supported by Schreiter's and Bevans' description of the translation models, Moreau explains (2012:38) that 'translation' was first applied to Charles Kraft's approach to contextualization because Kraft (1979) applied principles derived from the linguistic translation methodology known as dynamic equivalence.

Schreiter's map classifies the models of 'local theologies' by how they relate to the cultural context (1985:6). He describes three types of models: the translation, adaptation and contextual models. Unfortunately for the researcher, Schreiter's nomenclature does not correspond with the one used by Bevans.[23]

Table 2.2-1: Nomenclature by Bevans and Schreiter

Bevans	Schreiter
Classified by theological method	*Classified by how they relate to cultural context*
Model (alternate names)	Model (subtypes)
Translation (accommodation, adaptation)	Translation
Anthropological (indigenization, inculturation, ethnographic)	Adaptation (enculturative)
	Contextual (identity or ethnographic approaches)
Praxis (liberation, situational)	Contextual (liberative)
Synthetic (dialogical, analogical)	Adaptation (philosophical)
Transcendental (subjective)	–
Countercultural (prophetic, encounter)	–

Table 2.2-1 above shows the different labels and their approximate correspondence to each other; it originates from Moreau (2012:38). While Moreau acknowledges that Bevans' and Schreiter's global maps helpfully describe the different approaches to context, he critiques that they do not provide the perspective on the relative significance of the models. Moreau also discerns that Bevans' map reduced almost all of the 'evangelical' approaches[24] to either a translation or a countercultural model (Moreau 2012:13). This motivated Moreau to map the evangelical models in more detail. He outlines key assumptions regarding the understanding of

---

[23] Others draw nomenclature and definitions from Bevans and Schreiter, for example Dean S. Gilliland (2005) from Fuller Theology Seminary (Pasadena). He presents yet another map of contextualization models. The foundation of his map is the postulate that the Incarnation is the most suitable matrix for appropriate theologies. Gilliland's list contains the adaptation, anthropological, critical, praxis, synthetic, and translation model.

[24] For the definition of 'evangelical' Moreau (2012:19) adopts the definition given by David Bebbington (1989) who characterizes 'evangelicals' as those who emphasize 1) conversion (lives need to change), 2) activism (evangelism and missionary work), 3) biblicism (giving special importance to the Bible), 4) crucicentrism (Christ's death on the cross is central). To add depth to these characteristics Moreau supplements the definition by John Stott's key theological constraints important to evangelicals (Stott, John 2003:25–30): 1) the gospel comes from God and not human ingenuity; 2) the gospel is Christological, biblical, historical, apostolic and personal; 3) the gospel is effective because God himself revealed it.

'revelation' and 'interpretation' that undergird the rules used by evangelicals to devise, implement and evaluate contextualization. Moreau's map is to be understood as a supplement to Bevans rather than a competing one.

According to Moreau, early evangelical maps of contextualization are those presented by Nicholls (1979) and Hesselgrave (1979; Hesselgrave & Rommen 1989). Nicholls presented a binary map separating the models into the two categories 'dogmatic' and 'existential'. Hesselgrave developed a threefold map with categories based on how each handled 'truth': 1) apostolic accommodation (truth revealed), 2) prophetic accommodation (truth proclaimed), and 3) syncretistic accommodation (truth in process of being discovered).

Moreau takes a different approach and develops five categories for mapping the evangelical models: 1) the nature of the approach; 2) the scope (people addressed); 3) the area being addressed (theology, social change, spiritual change, etc.); 4) methods used (philosophical orientation and the 'flow' such as linear, dialogical, cyclical, organic); 5) initiator's role taken in contextualization (guide, pathfinder, herald, facilitator, restorer, prophet). The result of Moreau's undertaking is a textbook that describes and categorizes the large variety of evangelical approaches to contextualization in great detail.

The three attempts at mapping the different approaches to contextualization by Bevans, Schreiter and Moreau provide extensive references to literature that can be studied in more depth depending on the researcher's interest and context. To review them would go far beyond the limitations of this literature review. The model of 'critical contextualization' adopted for my research project in Brazzaville will be presented in sub-section 4.2.1, p.83.

2.3   Literature on 'sin' in the African context

Finding the relevant literature on the concept of 'sin' in the African context was a challenging undertaking because the topic turned out to be often buried in sections describing phenomena such as 'fetishism', 'sorcery/witchcraft', exorcism, healing or salvation, which was a first hint at

the strong connection of 'sin' with these issues. I found that very few works were written that are dedicated to the notion of 'sin' in the African context in general. This also applies to African Christian Theology[25]. What I found is presented in the following short overview; it arranges the works by the year of publication.

Oosthuizen (1968:188-205) in the section 'the concept of sin in the nativistic movements' presents a wide range of observations on how 'sin' is viewed in traditional African philosophy and society and various African independent (religious) movements. Noteworthy for my research he also briefly discusses the similarities or rather the dissimilarities between the African concept of 'sin' and that of the Old Testament.

Adeolu Adegbola (1969) emphasizes the importance of an understanding of African onto- logy. Without that knowledge the moral sense of the African and the direction of ethical pursuit cannot be understood (1969:118). He continues by describing Yoruba[26] ontology and its consequences for the concept of 'sin' and for their understanding of good and evil. Interesting for my research, Adegbola explains that in order to be 'close to the heart of African ontological morality' a Christian doctrine of 'sin' needed to begin with 'a definite recognition of sin as fundamentally an inward problem of character'; the cause of 'sin' should be seen as springing out of man's urge and search for 'vital force' (1969:133).

John Mbiti (1969:204-215) – in chapter 17, 'The concept of evil, ethics and justice' – offers wide-ranging information on the notion of 'sin' in African traditional religion in general including many different ethnic people groups throughout Africa.

---

[25] In the African context many different theologies have been produced. Four main theological trends can be recognized: 1) Inculturation theology that emphasises the importance of African traditional religions and cultures, 2) African liberation theology that reflects on socio-economic development of the poor and aims at structural changes, 3) African evangelical theology sees Scripture as the supreme source and absolute norm for doing Christian theology, and 4) African Pentecostal theology that also maintains Scripture as its base for doing theology but places particular emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit. In order to simplify and summarize these different trends and despite the many differences between these theologies I chose to apply the single term 'African Christian theology' in this thesis following the suggestion made by Sakuba (2004). The term refers to all African expressions of Christian faith in oral forms, symbols or writing by African Christian theologians using indigenous African thought, forms, concepts and worldviews.

[26] The Yoruba people live in the south-west of Nigeria.

Sebahire Mbonyinkebe (1974) presents a generalized description of a traditional African worldview and characterizes the African understanding of 'sin' as based on a sacred order and oriented towards the community. What improves the life in a community is described as 'good', anything contrary to it is called 'evil'. In Mbonyinkebe's catalogue of serious transgressions in African societies, 'sorcery' takes the first position. It is generally understood as a crime against life. Kato (1975) in his *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* gives a fragmentary description of the concept of 'sin' among the Jaba people in Nigeria. His description however serves only to demonstrate how the Jaba's 'wrong conception of sin' resulted in a 'wrong view of salvation' (Kato 1975:42). Unfortunately, there is no attempt by Kato to discuss the topic in more detail.

J. Omosade Awolalu (1976) notes that (at that time) 'sin, as a religious concept, has not received a systematic study among scholars of African Traditional Religion.' By assessing and quoting scholars such as Basden (1966), Ellis (1894), Parrat (1969), etc. he establishes that when 'sin' was mentioned in their works, many scholars 'claimed either that the Africans had no notion of sin or that they had very poor concept of it' (Awolalu 1976:276). According to Awolalu, Parrinder (1949) maintained an unclear position. Parrinder stated in his 1949 edition of *West African Religion* that 'morality… is entwined with religion, for the [West African] people undoubtedly have a sense of sin' although they do not live with a constant feeling of being sinful. For unknown reasons however Parrinder expunged the statement in subsequent editions of the same book. In opposition to the scholars above, Awolalu mentions Westermann (1937; 1949) who claimed that African people not only know about 'sin', the confession and removal thereof, but by breaking the sacred law respected by the community, they understand also a divine power being offended (Westermann 1937:96f). Awolalu assesses Westermann's statement to be important for the understanding of 'sin' among Africans because it implies the belief that moral values are based upon the recognition of the divine will and 'that sin in the community must be expelled if perfect peace is to be enjoyed' (Awolalu 1976:278).

50

Simon Maimela's article (1982) explains the liberation theology concept of atonement and how liberation theology understood the nature of 'sin'. Moreover, he describes where liberation theology and 'traditional theology' differed in this matter. Ngoliko Waswandi (1988) focuses on a description of the understanding of 'sin' in the worldview of the Nande, a people from DRCongo. The explanation of the biblical account of 'sin' that followed is viewed in isolation from the Nande understanding and there is no correlation of the two perspectives. Gerhard Van der Merwe (1989) presents an interesting field study on how members of the Zion Christian Church in South Africa look at 'sin' and explains links to traditional thinking. Kwame Bediako (1992:386-425) in his chapter about Kato's theology briefly comments on Kato's rather negative view of traditional African religion. In a brief discussion Bediako uses the topic of 'sin' as an example of Kato's alleged tendency to minimise the significance of evidence that pointed 'in the direction of convergence' between traditional thought and Biblical teaching. Xolani Sakuba's thesis (2004) on the relationship between 'sin' and evil in African Theology aims at offering 'a survey of how contemporary African Christian theologians understand this relationship' and a 'classification of various positions in this regard' (Sakuba 2004:iii).

All the above works deal with the notion of 'sin' in the African traditional religion in one way or another, holding important and relevant insights. They however did not specifically deal with the Kongo culture, nor were they very precise in expressing their own reflections on the notion of 'sin' as African theologians, nor did they address possible ways of contextualization and its process.

2.4 Literature on Kongo culture and 'sin'

As stated in 1.2.2 (p.10) my research fills a gap in the literature on the Kongo concept of 'sin' left by previous studies. Authors who made notes about 'sin' in the Congo-Brazzaville setting (Stonelake 1937; Andersson 1958; 1968; Balandier 1968; Ekholm Friedman 1991) – to which I will later refer in the main body of the thesis and are thus not assessed here – or wrote extensive

ethnographies about the Kongo culture in today's Democratic Republic of Congo[27] (van Wing 1938; 1941; 1959; Laman 1953; 1957; 1962; 1968; 2000; MacGaffey 1970a; 1970b; 1972; 1977a; 1977b; 1977c; 1983; 1986; 1988; 1990; 1994; 2000; Janzen & MacGaffey 1974) all pointed out issues that are of importance which I will frequently take up throughout the study. However, none of them presented an in-depth study on the Kongo understanding of 'sin'. The same also applies to the missiological study by Sundberg (2000) as well as to the doctoral thesis by Julian (2004). Sundberg presents the results of his field research in Brazzaville on conversion motifs and contextual statements about Christ. The focus of Julian's work is on the discipleship process. Both studies provide deep insights into the soul of many Kongo people and remarkable background information about the Kongo worldview. Yet they do not specifically inquire into the topic of 'sin'.

2.5 Conclusion

The issues discussed above and the literature presented influenced my research design. Section 2.1 accounts extensively for the struggle to find the appropriate academic discipline for my research and for the relative proximity of PT and AR approaches. Although I moved away from a typical AR approach during the research process, AR left its mark on my inquiry. AR concerns for the relevance of the practical, the participation of the researched people, and reflexivity as a key element embedded in a cyclical research approach kept influencing my project. However, I found these concerns also addressed in PT research, especially the intention to hold theory and practice genuinely together; thus PT became the framework within which I eventually put my project. Chapters 3 and 4 will present more details on the issues of the practical (or praxis), the participation of the researched people group, reflexivity and the developed research cycle.

---

[27] The nation state DRC is a neighbouring country of the Republic of Congo, sharing in Kongo culture heritage.

The literature on contextualization is vast. To assess the still growing material is practically an impossible undertaking. I therefore focused in section 2.2 on presenting an overview of the relevant maps of contextualization, developed by Bevans, Schreiter and Moreau. I understand their works as entry points from where the researcher can gain comprehensible access to the wide field of contextual theologies around the world. A more detailed discussion of contextualization in general and of the chosen model more specifically will be offered throughout the study.

The scarcity of published in-depth studies about 'sin' in the African context became obvious in section 2.3. This might tempt one to conclude that 'sin' is an irrelevant topic for the Church throughout Africa. However, I consider the subject not peripheral to Christian understanding, but foundational irrespective of any culture. The perception of 'sin' affects the understanding of salvation, repentance, forgiveness, justification, reconciliation, sanctification and the final judgment. In order to communicate God and what a human relationship with God entails the Christian community needs to be able to speak plausibly about 'sin'. This thesis aims to go towards that goal: speaking plausibly about 'sin' in the Kongo culture, hoping that it might find resonance in other African cultural contexts and elsewhere. Moreover, the literature review in section 2.3 demonstrated that a genuine dialogue between Western and African Christians on the topic had no central place in the past. I consider my thesis as a response to Mbiti's call 35 years ago to rub shoulders with people whose concerns and world views are not those with which one is familiar (see p.10); his call is still of major importance today, maybe even more than ever before.

It is also evident from section 2.4 that there is a lack of specialized studies regarding the concept of 'sin' in the Kongo context and its implications for the Christian community. This means the present study fills a considerable gap not only in the literature but also in the shaping and transforming of the local theological understanding of central issues of the Christian faith, which includes the Kongo people and me as the researcher alike.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.0   Introduction

As pointed out in the previous chapter this study is a PT inquiry.[1] My understanding of PT is based on the work by Swinton & Mowat (2006). The PT methodology they established adopts the hermeneutic phenomenology methodology[2] and the paradigm of critical realism (with a slight tendency towards constructivism). I use the term 'paradigm' for describing the 'net that contains the researcher's epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises' (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:13), the 'basic set of beliefs that guide the action' (Guba 1990:17). 'Methodology' determines my overall approach to the field and 'implies a family of methods that have in common particular philosophical and epistemological assumptions' (Swinton & Mowat 2006:75); 'methods' refers to particular ways or techniques for gathering research data.

3.1   Theoretical framework

In this section I will present the theoretical framework of practical theology (PT), its position within the theological discipline, its location in human experience, and its hermeneutical nature. I will then explain my understanding of the term 'practice'; the section will conclude with some clarifying remarks about the relationship between PT and the social sciences.

3.1.1 Characteristics of practical theology

Practical theology (PT) is – as the name implies – a **theological** enterprise. It is however theologically diverse, and there is no standardized way of doing it (Swinton & Mowat 2006). PT is

---

[1] The chosen topic is a missiological subject matter. Despite the emphasis on the research being PT, I see my project fitting into the wider (academic) field of missiology, in some Protestant circles today understood as 'intercultural theology' (Wrogemann 2003:22f). Missiology is usually either placed in the academic subject of Systematic Theology or Practical Theology depending on the perspective from which the research is conducted. Because my research focuses on the practical, non-theoretical adaption of a central theological term to the Kongo context, its assignment to Practical Theology is a natural choice.

[2] It is interesting to point out that Swinton & Mowat understand hermeneutic phenomenology as both methodology and method; it sits on the borderline between the two (see 3.2.2, p.73).

part of the classic theological *quadrivium*. I understand it neither as applied theology, traditionally a sub-discipline of systematic theology,[3] nor as a Schleiermacherian technical discipline for pastors who are to be trained in effective techniques for successful Church ministry.[4] Beside that classical 'ecclesial paradigm' there is another strand of PT within which I place my research; it is the strand that 'uses the empirical research methods of the social sciences in a rigorous way in order to explore, describe, and test the nature of religious beliefs, values, and practices' (Kurian 2012:1859).

3.1.1.1 Located in human experience

All PT – whatever perspective it promotes (empirical, psychological, sociological, missiological, pastoral, etc.) – is located in the diversity of human experience and is thus marked out as distinct from the other theological disciplines. Together with Swinton & Mowat (2006:11) I understand experience as emerging in response to the redemptive actions of God, but not as a source of revelation. Therefore, the true starting point for PT is not experience, but '**God** and the revelation that God has given to human beings in Christ'.

3.1.1.2 Theoretical inquiry and practical discipline

PT is deeply rooted in theology which is a fundamentally hermeneutical enterprise. While systematic theology interprets doctrine and tradition, and biblical studies interpret Scripture, practical theology interprets practice within the context of the Church and the reign of God. It is critical theological reflection that examines theories and assumptions underlying that practice, discerns discrepancies and points to alternatives.[5] It is never apart from the dialogue with the

---

[3] Rather than applying to the Kongo context theories developed by Systematic Theology – or moving from theory to practice – the starting point of my research is the context and moves from practice to theory, or more precisely from context to text (Tanchanpongs 2010).

[4] In 1811 Schleiermacher replaced the traditional manuals on pastoral ministry with practical theology: the theory or technique of church leadership (Meyer-Blanck 2011a). PT was for Schleiermacher an entirely technical discipline and had no influence on how theology was studied (Forrester 2000; Nowak 2002). This led to the narrowing of its subject field to ecclesial practice and later on to the practice of clergy. PT became pastoral theology, emphasising the technical aspects of the profession.

[5] I came to understand 'practice' as being theory-laden and historically grounded which means that all our practices have theories behind and within them (Browning 1991). They contain often hidden values, beliefs,

other theological disciplines. PT is both theoretical inquiry (understanding, evaluating, criticizing) and practical discipline (guiding, transforming of practices) holding theory and practice together in creative tension (Figure 3.1-1). PT is located within the uneasy but critical tension between the script of revelation (historically formulated within scripture, doctrine and tradition) and the continuing innovative performance of the gospel (Swinton & Mowat 2006:5).

Figure 3.1-1: Location of practical theology
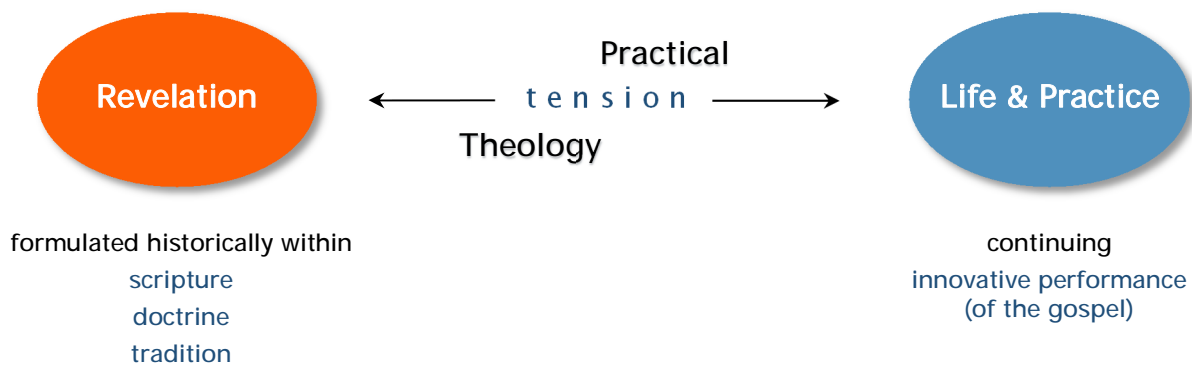
The focus of PT is on enabling faithful 'performance' (Hauerwas 2004) of the Christian community as a whole and its individual members.[6] While agreeing that 'practice' should not be the monopoly of PT (Hermans 2004) but should be the orientation of every theological undertaking, I think it is the special task of **practical** theology to stay close to practice enabling a God-oriented, holistic lifestyle.

3.1.1.3 Understanding of 'practice'

If PT is understood not as mere application of other branches of theology to specific forms of clerical action or techniques (see 3.1.1 above) but as a special task that seeks to enable faithful Christian living, I consider it necessary to further explain the term 'practice'.

---

assumptions and commitments that 'go unnoticed until they are complexified and brought to our notice through the process of theological reflection' (Swinton & Mowat 2006:20).

[6] Hauerwas understands the Christian faith as a 'performance', a dynamically living, rather than 'revealed data' or the reception of a 'deposit' that is for the Christian to follow verbatim and unimaginative.

Many debates on the task of PT in the 1980s and 1990s dealt extensively with the understanding of 'practice' (see 2.1.1.1, p.32). In order to explain the meaning of 'practice' the term 'praxis' was retrieved; a term that is still often used today. According to Bevans (2002) this term is not just a trendy alternative word for 'practice' or 'action'.[7] 'Praxis' is a technical term that has its roots in Marxism, the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research[8] and the educational philosophy of Paulo Freire[9]. 'Praxis' denotes a 'method or model of thinking in general, and a method or model of theology in particular' (Bevans 2002:71). The underlying view assumes that genuine knowledge does not consist only of rationally or intellectually appropriated knowledge but also of action. Because the term 'praxis' has its roots in Marxism, I hesitated to embrace the concept and its underlying epistemology. I questioned whether I could conduct **theological** and missiological research in the Christian faith while adopting a Marxist concept as 'praxis' seemed to be.[10] Before rejecting the whole issue altogether, however, I saw it as essential to understand the usage and content of the term 'praxis' in the PT debate. There 'praxis' denotes 'creative action, inspired by critical reflection, that gives rise to both change and insight.' (Maddox 1991:164, quoting Lane 1984). It captures 'the dialectical relationship between action and reflection' and correlates with knowledge that is neither pure theory nor mere technique, but *phronesis:* 'a wisdom that interrelates the universal and the particular' (Maddox 1991:166). *Phronesis* (originally Greek) stands for the faculty of thoughtful planning, the ability to understand associated with insight and wisdom; it is sensible, thoughtful and prudent understanding (Arndt, Danker & Bauer 2000, BDAG); it is often translated and described as

---

[7] Fully supporting Bevans I suspect though that many authors I read on the topic of practical theology and 'praxis' do exactly that, using 'praxis' as substitute for practice or action/activity. At least I could observe a rather careless usage of the term.

[8] More informally called Frankfurt School, with members such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Erich Fromm and others; also associated with Jürgen Habermas and others. They were a group of researchers who applied Marxism to interdisciplinary social theory (see Encyclopaedia Britannica available at <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/217277/Frankfurt-School> [Accessed 16.10.2013]).

[9] Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator and philosopher.

[10] Most certainly this had to do with Marx who said that 'man makes religion' (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *On Religion*, quoted by Heitink 1999:56), and who thought of religion as a toxicant (the opium of the people) that maintains an illusionary happiness in order to cope with a miserable human existence.

'practical wisdom' (Browning 1991; Forrester 1990; Maddox 1991).[11] Knowledge understood as wisdom is also a concept found in the Bible. There *phronesis* and its cognates are used in the fields of wisdom, insight, knowing and cleverness.[12] The OT Hebrew term for wisdom (*ḥokmā*) often refers to practical or professional skills of artisans, goldsmiths, craftsmen and women, farmers, sailors, soldiers, leaders, etc. A wise person is someone who has mastered something. Wisdom 'is intensely practical, not theoretical. … [It] is the art of being successful, of forming the correct plan to gain the desired results' (Marshall & Wood 1996:1244). In the OT the terms 'wisdom', 'understanding' and 'knowledge', in their theoretically intellectual and practically ethical character, cannot be separated conceptually.[13]

It can be said that 'understanding' (*phronesis*) and 'wisdom' (*sophia*) constitute a unity as a representation of the religiously determined practical wisdom (*ḥokmā*) of the OT (see also Bertram 1976, TDNT).[14]

Browning explains *phronesis* as distinguishable from theoretical reason which asks the question about the nature of things, and from technical reason which asks the question about the

---

[11] Aristotle distinguished between *sophia* (theoretical wisdom) and *phronesis* (practical wisdom). The latter is different from a skill or technique (*techne*). In Mt. 7:24 Jesus used *phronesis* to describe a person who hears his words and acts on them like a wise man building his house on a rock. For a detailed discussion of the term 'praxis', *techne* and *phronesis* see Eikeland 2012.

[12] The Hebrew words for discern, understanding, consider, reflect, to learn, to know but also crafty and shrewd are occasionally translated in the Septuagint (LXX) by *phronēsis*. In the NT *phronēsis* occurs only twice, both times in liturgically shaped texts. Lk. 1:17 talks about the wisdom of the righteous and in Eph. 1:8 it is the grace of God that endows us with wisdom and insight. *Phronimos* (adj.) however, is used more frequently (14x in the NT; in the LXX it occurs mainly in the wisdom literature); it stands for understanding associated with insight and wisdom and can be translated by sensible, thoughtful, prudent, wise. In Matthew and Luke it occurs only in the parables and the imagery of Jesus: Mt. 7:24 (the doer of the word is a wise builder); Mt. 25:1 (wisdom is preparedness); Lk 16:8 (wisdom has the sense of cunning; cleverly resolute action is imposed by the hopelessness of the situation and the resultant urgency); Mt. 10:16 (wisdom of serpents, simplicity of doves). Paul used *phronimos* help to try to express the nature of the believer. His use of the verb *phroneō* is strikingly frequent. It often expresses the single-minded commitment of the believer and the conditions for such commitment. It stands in contrast to the fool, ungodly man, impious mind or careless conduct. For more details see Kittel, Bromiley & Friedrich 1976; Arndt, Danker & Bauer 2000 and Balz & Schneider 1990.

[13] In the parallelism of Jer. 10:12 God's power, wisdom and understanding are to be seen as unity. 'It is he [Yhwh] who made the earth by his power [hebr. *kōaḥ*; gr. *ischys*], who established the world by his wisdom [hebr. *ḥokmâ*; gr. *sophia*], and by his understanding [hebr. *těbûnâ*; gr. *phronēsis*] stretched out the heavens.'

[14] When *ḥokmâ* (wisdom) is translated by *phronēsis* in the Septuagint (LXX) emphasis on practical reason seems to be in view (Bertram 1976). This happens in 23 cases; 16 occurrences thereof are found in the verses that describe Salomon's wisdom, temple-building and reign (1 Kings 3-11).

most effective means to a given end (Browning 1991:10).[15] With that understanding of practice in mind, I identify my research as being a combination of 'technical reason' (reflections on the model of contextualization and how it can best be put into practice) and *phronesis* or 'sensible, thoughtful and prudent understanding' (inquiry into a specific part of the value and belief system of the Kongo people).

The undergirding epistemological position of 'praxis' – or *phronesis* – has consequences for the understanding of theology.

> Within this way of understanding, theology becomes much more than simply thinking clearly and meaningfully. It becomes a way of articulating one's faith that comes out of one's Christian commitments to a particular way of acting and sets the agenda for an even more thoughtful and committed plan of action in the future. (Bevans 2002:72)

The understanding of theology as being 'right and meaningful thinking' (*ortho-doxy*) paired with theology as being 'right and Christian committed acting' (*ortho-praxy*) constitutes the basis on which I build my theological research. *Phronesis* – understood in terms of the description of practical wisdom found in the Scriptures, the sensible, thoughtful and prudent understanding – is thereby the overarching principle that guides the collecting and analysing of the data of my project.

3.1.2 Relationship between practical theology and the social sciences: the Chalcedonian pattern

Researching practice is traditionally the realm of the social sciences. Thus **practical** theology lies at the interface between theology and the social sciences. Forrester (1990:7) views PT as a bridge between theology and the social sciences, 'reflecting critically upon, learning from, and endeavouring to renew, reform and strengthen [Christian] practice.' With Forrester (2000:61ff) I am convinced that in order to understand what is going on in the situation I am investigating, I need to analyse the situation, 'probing the problem in all its complexity' with the best available

---

[15] Browning associates *phronesis* not only with philosophers such as Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Hume and Kant, but also with the American pragmatists William James & John Dewey, the neo-pragmatists Richard Rorty and Richard Bernstein, including the hermeneutic theory of Gadamer, the critical theory of Habermas and the communitarianism of Alasdair McIntyre (Browning 1991:2).

tools. Many of those tools are developed by social sciences. There is a danger however of using those tools uncritically and carelessly. During the research I found my unease with many PT models reverberating with the critique that they fail to account for divine agency and display great difficulty in speaking of God (Fowler 1985; Hastings 2007) whatever insights regarding theory and practice they offer. Often the models seemed to support, consciously or unconsciously, modernity's mode of rationality that underwrites 'a fatal deistic disjunction between God and the world' (Hastings 2007:7 quoting Torrance 1976:2). Also – as Swinton & Mowat discuss in greater detail – there are areas between (practical) theology and qualitative research (QR) that are full of tensions and contradictions, particularly regarding epistemology and the nature of truth and knowledge (for more details on the epistemological and ontological position see sub-section 3.2.1, p.63 below). Therefore it is crucial that I clearly formulate my understanding of the relation between theology and the social sciences.

Agreeing with Forrester (Forrester 2000:63) that 'social analysis does not and cannot answer theological questions' I nevertheless regard the social sciences as an important dialogue partner of my research. However, I understand my project to be a theological one – and not a social science one with only some 'theological icing on the cake' (Farley 1987:16). In order to explain the relationship between PT and the social sciences I adopted the proposal of the 'Chalcedonian pattern' developed by van Deusen Hunsinger 1995 (see also Loder 1999; Hastings 2007; Swinton & Mowat 2006). The three features of the Chalcedonian pattern can be summarized as 'indissoluble differentiation', 'inseparable unity' and 'indestructible order' of two given terms.[16] Since these features – originally used to describe Jesus' full humanity[17] –

---

[16] Van Deusen Hunsinger (1995:65) explains: '"Indissoluble differentiation" means that they are related without confusion or change. "Inseparable unity" means that they coincide in an occurrence without separation or division. And "indestructible order" means that in and with their differentiated unity, the two are asymmetrically related, with the one term having logical precedence over the other. The two terms are thus differentiated, unified, and ordered in particular way.'

[17] In Church Dogmatics III/2 Barth refers to the Creed of Chalcedon when he speaks speaks about Jesus' full humanity explaining that a human being is 'soul and body totally and simultaneously, in indissoluble differentiation, inseparable unity and indestructible order' (*CD* III/2:437). This concept is also true regarding the

'are formal rather than material, they can be applied to a wide range of doctrinal or substantive questions' (van Deusen Hunsinger 1995:61) and different contexts. Applied to the relationship between PT and the social sciences the 'indissoluble differentiation' means that the two disciplines play specific roles and reveal specific forms of knowledge that should not be confused with one another. The 'inseparable unity' suggests that the unity of the two should at the same time be acknowledged.

> The social sciences can offer complementary knowledge which will enhance and sharpen our theological understanding. Similarly theology will offer perspectives which will challenge and shape the perspectives offered by the social sciences. (Swinton & Mowat 2006:85)

Theology and the social sciences are held in critical complementary tension. The idea of the 'indestructible asymmetrical order' sees theology in PT research as having 'logical precedence' over the social sciences because the latter have no capacity to deal with ultimate issues such as life, death, God and the meaning of life. In PT research, the research data acquires its significance from theology, hence the 'logical priority' of theology (Swinton & Mowat 2006:83f). The concept of asymmetry stands in contradistinction to many other models of PT (mainly the 'mutual critical correlation models') and research projects that either try to give equal weighting to the dialogue partners (theology and the social sciences) – which is critiqued by Swinton & Mowat (2006:83) as unfeasible because in practice they observe a notoriously epistemological priority of the social sciences over theology, the human system of knowledge overriding revelation given by God – or strive to create a *tertium quid* solution by seeking out a neutral or non-theological baseline for meeting the requirements of an interdisciplinary research methodology and therefore leave the theological centre (Loder 1999; see also p.38).

Recognizing my own tendency of leaving my theological grounds and turning increasingly to the social sciences in order to find answers to my questions in the research, Loder's critique was like a wake-up call. As a result I turned to van Deusen Hunsinger's Chalcedonian pattern

---

two natures of Christ (divine and human). They are simultaneously and completely present in Christ; they constitute a unity and are inseparable; they are also distinct but are not to be confused with one another. But 'only when the divinity of Jesus is assigned precedence over his humanity does Barth regard the relationship between them as properly conceived' (van Deusen Hunsinger 1995:63).'

for conceptually putting in order the theological concerns and the interests of the social sciences influencing my project. Thus I gave theology the 'logical precedence' over the social sciences in the research.

The application of the Chalcedonian pattern is mirrored in several ways throughout the study. First, the separation of the collected research data into two separate chapters not only represents the two different steps of the contextualization model adapted, but also characterizes two different kinds of data, mirroring the 'indissoluble differentiation' of the social sciences and theology. The cultural understanding of wrongdoing and the evaluation thereof (chapter 5) are approached from an anthropological perspective using tools typical for the social sciences; the inquiry of the OT understanding of 'sin' (chapter 6) was done from a biblical studies' perspective using tools typical for theological exegesis. Both perspectives use their own rules and make different demands that I aspired to meet within the delimitations of the project. Giving theology 'logical precedence' over the social sciences is demonstrated by measuring the cultural findings against the findings resulting from the exegetical work and not the other way round (chapter 7). Despite the tensions between the two different sets of data I view them as an 'inseparable unity'; in the process of contextualization both are significant.

3.2 Research paradigm

There are tensions and contradictions between PT and QR particularly over epistemological and ontological issues.

> The inherent tendency of qualitative research to assume a fundamentally non-foundational epistemology which is highly sceptical about the possibility of accessing truth that has any degree of objectivity, stands in uneasy tension with the theological assumption that truth is available and accessible through revelation. (Swinton & Mowat 2006:73)

Adopting a QR approach for my PT project, it is necessary to find a way to work constructively within these tensions. Therefore I will turn in this section to the ontological and epistemological stance I take in the research, and present its methodological premises of hermeneutic phenomenology.

3.2.1 Ontological and epistemological assumptions

The ontological and epistemological foundations of a research are interested in the questions about reality, truth and knowledge. My ontological position gives an answer to the question about what reality is and what I consider to be true. Because of the theological nature of the project and its link to the Scriptures, which I assume to be God's revelation (see also 1.5.5, p.26), it is necessary to present in the following my view of reality, truth and God's revelation (see 3.2.1.1 below). My epistemological stance gives an answer to the question about how I come to know and how I can figure out truth. I consider reflexivity as a mode of knowing to which I will turn in sub-section 3.2.1.2. Since I view knowledge as being of a perspectival or contextual nature, I will conclude with some thoughts on my personal context in the last sub-section 3.2.1.3.

3.2.1.1 Reality, truth and the revelation of God

I came to understand that reality, an experience or a situation, is often not unequivocal but holds a variety of ambiguous truths and interpretations thereof. Through my work in Africa I learnt that there is not just one right perception of things. Working and living in an African context for nine years taught me in very practical terms that my Swiss Sabine Müri way of looking at reality is not the only way of perceiving the world. My horizon[18] does not display the whole truth about the world; it is limited. Because of my limitation and my situatedness, I can never achieve a complete or totally true understanding of the world (McLeod 2001:4); my understanding will always stay in need of being complemented and corrected. Borrowing from the Apostle Paul, my limited understanding can only 'see in a mirror, dimly' (1 Cor. 13:12). Despite my blurred view, I am able to see nonetheless; despite my human limits I can seek to broaden my horizons by keeping myself open to other perspectives and moving towards other horizons knowing that 'horizons change for a person who is moving' (Gadamer 1990:303). Broadening my horizon

---

[18] The term horizon is prominently used in phenomenology and hermeneutics. 'The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point.' This definition is applied figuratively to the thinking mind. In philosophy the horizon thus 'characterizes the way in which thought is tied to its finite determinacy' (Gadamer 2004:301).

means understanding the world better. In order to understand this world and its meanings however, one must interpret it (Schwandt 1994:118), or in more radical words, one cannot not interpret the world, because interpreting is what humans are (for more details on the ontological statement of hermeneutic phenomenology see 3.2.2 below).

Within this interpretative paradigm of reality I assume that knowledge and truth and the ways in which they are perceived are to a certain extent constructed by individuals and communities (Guba & Lincoln 1994; Swinton & Mowat 2006). Knowledge is contextually and historically grounded and of a partial, provisional and perspectival nature (Mauthner & Doucet 2003). Generally speaking I cannot access reality or truth in a pure, non-interpreted form. Yet, in view of this epistemological constructivist and ontological relativist stance of knowledge and truth, I acknowledge at the same time that reality is **not** nothing but constructed. Against the postmodern view, I assume that there is an 'ultimate reality', a reality outside my perceived 'matrix'. Although it lies beyond human control, it does not lie outside all human knowing. I **know** that there is an ultimate reality because I can tell of more than one life-changing encounter with this 'other reality'. The reality I perceive and other people's realit*ies* 'are embedded in a wholly other ultimate reality, namely, the reality of God the Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer' (Bonhoeffer et al. 2005:48). Through Christ God broke into the human reality, embracing limited human existence by His divine love and compassion for his creation, letting the human rational knowledge, reason and daily reality which, throughout the human world tends to be seen as **the** only reality, look like complete foolishness. God's reality however is by humans never experienced without or even outside the reality of the world, nor is the reality of the world experienced without the (often hidden) reality of God; the human reality is embedded in God's. Therefore I question whether something like **the** 'pure truth' can be distilled either from God's reality and its revelation (in the form of God's word) that Christian tradition claims to have received, or from my personal encounters with the Creator and Redeemer God. The New Testament tells me that God himself, and with him God's truth, became incarnated in Christ;

64

God's ultimate truth is thus not a thing but a person (for more on God's revelation and my understanding of the biblical Scripture see 1.5.5, p.26). Hence moving towards God's truth cannot happen through mere method or (academic) technique only (such as biblical exegesis), but also through relationship to that self-revealing God (Brunner 1947)[19]. Living out such a relationship can only happen within my finite being that cannot grasp the infinite entirely, but only partially and fallibly.

Finding that God's revelation of himself in Christ is profoundly idiographic truth – in distinction from nomothetic[20] truth – also sets the line of approach to my theological research.[21] The quest for my research is for meaning and deeper understanding (Schwandt 1994; Swinton & Mowat 2006; Johnson 2009 referring to Maykut & Morehouse 1994) built on idiographic evidence-based knowledge; understanding, interpreting and describing are key terms. Taking up Lincoln & Guba's proposition (1985:118) I take it as my (the researcher's) responsibility to ensure a 'thick description' of the data in order to create identification and resonance with other situations and contexts, and to generate an applicability that 'can be carried and shared across contextual boundaries' (Cibangu 2012:110). The findings in my research seek to raise issues and offer insights that reach beyond the particular situation. In other words, I hope to create a 'potentially transformative resonance' (Swinton & Mowat 2006:47) that is realized when people outside of the particular situation can identify with the offered description (because of enough similarity with their situation).

---

[19] Brunner (1947:36f) talks about two dimensions of knowledge that should not be confused. There is the 'I-It' dimension, the realm of abstract truth (knowing about some**thing**) and rational knowledge, and the 'I-Thou' dimension, the realm of revealed knowledge, of personal relationship (knowing a **person**).

[20] The terms 'idiographic' and 'nomothetic' were introduced by the German neo-Kantian philosopher Wilhelm Windelband in the nineteenth century. As Robinson (2011:32) explains, 'the two terms refer to different forms of evidence-based knowledge'. Idiographic knowledge aims at describing and explaining particular phenomena and typically presents descriptive data, which is characteristic for the humanities. Nomothetic knowledge aims at finding generalities or general laws, typically presenting theoretical generalizations, which is characteristic for the natural sciences. (See also Ingold 2008).

[21] I consider God's self-revelation idiographic because Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection relate to unique events.

Although an idiographic approach commonly does not seem to be interested in any theoretical generalization, I consider it essential at this point to state that with my research I hope nonetheless to contribute to 'theory development that has wider implications for other individuals and groups' (Swinton & Mowat 2006:48), which goes beyond simply describing and documenting situations and experiences. Therefore, my experiences in the research process and the insights resulting from putting into practice an already established contextualization model will not be presented simply for their own sake, but are meant to contribute to further theory development in contextualization, and to create deeper understanding of our contexts and their implication for doing theology across cultures in general.

3.2.1.2 Reflexivity[22]

Within my chosen research paradigm the qualitative researcher is assumed not to be a distant, disembodied or dispassionate observer (Mason 2002; Johnson 2009 referring to Gould & Nelson 2005), but one of the key players influencing the research process. As qualitative researcher I accept that I cannot bracket or eliminate my own thoughts, emotions or interpretations because I understand myself as being an interpretative creature. I cannot help but interpret everything that comes my way, because interpreting is not only something I do, but interpreting is my human nature (for more explanation see section 3.2.2 below). Consequently I am part of the data under scrutiny. Mason (2002:7) advises that qualitative research

> …should involve critical self-scrutiny by the researcher, or *active reflexivity*. This means that researchers should constantly take stock of their actions and their role in the research process, and subject these to the same critical scrutiny as the rest of their 'data'. … [Researchers] should seek to understand their role in that process. Indeed, the very act of asking oneself difficult questions in the research process is part of the activity of reflexivity.

Reflexivity is more than a simple QR tool, but a 'mode of knowing which accepts the impossibility of the researcher standing outside of the research field' (Swinton & Mowat

---

[22] I understand reflexivity or to be reflexive as being or becoming aware of my own biases and to aim at discovering how they affect the observed. Details on the discussion about the difference between reflectivity, reflexivity, self-reflexion, reflection, etc. see previous chapter (2.1.4, footnote 21, p.42).

2006:59). It is 'an active, ongoing process that saturates every stage of the research' (Guillemin & Gillam 2004:274).

Over the years reflexivity has become a defining part of contemporary QR (Finlay 2002a; Pillow 2003) and is considered central to the research process (Doyle 2013; Johnson 2009). Mauthner & Doucet explain that reflexivity contributes towards a better understanding of theoretical and empirical knowledge construction processes (also Pillow 2003); it also recognizes the 'perspectival nature of knowledge' (Mauthner & Doucet 2003:416). The way of analysing the data, the way of thinking of the data as important or unimportant, in fact the whole research setup and the questions I ask (and the ones I do not ask), are grounded in my context, in my assumptions and perception of the world. Not being aware of my assumptions might block my view 'of what is there'.

> The trouble is that researchers often fail to see much of what is there because they come to analytic sessions wearing blinders, composed of assumptions, experience, and immersion in the literature. (Strauss & Corbin 1990:75 quoted in Mauthner & Doucet 2003:418)

In order to say it with Gadamer's strong words, 'the tyranny of hidden prejudices' makes me 'deaf to what speaks' to me in the collected data (Gadamer 2004:272). Although Gadamer does not use the term reflexivity, I found the description of his idea of 'foregrounding' a similar process. Foregrounding is an 'appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices' (2004:271); it is the way prejudices are brought into play.

Foregrounding, or conducting research with reflexivity helps to situate myself and be sensible of the ways my personal history influences the research process and thus not only yield more 'accurate' and 'valid' research (Pillow 2003:179), but might also open up my narrow horizon and allow me to think more imaginatively. According to Finlay (2002a; 2002b) reflexivity can be used to examine the impact of the position, perspective and presence of the researcher; to promote insight through interpersonal dynamics; and to evaluate the research process, method and its outcomes. Kaufmann (2012:71) defines reflexivity as 'a process of seeing and a process of being'. According to him to be reflexive means that we are conscious of

the lenses through which we view the world. 'It suggests that we understand both our situationality and our positionality.'

As well as all the positive features of reflexivity however, there are other voices warning against it. One of the first voices that spoke up at an early stage of my research was a fellow student who suggested that I take out the point at which I bring myself into the picture in the research otherwise I would 'disqualify' myself. Although his suggestion discouraged me, it was at the same time a wake-up call to develop more sensitivity towards the dangers and pitfalls of reflexivity. Doyle (2013:253) compared reflexivity with a double-edged sword; and it seems that it is often labelled even by advocates 'application at one's own risk'. In the academy reflexivity is at times criticised for being self-indulgent and endlessly narcissistic where all meaning gets lost (Finlay 2002a; Pillow 2003), proliferation of the self sprouting like mushrooms in the academy, 'fads' that do not produce better research (Pillow 2003:176 quoting Patai 1994:64). Karakayali warned against 'fetishizing reflexivity as a magic tool that can render theoretical reflection redundant' (Karakayali 2004:361 quoted by Doyle 2013:249). And indeed, misuse of reflexivity in the academy cannot be denied. The risk of excessive focus on self or overemphasizing the researcher's experiences and thereby eclipsing the research participants' contribution is a real danger (Doyle 2013:253 referring to Potvin, Bisset & Walz 2010). Mason confirms the temptation to use the research 'to showcase ego-centric tales' about oneself, which may do little to illuminate the research problem or 'to make sound research decisions' (Mason 2002:5).

Listening to all these warnings one might become rather discouraged from using reflexivity by actively putting the self under scrutiny and making the resulting data fruitful for and explicit in my research and writing. However, I still consider reflexivity to be an indispensable part of my project, not least because contextualization (the main concern of my research) – either done by cultural outsiders or insiders – virtually demands reflexivity. Without intentional, explicit reflexivity on my contextual 'groundedness' I see the process of contextualizing as unlikely to happen. A reflexive approach clearly helps me and the reader to better understand how my

68

worldview is shaped and constrained by my own subjectivity (Kaufman 2012:71). 'Navel-gazing' however is not my goal, but striving to use reflexivity as a 'springboard'.

> As researchers, we need to strike a balance, striving for enhanced self awareness while eschewing navel-gazing. Instead, with reflexive analysis, the self, in my view, should be exploited only while it remains purposeful to do so. … The challenge for researchers using introspection is to use personal revelation not as an end in itself but as a springboard for interpretations and more general insight. (Finlay 2002a:215)

I understand reflexivity not as a random revealing of emotions or a haphazard outpouring of self but as focused thinking about aspects of self that are closely linked to my research (Doyle 2013), influence and shape it. Reflexivity is part of my constructing interpretation ('What do I know?'), and at the same time questioning how those interpretations came about ('How do I know what I know?') (Guillemin & Gillam 2004:274; Hertz 1997:viii).

My interpretations are influenced by my prejudices, often hidden and operating unnoticed. In order to reflect on them, they first need to be unearthed or 'provoked' (Gadamer 2004:298). The question follows how such provocations could be provided. On the search for an answer I came across Pollner (1975) and Agar (1983; 2006). I found the so-called 'reality disjunctures' (coined by Pollner) and 'rich points' (described by Agar) useful concepts to indicate situations or encounters worthy of critical reflection. A 'reality disjuncture' occurs when two people have 'looked at the world and experienced it in contrary ways' (Pollner 1975:427); it describes 'incommensurable accounts of (arguably) the same experience (Lynch & McNally 2003:100). 'Rich points' are departures from a cultural outsider's expectations, 'moments of incomprehension and unmet expectations', surprises that occur when 'people do something in a situation that we don't understand' (Agar 2006:4). Rich points (or 'breakdowns' in Agar 1983) became the 'fuel' for reflexivity and subsequent learning in my research project.[23]

In this project I engage in two types of reflexivity. Firstly, there is personal reflexivity with which I seek to carefully and explicitly consider my values and experiences, interests, beliefs and commitments that have impact on the research. Secondly, there is epistemological reflexivity

---

[23] Gadamer called the experience of surprise by reading a text 'being pulled up short' (2004:270).

by which I look critically at the chosen research paradigm, epistemological assumptions and their implications for the research project. Reflexivity enhances my self-awareness and sensitivity of the moment. Or as Doyle describes it, reflexivity is 'being alive in the moment-to-moment interactions between researchers and research participants' (Doyle 2013:252). Reflexivity is vital for all dimensions of the research, particularly in interviews and – as I learnt during the conducted research cycles in Brazzaville – in teaching settings. As the researcher and teacher I need to be aware of the power dynamics that place me in a position where I can control, manipulate and misrepresent the people I work with. Such a power position is a 'dangerous' gift that can be received, treasured and accepted, or abused, manipulated and discarded. As the researcher it is my responsibility not to let the latter happen. Reflexivity helped me to constructively manage the power imbalances between the participants of the focus groups and myself. Acknowledging and reacting to the tensions arising from our different social positions gave my project an unexpected turn (see 4.2.4).

3.2.1.3 My self-location

Having presented my considerations on reflexivity, I find it appropriate if not even mandatory to offer an account of my self-location, of the factors that affected my research in the field (Punch 1994) and – making no claim to be exhaustive – to give insight into the 'contamination' of my analysis so to speak.

1) Cultural impacts

I come to the research project and its Congo based context as an unmarried female, white, Swiss missionary worker. When I started to work in the central African area I faced the difficulty that my host culture did not have a category for an adult, never-married, woman without children, despite the benefit of the doubt given to me as a white person. I found myself often either being cautiously treated as a man or being treated as a woman in need of a husband and therefore being proposed to innumerable times, which both made me feel awkward and unsure of myself. It took

a long time to find my place and my role in the African day-to-day life as well as in my research project.

There is no doubt that my Swiss background left its mark on the research. Switzerland developed the political system of democracy to an extreme by granting its citizens the right to a say in almost every (political) matter; it keeps insisting on 'neutrality' almost to the breaking point. Switzerland champions the cause of the protection and rights of minorities and acknowledges four official languages. The educational system supports from an early age the learning of at least one of those languages (besides the mother tongue). Despite the different mind-sets (and cultures) in the different language regions, the Swiss are committed to live in social, religious and political peace together. Working hard goes mostly without saying; quality comes long before quantity maybe because anything 'large' is too big for my small country. These Swiss cornerstones are also part of my personal DNA. Anything that goes against the idea of democracy, protecting minorities, equality of languages (and cultures) or peace fills me with indignation. That took effect especially after the March explosions (see introductory grassroots story) that resulted in ethnic based animosities flaring up in the capital city. That incident left a deep emotional mark on me (deeper than I ever thought it would) and made me adjust the goals for the students' participation group (see 4.2.2).

Being a female white, unmarried missionary, suffused with the Swiss version of democracy that is deeply suspicious of every serious power gap, considerably affected my perception and experience of authority, social hierarchy and seniority, elements of the Kongo culture that became problematic in my first research cycle and called for attention and eventual change in my choice of participation groups (see 4.2.4).

2) Educational impacts
Formally educated in theological institutions in Switzerland and Germany I tend to see my own theological understanding of a biblical text or central theological terms not only as specifically solid (Swiss quality approved), but also as the 'right' one, most 'balanced' and 'healthy'. My

spiritual home is the Reformed National Church of Switzerland[24]; during my adolescent years I developed a lot of sympathy towards moderate charismatic oriented free churches and evangelical communities which I still cherish. My theology is highly influenced by rationality. Confidence in reason runs all through my thinking, perceiving and acting despite some transformational spiritual experiences throughout my life as a committed Christian. Despite the nine years I lived in Congo during which I encountered the unseen (supernatural) world in rather disconcerting ways, the first leap I take in order to 'explain' something is rational. The premise of rationality did not only influence the questions I asked the students of the third participation group, but was also recognized and commented on by the participants (p.153), an incident that took me by surprise.

3) Professional impacts

My interest in cultures different from my own stemmed originally from my professional work as a Bible translation consultant and the dynamic-equivalence approach to translation – the favoured translation model of my employing institution – that seeks to integrate local view, local diction and culture into the translation. I have been on the lookout for points of contact in local culture and theology for many years; and I acknowledge that in order to translate well it is necessary to understand the culture and concept behind words rather than to seek a one to one translation of the word form only.

I am fluent in reading, writing and speaking French, the official language of the country. As much as I aspired to fluency in Munukutuba (one of the two officially recognized national languages of the Congo), I acquired only a rather rudimentary knowledge of that language, mostly spoken in the South of the country (the country of the Kongo ethnic groups). My language learning efforts, and living in that particular part of Congo drew me close to the ethnic groups

---

[24] *Reformierte Landeskirche der Schweiz*, also called Protestant or 'evangelische' Landeskirche. The word 'evangelisch' is sometimes translated 'evangelical'; a translation which I think can be quite misleading.

that are resident in the South, and that in the past had developed animosities towards ethnic groups from the North, which were reciprocated. One of my former Congolese co-workers (he was from the North) on one occasion called a group of oddly behaving Laari (a people group from the South) 'your people', teasing me and with a twinkle suggesting that I should feel ashamed for my people's annoying behaviour. It had not struck me before that I had developed a preference for people from the South, but others noticed it. When I conducted the second and the third research cycle with a class at the university I was not an outside neutral observer, but a biased teacher, sympathising with the students from the South; this setting overruled my Swiss commitment to 'neutrality' and sometimes caused in me inner tensions that I was not always fully aware of.

4) Impacts of illness

Another factor that affected my field research was that I fell seriously ill after the second research cycle. Being diagnosed with cancer meant an interruption for more than a year. When I was able to take up my project anew after treatment, I had to grapple with the research data by taking a long second look; and I realized that the findings made more sense after the break than they did before. The interruption affected the research considerably and transformed it on different levels.

Because my biographic situation impacted my research, its analysis and interpretation considerably, I thought I was justified in giving such a lengthy account of reflecting on my self-location. As I will show in the following, reflexivity is not only an integrative part of QR and contextualization, but is also viewed as essential in hermeneutic phenomenology.

3.2.2 Methodological premises: Hermeneutic phenomenology

As stated above in the introduction to the chapter (p.54) I grant the hermeneutic phenomenology an important influence although I do not adopt its formal methods. Generally speaking, to seek deeper understanding of any topic from the perspectives and experiences of the representatives

of the culture under scrutiny is mandatory in contextualization.[25] In more specific terms, allowing the 'voices' of my research participants to speak as regards their own perspective and experience of wrongdoing and 'sin' is indispensable. Being aware of the fact that these voices are still interpreted and represented as evidence by me as an outsider and thus do not really 'speak on their own' (Mauthner & Doucet 2003:418) directly, I came to understand that hermeneutic phenomenology provides a basis for my endeavour to do research **with** people and not so much **on** people (Reason & Heron 1997).

Hermeneutic phenomenology not only provides tools for QR, but is also an epistemological and an ontological framework; it is thus both a method and a methodology (Swinton & Mowat 2006). Because in the literature a difference is made between phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology[26] I will offer some more explanations in the following sections.

3.2.2.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology could be described as 'the study of things as they appear'[27] (Smith 2009); it is the study of the 'lifeworld', the world as we experience it before we categorize or reflect on it (van Manen 1990:9). Phenomenology attempts to build a comprehensive description of the essence of everyday experience, or the 'thing itself' (McLeod 2001:38). In order to understand the way things are, phenomenological inquiry seeks to start from an insider's perspective; it puts emphasis on 'the viewpoint of the experiencing person in regards to specific situations occurring

---

[25] Even everyday sentences such as 'I am mad about my flat' often need the cultural context to be understood. Said by an American it means, 'I am angry about the flat tire of my car.' For the British the same statement means, 'I am excited about my living quarters.' The example was found in Bailey 2005:10f who refers to N.T. Wright (2003).

[26] During the writing of this section I came across the debate about the difference between hermeneutic phenomenology and hermeneutics (see for example Finlay 2009). I learnt that researchers in phenomenology can take many different approaches that sometimes come close to actually being more hermeneutical than phenomenologist. For example Smith's approach (2004) called interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) displays a concern for personal and individuals' perception of experiences, but at the same time identifies clearly with the hermeneutic tradition of the researcher's central role; the use of bracketing, classical for phenomenological research, is not promoted. Swinton & Mowat (2006), whose premises of PT I widely adopted for my research, advocate for 'hermeneutic phenomenology' as well.

[27] The definition of a phenomenon (pl. phenomena) is a 'thing as it appears'.

in their everyday world' (Johnson 2009:26). Phenomenology seeks to determine what an experience means to a person 'apart from any theoretical overlay that might be put on it by the researcher' (Swinton & Mowat 2006:106 referring to Moustakas 1994); it does **not** offer effective theory to **explain** the world, but 'the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world' (van Manen 1990:9).

The philosophical theory behind phenomenology was first developed by Edmund Husserl. In order to understand phenomena, Husserl suggested that the researcher needed to set aside (bracketing) any assumptions about the object of inquiry. Bracketing biases stands on the positivist epistemological tradition that views reality as something 'out there', as 'something apart from us that we receive and can study rather than something we create' (Laverty 2003:13 referring to Polkinghorne 1983). Its epistemological bedrock actually stands in contrast to my conviction that I am inextricably interwoven with my context (time, history, culture, life experience, etc.); I view bracketing as impossible. Despite my dismissal of bracketing however I do not reject phenomenology as a whole. Husserl's call to the 'conscientiousness of phenome-nological description' (Gadamer 2004:xxiv) is a valid one and I seek to apply it to my research to which I will come back in the sub-sections 3.2.2.3 and 3.2.3 below.

3.2.2.2 Hermeneutics

In general terms, hermeneutics is the theory and practice of human understanding in different kinds of human contexts (Odman 1988:63 found in Wilcke 2002:3) and the theory of interpreting texts. Hermeneutics is embedded in interpretative epistemology which views knowledge as multifaceted in nature (Hutton 2009). There are different approaches to hermeneutics that could at the same time be ascribed to historical stages.[28] In the Ancient World and in the Middle Ages

---

[28] Kakkori (2009:22f) describes six historical stages. 1) The theory of biblical exegesis; 2) General philo-logical methodology, represented by Wolf and Ast; 3) The science of linguistic understanding, represented by Schleiermacher; 4) The methodological foundation of human science, represented by Dilthey; 5) Phenomenology of existence and of existential understanding, represented by Heidegger and Gadamer; 6) The system of interpretation, represented by Ricœur. See also Palmer (1969:33) and Ricœur (2008b:53–71). The philosophy of Paul Ricœur (1913-2005) understood hermeneutics as 'the system by which the deeper significance of a given text is revealed' (Kakkori 2009:25). Texts are understood very widely and include groups of signs, symbols, myths, etc.

hermeneutics referred to the study and exegesis of Old and New Testament texts. Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824) and Friedrich Ast (1778-1841) expanded the conception of biblical exegesis to the interpretation of other texts as well and described two sides of hermeneutics, understanding and explaining. It was in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century when hermeneutics became more and more understood as a theory of human understanding. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) saw hermeneutics no longer exclusively as a disciplinary matter belonging to theology or literature, but 'as the art of understanding any utterances of language' (Kakkori 2009:23). Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) understood hermeneutics as the core of all human sciences and described the human understanding as circular and historical.

The ontological turn in hermeneutics came with Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). According to him hermeneutics refers to the phenomenological analysis of *Dasein*[29] (existence). Against the phenomenological theory of his teacher Husserl he insisted that the interpretative horizon against which the world is understood is unsuspendable.[30] Husserl had suggested that in order to find the pure essence of a phenomenon the researchers had to reduce (or 'bracket') their experiences, knowledge and emotions in order to interpret the phenomenon under investigation in an unbiased, neutral or objective way. Heidegger dissociated himself from the phenomenology's requirement of reduction.

> I cannot look at the world objectively because the world is not, and cannot possibly be, outside me, since I am – and always have been since birth – in the world existing as part of it. I am inextricably linked to all other entities in the world-wide web of significance (Watts 2001:12 explaining Heidegger).

That means that there is no 'pure' presuppositionless starting point or angle to which the researcher can turn in order to get objective insights (Guignon 2006:6). Bracketing is impossible;

(Ricœur 2008a:26f) stressed that 'there is no general hermeneutics, no universal canon for exegesis, but only disparate and opposed theories concerning the rules of interpretation'.

[29] *Dasein* (lit. there-being) is a German word and can be translated 'being situated in the world'; 'existence'; or even 'life'.

[30] Heidegger was Husserl's successor to his professorship in Freiburg (Germany). He was thought to be Husserl's heir but later disassociated himself from Husserl and his work (Laverty 2003:24).

'one cannot stand outside of one's pre-understandings and historicality of one's experience' (Laverty 2003:14 referring to Heidegger 1962).

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) took Heidegger's hermeneutics one step further. Interpreting is more than what people **do**, but it is what people **are**; hermeneutics is a mode of *Dasein* (Gadamer 2004:xxvii).[31] Therefore Gadamer views the personal context, the embeddedness or historical situatedness of every person as not only unsuspendable but necessary for any interpretation and understanding (Gadamer 2004). It is thus essential to reflect on the ways in which this situatedness influences the interpretation of our world (Wildman 2010). Gadamer (2004:305) suggested that 'we are continually having to test all our prejudices'. This testing is a process he called 'foregrounding' (German *abheben*), the way in which the prejudices are brought into play. Foregrounding something cannot be done in isolation, but is always – as the word implies – foregrounded from something else that reciprocally is thus made visible as well. Gadamer (2004:398) viewed the phenomenologist attempt at bracketing as absurd.

> To try to escape from one's own concepts in interpretation is not only impossible but manifestly absurd. To interpret means precisely to bring one's own preconceptions into play so that the text's meaning can really be made to speak for us.

In order to interpret and to understand I have to bring my own preconceptions into play.

Gadamer's hermeneutical stance is significant for the framework of my research (see 3.2.1.1 above). Being an interpreting creature by definition, I 'can only make sense of the world through complex and ongoing hermeneutical processes, carried out implicitly and explicitly, reflectively and unreflectively' (Swinton & Mowat 2006:107). The view that hermeneutics is a mode of *Dasein* also resounds with my conviction that human beings are deeply embedded in their context. As the researcher I am not free from 'prejudices' that inevitably arise from being a member of a culture (Swinton & Mowat 2006). My biases and assumptions are embedded in the interpretative process of the research; as the researcher (or observer) I cannot be disentangled

---

[31] The ontological view of Gadamer's hermeneutics can be summarized best in his own words: '*Understanding ... is the original form of the realization of Dasein* which is being-in-the-world.' (Gadamer 2004:250) Original German: '*Verstehen ist ... die ursprüngliche Vollzugsform des Daseins*, das In-der- Weltsein ist.' (Gadamer 1990:264). Italics in the original.

from the observed (Schwandt 1994:128; 1985:143 referring to the constructivist paradigm by Lincoln & Guba 1985). Any gaze is filtered through the lenses of language, gender, culture, commitments, etc. of the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:12); The way I interpret my data is conditioned by my assumptions. The data derived from my study 'cannot be treated as simple irrefutable facts… [but] represent hidden assumptions… [that] the critical researcher must dig out and expose' (Kincheloe & McLaren 1994:144). Those assumptions however are not to be uncovered in order to put them aside but in order to work with them.

3.2.2.3 Hermeneutic phenomenology

In hermeneutic phenomenology (HP) two epistemological positions are brought together without attempt to resolve the clear tenstions. Phenomenology as well as hermeneutics assume an 'active, intentional, construction of a social world and its meaning for reflexive human beings' (McLeod 2001:57) and construct meaning through interpretative processes. Central to the analytical task is the significance of language and the importance of analysing 'texts'[32] although the modes of analysing may differ considerably in phenomenology and hermeneutics respectively. Both positions 'seek to provide modes of understanding which, while potentially transformative, are not necessarily explanatory' (Swinton & Mowat 2006:109; McLeod 2001; Wilcke 2002; McManus Holroyd 2007).

McLeod suggests that 'phenomenology and hermeneutics should both be seen as integral, complementary aspects of any satisfactory way of knowing' about *Dasein* (2001:59). This suggestion goes back to Heidegger who fused in a sense phenomenology and hermeneutics. Hermeneutic phenomenology, sometimes also called 'interpretive phenomenology', asks for meaning of a phenomenon with the purpose of understanding the human experience; it is underpinned by the philosophy of hermeneutics. The HP methodology seeks to 'increase

---

[32] The used concept of 'text' here goes beyond written texts. It includes non-written (oral) texts and experiences, culture, pictures or physical objects (text-analogues).

sensitivity to humans' ways of being-in-the-world' (Crist & Tanner 2003:202), a deep and rich understanding of the experience 'lifeworld' (van Manen 1990). In HP inquiry the researcher acknowledges her inextricable situatedness in the world. I am not to bracket my preconceptions but to acknowledge my assumptions that could influence the data collection and the analysis and interpretation thereof.

The focus of HP research is on the realm of human experience; it records and describes the participants' experience of a situation or phenomenon in their own words and analyses the narratives of their lived situation repeatedly in a circular interpretation process, identifying general themes about the essense of the experience (Cris & Tanner 2003; Finlay 2009).

Although I place my study within the HP methodology I use more its philosophical foundation and character rather than adopt its formal methods which the following chapter on the research procedures will show in more detail.

3.2.3 Practical implications for research

The influence of the HP philosophy results in an approach to my research that is both descriptive and interpretative (van Manen 1990:181f). It is descriptive because it allows the 'voices' of the research participants to speak as regards their own perspective and experience; it is interpretative because it assumes that there are no uninterpreted phenomena. This has implications for my research. It means in more practical terms that I seek to provide: 1) A rich description of my experiences (or horizon) and reflections as well as those of the research participants seeking as far as possible to let things speak for themselves. That kind of description will be concrete and avoid abstract generalizations. When referring to my experiences it will be in first-person accounts, when referring to situations and reflections of the research participants, their language[33] and expressions used will be given wherever possible (for more on phenomenological description see van Manen 1990; Finlay 2009; Smith 2013). 2) An interpretative perspective on

---

[33] The language used by the research participant is mostly French, in some cases Munukutuba or another Kikongo language (or dialect). In order for the reader to understand, any French or vernacular language will be separately translated into English.

the gathered data or 'texts'[34] under scrutiny. A hermeneutical cycle developed for my project will be the main tool for interpreting the data (for more details on the research cycles see 4.2.2, p.85). Digging out and exposing relevant assumptions are an integral part of the research which I will make explicit throughout (see more details on reflexivity in 3.2.1.2 above).

3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the qualitative field research design of the study that is to be understood as a practical theological undertaking. The tensions arising between the qualitative research design and PT were given consideration by offering the epistemological and ontological premises I took into account.

In order to give to the data more breadth and complexity, and to gain deeper understanding of the phenomena, I used multiple research methods which I present in the following chapter.

---

[34] The concept of 'text' I use here goes beyond written texts. It includes non-written (oral) texts and experiences, culture, pictures, etc.

4. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

After the presentation of the theoretical framework of my research project in the previous chapter I turn now to the description of the research procedures and the 'practicalities of the day-to-day realities' (Holliday 2007:50) in the given research setting.

Most interpretation and understanding of phenomena are of a polyvalent nature which can hardly be uncovered by using a single research method. In order to uncover the various aspects and in order to obtain rich data and in-depth understanding I used various methods, worked with different participation groups, conducted semi-structured interviews and instructed the theology students to do exegetical exercises of various OT texts that were discussed in class. The use of diverse and multiple methods, or triangulation, was demanding and produced some un-anticipated challenges. The different perspectives however contributed to obtaining rich data and deeper and clearer understanding of 'sin' and wrongdoing in the Kongo culture on the one hand, and a better understanding of the biblical notion of 'sin' on the other hand. Both were requisite for the objective of a fruitful contextualization process transforming the Christian faith of the research participants and the researcher.

In order to give the data rigour, breadth and complexity QR theory recommends triangulation (Swinton & Mowat 2006:215). Denzin & Lincoln (1994:12) are convinced that 'no single method can grasp the subtle variations in ongoing human experience'; triangulation therefore helps in getting a better 'fix' on the object of study (Robson 2011:534).[1] In social science research four different types of triangulation are used (Bryman 2003; Flick et al. 2012): data triangulation (using a variety of data), methodological triangulation (using multiple methods),

---

[1] By referring to different authors Denzin & Lincoln (1994) avail themselves of the (originally French) terms *bricoleur* (researcher) and *bricolage* (research) to describe the multiple use of methodologies and methods. The researcher is called a *bricoleur* (a 'Jack of all trades') who produces a *bricolage* (a pieced-together, close-knit set of practices) that 'changes and takes new forms as different tools, methods, and techniques are added to the puzzle.' I think the two terms are an unhappy choice of words despite the explanation the authors give. In connection with professional and serious work, a *bricoleur* is a tinker, someone who does a lousy job; *bricolage* is the resulting outcome or a DIY piece of work not professionally done. That meaning is certainly not what Denzin & Lincoln had in mind.

investigator triangulation (more than one researcher with different methodological backgrounds), and theoretical triangulation (using several theoretical approaches). In my project I used data triangulation that resulted from the multiple methods applied and the three different cycles (methodological triangulation). At every stage of the research I tried to be open to further insight and increased understanding and therefore held evaluations lightly being ready to revise my conclusions as better interpretation came along in the next research cycle.

4.1 Qualitative field research

As explained above I place my project within the theoretical framework of PT using a QR approach. I did the fieldwork between January 2009 and June 2012 conducting three research cycles (see 4.2.2) and working with three different participation groups (see 4.2.3). The conditions under which I had to conduct the fieldwork asked for a lot of flexibility and adjustments. Stress, personal involvement, role conflicts, health issues (see 3.2.1.3, p.70), mental and emotional efforts, discomfort and the (Congolese) national trauma of the March explosions led me to contemplate the abandonment of the project more than once. I was challenged to make changes to the research setup, procedures and methods in order to follow through and finish the field research before moving back to Switzerland after nine years living and working in Congo. Usually such problems are not accounted for in a final thesis (Punch 1994). However, because they considerably influenced the research process, the outcome and analysis, I chose to make the difficulties I encountered and the solution thereof explicit (more on reflexivity see 2.1.4, p.42).

4.2 Collecting the research data

The methods applied for collecting data depended on the genre of information I was looking for. I initiated discussions with participation groups, interviewed individual Kongo people, collected students' homework, papers and their exegetical studies. I also kept a field data notebook and a research journal (Johnson 2008) and collected handwritten notes from teaching lessons and

blackboard drawings. This kind of theoretical sampling[2] was data driven and controlled by the emerging theory throughout the three research cycles. In the following I will present some details regarding the methods used.

4.2.1 Four-step-model of critical contextualization

Initially looking for suitable research models in the wider field of missiology and contextualization I came across the four-step-model of 'critical contextualization' developed by Paul Hiebert (1987; 1994:75–103).[3] His model became the guiding system that led me through the many crossroads and junctions I came across in the research process and data gathering (see Figure 4.2-1 below). Hiebert assumed a process in which missionary involvement plays an important and leading role and suggests four steps. Step 1, 'exegesis of the culture', is to study the local culture phenomenologically; it is an **un**critical collecting of 'past' (traditional) beliefs and customs associated with the topic that is contextualized. Step 2, 'exegesis of Scripture and the hermeneutical bridge', is to study Scripture passages and Christian beliefs about the subject at hand. The third step, 'critical response', leads the people to critically evaluate their own beliefs and customs in the light of their gained insights and understanding resulting from studying the Scripture passages. The response may take different forms: retaining practices that are not unbiblical and that reaffirm cultural identity and heritage; explicitly rejecting customs which are 'unbecoming for Christians'; modifying old practices by giving them explicit Christian meanings; borrowing symbols and rites from other cultures in order to replace the ones they rejected, or creating new symbols and rituals 'to communicate Christian beliefs in forms that are indigenous to their own culture'.

---

[2] Theoretical sampling originates from Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (latest edition 2008) who developed Grounded Theory (GT), a research approach that emphasizes the systematic discovery of theory from data (Robson 2011). Theoretical sampling is also applied in research in which the used methods of interpretation are different from the GT model. 'The basic principle of theoretical sampling is the genuine and typical form of selecting material in qualitative research.' (Flick 2009:121)

[3] Hiebert wrote that this model was originally developed by Jacob Loewen and Paul Geertz. Although developed among a people of Panama, Hiebert claimed that it was applicable in other cultural contexts as well (Hiebert 1994:88).

Figure 4.2-1: Four-step-model of critical contextualization[4]
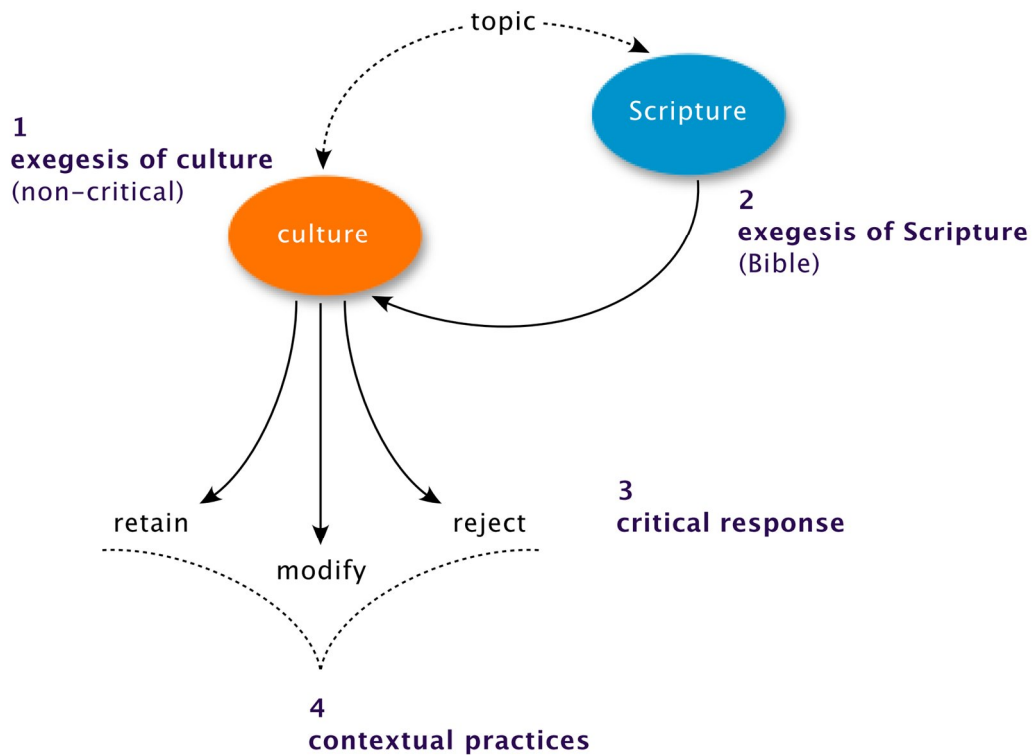
The last step, 'new contextual practices', is to put the response and resulting decisions into practice and includes the transformation of old practices into new rituals that express the Christian meaning.

The research project concentrated on processing the first three steps, not considering the final step because the subject of rituals and symbols would have opened up a whole new set of research issues that could not be covered within the scope of this study (see 8.3 suggestions on further research). As I will further explain in 4.2.2 below, Hiebert's model served me as a roadmap. On the ground however I encountered junctions and crossroads that challenged me to modify the anticipated research plan (see Table 4.2-1 below).

---

[4] The diagram of the model was developed by me during the third research cycle as a help for the theology students (participation group III) to understand the model.

4.2.2 Research cycles

From the beginning I intended the research project to be consciously data driven. This meant that it was mostly the collected information that determined the issues to be further addressed and the next step to be taken, rather than pre-formulated hypotheses or questions. The research questions and methods I started out with were rather fuzzy but were more and more refined by the later research. In the process, reflecting the idea of the hermeneutic circle[5] in which the researcher brings into play and puts at risk her own 'horizon' in order to understand the subject under discussion,[6] the research cycle shown below in Figure 4.2-2 evolved.

Initially following an AR study design I read only some of the literature relevant to the research problem right at the beginning to outline the research, holding back the urge to tidy up the 'mess' that all the ideas, possibilities, thoughts and contradictory hypotheses on the research problem generated (Cook 1998; Dick 1993; 2002). During the evaluation and writing phase, I sought out relevant literature in order to support, question, eliminate (Miles & Huberman 1994; Phillips 1992) or add to the reflections (literature). Results coming out of this phase, including the theoretical and practical suggestions of Hiebert's contextualization model (see 4.2.1 above), fed into the next planning stage as well as into new theory that was then taken back to the next research cycle (planning). In doing so, I was able to verify, refine, extend or eliminate evolving theories.

---

[5] The hermeneutic circle describes the movement of understanding that constantly goes from the whole to the part and back to the whole. Gadamer emphasized that 'we must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole' (Gadamer 2004:291, 293f).

[6] Gadamer suggested that bringing into play and putting at risk the interpreter's own horizon 'helps one truly to make one's own what the text says' which he called the 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer 2004:390).

Figure 4.2-2: Research cycle

What should my research be about?

some
Literature

Evaluation
& Reflection

STEP 1

Groups

Planning

Literature

Evaluation
& Writing

Theory

STEP 2

Groups

Planning

Literature

Evaluation
& Writing

Theory

STEP 3

Groups

Planning

Critical Contextualization
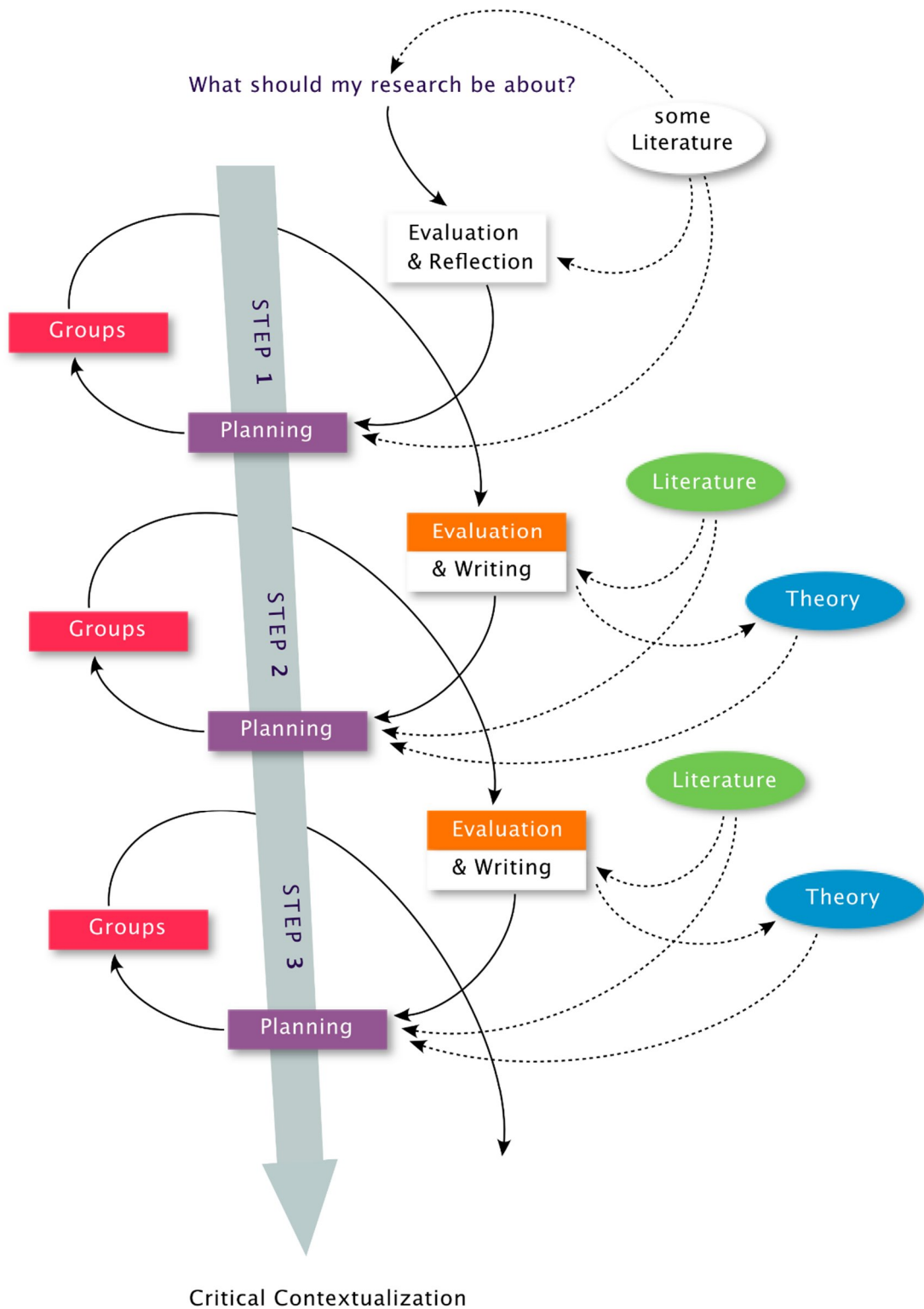
This cyclical approach to the research as a whole was also applied to the individual participation group sessions. After every individual session I went through an evaluation phase that influenced the planning of the next individual session with the group. That data driven approach helped me to stay flexible and to be able to respond to unexpected turns of the research.

Despite all the spontaneity to which I aspired, I had intended Hiebert's model to serve as a roadmap for gathering and grouping the research data. This meant that the first research cycle was originally designed to collect information about the phenomena of wrongdoing ('sin') and evil in the Kongo culture (model step 1, exegesis of culture); the second cycle to look at 'sin' and its presentation in the OT focusing on the issues that were found to be essential in the first cycle (model step 2, exegesis of Scriptures); the third cycle to find a response to those essentials (model step 3, critical response). Soon I realized that the plan was not only too ambitious, but also too static and unable to respond to the difficulties encountered in practice. In order to better respond, I modified the initial roadmap. The modification was also necessary because of my practical experiences with the focus groups.

The initial idea for the research focus groups was to work through the contextualization model steps with all (three) groups, ideally at approximately the same time. For example, during one month I would work with all three groups through step 1, the following month with all three groups through step 2, etc. Because of problems encountered with the first two focus groups however (see 4.2.4.1 and 4.2.4.2 below) I modified the research plan. Table 4.2-1 below gives an overview of the initial plan (left column of the table) and the modifications made (right column). In the following paragraphs I will explain and comment on these modifications.

The first research cycle was characterized by compiling, commenting on and presenting statements from focus group participants that were processed by my own reflections and reading rather than by those of the group participants themselves. The bottom line of the first cycle in regard to discussing, exchanging views and reflecting together on the notion of 'sin' is that the groups did not work in the way I envisaged. Although much cultural background information

could be collected (step 1), a process that would move the subject forward (step 2 and 3) did not emerge.

Table 4.2-1: Modification of the research plan

Research plan						
Initial plan				Modifications		
Cycle	Group	Steps (model)	No. of sessions	Steps (model)	Group	Cycle
I	Group I Group II Group III	Culture (1)	2 2 2 — 3	Culture (1)	Group I (Catechumens) ↓	I
II	Group I Group II Group III	Scriptures (2)	2 2 2 — 5	Culture (1) + Scriptures (2) mixed	Group II (Women's Bible Study group)	
III	Group I Group II Group III	Response (3)	2 2 2 — 6[7]	Culture (1) + Scriptures (2) mixed	Group III (Theology students)	II
				Illness + March explosions		
			9	Revision / modification [Culture (1)] Scriptures (2) + response (3) mixed	Theology students	III
				Illness (relapse)		
			–	Scriptures (2) + response (3)	myself	–

It was also during the first cycle that I came across many indications that pointed towards the hierarchical structure of the Kongo society as a challenge for the chosen contextualization model. The 'breakdowns' experienced (account given in 4.2.4 below) showed that the status assigned to me within the Kongo hierarchical structure by participants of the two groups was an obstacle. It not only hindered the contextualization process from moving beyond just collecting

---

[7] The six sessions were preceded by three lessons of introduction into contextual theology, including the presentation of Hiebert's contextualization model.

cultural information, but it also prevented us from entering into the 'vital process' of developing 'theological understanding' as a group (for more on the nature of contextualization see 1.5.1). The women (group II) explicitly named me as their teacher, giving me a higher place than their own in their social hierarchy. Because a teacher embodies seniority and authority, students simply listen, not discussing or even disagreeing except where the 'teacher' is on a social level similar to that of the students and the dividing lines are less clear cut. Blurred dividing lines alone however did not help to overcome the obstacle of hierarchical status in the catechumens group (group I). The catechumens could only guess at my role and my position in the social hierarchy based on my age and education and thus, as a precaution, assigned to me a status similar to that of their catechists who were their teachers and elders; hence, any further development of a mutual reflecting and thinking process simply could not happen.

These reflections and the insight that I needed much more time to build relationship and confidence with and within a participation group led me to choose for the next two research cycles a group (group III) where I would better fit in with my assigned hierarchical status. With these modifications I not only hoped for discussion at (social) eye level with the participants, but also to have room to develop a more cyclical approach to the contextualization process and to allow the growth of confidence and understanding between the researcher and the group (for more details on the participation groups see 4.2.4, p.92).

As I already mentioned in the previous chapter, beside the challenges regarding my social position two other factors affected not only the research plan, but also the later analysis and interpretation of the data: my illness and the March explosions. The political actuality in Brazzaville and my personal situation impacted the research and transformed it on different levels, namely in regard to 1) the goals of cycle III; 2) the contextualization model; 3) my role in the research process; 4) the research approach overarching the study.

First, the impact on the goals of cycle III. The events of March 2012 created an emergency situation that called for immediate response (see also 4.4.4, p.103). The impact it had on the

students made me adjust the goals for cycle III: Instead of inquiring further into the open questions from cycle II, I took up more of a pastoring role right after the incident and later ventured into finding out if the students saw any link between the topic of wrongdoing and 'sin' discussed in class, the explosions and the ethnical tensions flaring up again. The adjustment also meant that in order to finish cycle III I had to complete steps 2 and 3 myself. Because of a relapse of my illness and further treatment this could only be accomplished a considerable time after having finished the field research.

Second, the transformation in regard to the contextualization model. The model suggests collecting and evaluating **past** beliefs and customs (Hiebert 1994). It was not apparent to me that the current-events situation was decisive too. The crisis in the classroom occurring after the explosions (see 4.4.4, p.103) however made it absolutely clear that considering the timeliness and topicality of the issue at hand is essential; it reveals where it itches and unearths the most urgent issues that need theological contextualized response.

Third, the transformation in regard to my role. When I took a second look at the data resulting from the three research cycles I observed a change of my attitude towards the role initially assigned to me, the role of a 'teacher'. The change ranged from initial inward refusal to reluctant resignation (cycle I) to hesitant acceptance (cycle II) to confident reception (cycle III, after the research interruption). It was only in retrospect however, and with some distance from the research, that I realized that such a transformation had actually happened.

Fourth, the transformation in regard to the chosen research approach. During the first stages of the research I was often challenged in seminars to leave 'myself' out of the research project. Many fellow students and tutors looked at self-reflection suspiciously, maintaining that the 'subjective self' had no business in 'objective academic' research. Because I felt my role as a missionary and researcher was important however, I refused to leave 'myself' out of it and I decided to tackle the project by choosing an AR approach. Still, I continued to feel the pressure

90

on the issue, and I kept oscillating between doubt and conviction. For a long time it was solely the AR's call to keep 'myself' in the research rather than my own conviction. On the one hand that half-heartedness changed into commitment. It was mostly the writing process – a crucial element in the established cyclical process – that brought out the hidden and sometimes unconscious conclusions I had made, the things that had touched and influenced me and thus also influenced the outcome of the research. It was not the experience per se but the working with it, the making it explicit that made it fruitful to the research and to me personally. What I learnt throughout the research was more than background noise that should be left out of the final thesis. On the other hand however I had always felt great tensions regarding the AR's preference for participatory research methods. As much as I wished to adopt these, the situation in Brazzaville and the cultural setting made it hardly possible (see 4.2.3 and 4.2.4 below). I had been sweating over the issue for a long time until I had the courage to set aside the AR key priority of 'collaboration' and to embrace the onsite reality. It was only from the distance gained however – after my recovery from illness – that I was able to articulate the difficulties I encountered with AR and to position my project within the PT framework described by Swinton & Mowat (2006).

In conclusion of the presented modifications and incidents that affected the research it can be said that an interruption of one's research project should not be necessarily seen as a disadvantage; if embraced it can be turned into fruitful soil. Interruptions are not necessarily a loss but can be a gain, a chance for new clarity, determination and commitment.

4.2.3 Participation groups

From the beginning this study sought to be a research **with** people, not so much **on** people (Marshall & Reason 1994; Reason & Heron 1997), hence conducting the research with people **from** Congo **in** the Congo was a key element. Group discussions seemed to be the ideal form for data collection, because I assumed that Kongo people worked best in a collective. Moreover, as means for validating statements and understandings, the group discussion was a suitable form to

comment on each other's interpretations and to point out extreme views or opinions not commonly shared. The group discussions were intended to be a 'tool for reconstructing individual opinions more appropriately' (Flick 2009:197).

4.2.4 Case sampling

It was thought that participants for the planned group discussions should represent different parts of the Kongo culture community. I aspired rather naïvely to set up heterogeneous participation groups with younger and older people, men, women, students, people with responsible roles in higher society and politics, theologians, pastors, older Christians, new converts, etc. I assumed such a wide range of people was necessary in order to get a 'complementary knowledge' (Hiebert 1994:68f). However, it turned out to be impossible for me to engage with so many different people and I began to realize that heterogeneous volunteer participation groups were an illusion; Kongo people of different ages, social classes and gender do not naturally mingle much. Hence my desire for width in the sampling became impossible to realize in the time available to me, which made me change to depth as the aim of the sampling (Flick 2009). That required me to try to find more homogenous groups or groups of people with shared interests that already existed in some way. The resulting selection was based on the criterion of convenience which meant that I chose the participating groups that were more easily accessed, but still satisfactorily fitted the criteria of being representative and of Kongo cultural background. The three participation groups I finally worked with were a group of catechumens, a women's Bible study group and a class of theology students. In the following I will briefly introduce these groups, describe some of the difficulties I encountered and present the reasons why my initial idea of how to work with the groups (see Table 4.2-1 above) did not work out as anticipated.

4.2.4.1 Participation group I: Catechumens

I first settled with a group of young converts who attended catechism classes at the parish *Plateau Ville* of the *Église Évangélique du Congo* (EEC)[8] in Brazzaville. I had great hopes of getting from them a young, modern and fresh view not yet too much influenced by the Church's doctrine. On account of my former experience as a youth pastor in the Church at home I felt a rapport with them and thought that establishing contact and building friendship would be relatively easy. The young people[9] usually met on Saturday afternoons at around 5.30 pm. Armed with Bible, pencil and notebook they sat on benches in the shade outside of the church for roughly two and half hours of teaching. The time I could talk to that group of young people was roughly 30 minutes before their class started, defined by the two responsible catechists as 'you can start with them a little earlier' (FN_EEC#01). An additional challenge was that there was no specific time set for the class to begin. When I started the first cycle with the catechumens I faced one of the difficulties I had feared most: the people I wanted to work with did not respond to my questions in the way I hoped they would. Initially I had envisioned a highly motivated group of young people eagerly engaging in a discussion about cultural issues concerning moral values and the perception of the notion of 'sin' in their culture. To my disappointment they showed only polite interest, answered questions mostly with a one-sentence answer but did not engage in further discussion of the topics. They remained silent as if embarrassed or waiting for something else to come. The only occasion they started a debate was when they disagreed on a certain point and then began to fight over the 'correct' answer to my question. Many reasons came to mind as I tried to discern what blocked our discussion and hindered us from talking much more in detail:

---

[8] Some of the participants were from different church background. The EEC is of reformed-presbyterian background. The EEC follows the liturgy of the reformed (Protestant) Church; they do not practice infant baptism. The theology is influenced by 1) the Swedish pietism that was also the background of the missionaries founding the EEC, and 2) by the revival happening in 1947 which made the EEC embrace spiritual manifestations that had been typical for the messianic movements (e.g. Simon Kimbangu) such as divine revelation through prophecy, dreams, etc. (COR-RMa#02). For further information see *Communauté d'église en mission* (Cevaa) <http://www.cevaa.org/la-communaute/fiches-deglises/afrique-occidentale-centrafrique/eeco-eglise-evangelique-du-congo> [last accessed 23.04.2016)].

[9] The group consisted of about 25 people, men and women, between 18-35 years old.

the young people's lack of interest, their timidity, inaccurate ways of expressing myself, my strong feelings of being an outsider (FN_EEC#02; FN_EEC#03; FN_EEC#09), etc. I did not understand what was going on. My observation that the catechumens were also unresponsive to questions asked by the two catechists (FN_EEC#10) helped me not to take things personally, but it did not resolve my uneasiness. As my uneasiness increased and their classes were drawing to a close I stopped meeting with the catechumens. Although we had discussed some aspects of the culture we were far from moving to step 2 of the contextualization model; and I decided to start anew with another participation group.

In order to evaluate my uneasiness with the group I sought the catechists' advice; their conclusion was simple: '*Ta position n'était pas claire*'[10] (FN_EEC#09); was I teacher, catechist or catechumen? What discouraged me deeply was the catechists' observation that the catechumens did not have confidence in me to talk freely. Obviously, my experience as a youth pastor at home had not helped to build up enough confidence within the time frame set. I had also learnt that the catechumens were not the homogenous group I hoped for. They did not know each other much, they came from different parishes, from different (ethnic) backgrounds and were between 15 and 40 years old. The shared interests that had brought them together were that 1) they wanted to be baptized in due time and 2) the lessons were given in French. Not willing to jump to the conclusion that the experienced 'breakdown' was simply a result of my poor choice of participation group and my inexperience as researcher, I held onto the idea that the Congolese concept of '*séniorité*' (seniority) had something to do with it. When I asked them the catechists said that if seniority was an issue then it would work to my advantage. That statement plunged me into complete confusion because I did not perceive seniority to be advantageous in my position as a researcher seeking to let others speak. I felt that before continuing the research and finding another participation group I had to resolve that 'breakdown' (or 'reality

---

[10] English: 'Your position was not clear.'

disjuncture'; see p.69); and this was the entry point for further research on the topic of seniority and the social hierarchy system in Congo. The contextualization process began.

4.2.4.2 Participation group II: Women's Bible study group

After the rather frustrating experience with the catechumens it appeared to me that a women's group would be a good choice with which to continue; being of the same gender would certainly favour some bonding and facilitate a fresh start. Another consideration for an all women's group was that I observed that women were often ignored in the Church when it came to theological discussions; I wanted to give the women a voice.

With all these assumptions and considerations in mind I arranged some meetings with a group of women who usually gathered for Bible studies at the parish *Bethel* of the *Église de l'alliance chrétienne et missionnaire du Congo* (EACMC)[11] which is situated in a Munukutuba-speaking area at the outskirts of Brazzaville, an area recognized to be dominated by the Kongo ethnic group(s) from the south. It started as a small group of 3-5 women, increasing to 15 as the afternoon went on. In contrast to the catechumens, the women at the EACMC were able to pigeonhole me right away. They saw me as their teacher (RDIS#10). 'Where do you want to set up your things? Look, over there, in the other corner, that's a good place. There, we can all gather around you and concentrate on you and your teaching. Yes, you are our teacher today. Oh, how exciting this is!' When I heard them saying this, I was shocked. I did not want to be their teacher who would tell them what they had to believe, what to do and what not to do. I did not want to indoctrinate them in any way. I thought I was there to hear and learn from them about their view of things. My reaction to that role assignment was not expressed verbally, but something snapped in me. Hence, I was standing in front of these women through the whole session but felt that I

---

[11] This is a Christian and Missionary Alliance church. The Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) describes the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) as an 'evangelical protestant denomination'. According to the ARDA, those denominations 'emphasize a personal relationship with Christ, the inspiration of the Bible, and the importance of sharing faith with non-believers. Evangelical Protestantism is usually seen as more theologically and socially conservative than Mainline Protestantism, although there is obviously variation between denominations, congregations, and individuals'. See <http:// www.thearda.com/rcms2010/ evangelical.asp> [last accessed 23.04.2016].

was not myself. Physically I accepted the suggested setup in the room and my role as a teacher; in my mind however I refused it. The result was as one would expect in such a situation: the group's session had no significance and no depth. I could feel everybody's disappointment. That incident immediately followed the 'breakdown' I experienced with the catechumens. The two strong 'reality disjunctions' in that domain made it evident to me that a resolution was required. It seemed to me that it was not (just) the groups' heterogeneity or homogeneity that was the obstacle, but something that touched the relationship between me and the group(s). I followed Agar's advice to resolve the problem and decided to further address my role in the research process, and I plunged into further inquiry.

In order to continue constructively with the women's participation group I reluctantly accepted the assigned role of a teacher. I considered it vital, however, to find a way to meet with a participation group where I could discuss things at a similar (social) eye level with the participants and thus enter into the dynamic process of contextualization and of mutual reflection that I missed with the catechumens and the participants of the women's group.

4.2.4.3 Participation group III: Theology students

By the time I was looking for a third participation group I had abandoned the initial research plan (see Table 4.2-1, p.88); and for the next two cycles I wanted to settle on one single group with which to continue. I arranged to work with a participation group at the *Faculté de théologie protestante de Brazzaville* (FTPB), the theological faculty of the Protestant Church in Congo (EEC)[12], where the majority of the students were people in responsible positions in the EEC who were to be trained as pastors.[13] Having been given the opportunity to teach the subject of OT

---

[12] The EEC was founded by Swedish Missionaries of the former Mission Covenant Church or *Svenska Missionsförbundet*, a reformed free Church. In 2011 the Mission Covenant Church was merged with the Baptist Union and the United Methodist Church of Sweden. The new denomination is called Uniting Church in Sweden (*Equmeniakyrkan*). For further reference see <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/uniting-church-in-sweden>.

[13] The students were 14 men and 4 women from different social backgrounds.

exegesis (in connection with contextual theology) at FTPB during two academic semesters, I had the time frame necessary to work with a group whose participants were in a similar position in the social hierarchy to the one previously assigned to me. I openly communicated to the academic dean and to the students my intention of using the lessons for my research. They both showed interest and appreciation for the project. It was important to me that my students knew that I was myself a student too, that we both aspired after a higher academic degree. The latter was a bonding element; the FTPB students were studying for a Bachelor degree, a three year course in theology. The majority of the class came from the South of Congo and were from Kongo background (including Laari, Beembe and Suundi).[14] A minority came from the northern districts and thus from other ethnic groups. Although my research concentrated on the Kongo people group, I could not exclude the non-Kongo from the class. I openly talked at the beginning about my research project and that I concentrated on the Kongo, not wanting to stoke up the latent conflicts between Congolese coming from the North and those coming from the South that were an issue during the civil wars of the nineties, which still spread its 'poison' in many Congolese groups. In order for me to be able to make the distinction myself, I asked them to divide up into groups along language lines (which very much follow ethnic group lines). I observed later on during the semester that these groups were not artificial to the students; the students from the different groups also mostly stuck together during coffee breaks and other non classroom settings.

4.2.5 Individual interviews

In order to supplement the results from the participation groups I had intended to conduct semi-structured interviews[15] (Robson 2011; Flick 2009) with individuals. Who those individuals would be, depended on the collected data that needed supplementation. I anticipated interviewing specialists, people immersed in the Kongo culture who intentionally lived and taught the (old)

---

[14] For more information on the ethnic and language situation in Congo see 1.5.3.

[15] Flick uses the term semi-standardized interview.

ways of the Kongo people, but also average individuals who could shed light on questions I could not resolve in group sessions. However, I only interviewed five people – senior members of the Kongo community – because I felt that interviews calling for immediate response generally do not favour the communal way of reflection that is foundational in the Kongo way of processing. Individual interviews neither allow the exchange of thoughts and viewpoints in the group (or community), nor give time for reflection and taking into consideration different arguments, nor do they provide a corrective voice by the group (see 4.2.3). Moreover interviews of individuals conducted by a European missionary risk producing answers that are imagined to be the 'right' answers the European interviewer wants to hear and that please her.[16] Despite the profit that came from the conducted interviews I favoured the participation group as the main inquiry method.

4.2.6   Exegetical work

Following step 2 of the critical contextualization model I considered exegetical work of chosen Scripture passages by the research participants as an essential part for collecting data. It was only in focus group III that we came that far in the process however.

The choice of the biblical texts was data driven which meant that I selected those that seemed the most useful for the main areas discussed in class. The three main areas concerned the view of community, the issue of theft and the understanding of wrongdoing as 'sin' against God (for more details see following chapter 5). More specifically, to stimulate reflections on community and the destructive role it can play – also with regard to 'sin' and wrongdoing – I chose Ex. 32:1-29 (The Golden Calf; see 5.1.3). Josh. 7:1-26 (Achan's theft and punishment) was intended to draw out the Kongo view on theft (see 5.2.2). The third text, 2 Sam. 11-12 (King

---

[16] Diefenbach (2009) discusses problems regarding semi-structured interviews such as the interviewer as well as the interviewee 'spoiling' the data consciously or unconsciously. The interviewee might follow cultural scripts about how one should normally express oneself on particular topics, or he might only give socially accepted answers.

David's adultery), was meant to investigate David's perception of adultery being 'sin' against God, a perspective that is at odds with the Kongo conviction that *Nzambi* (God) is not involved in human affairs and is thus not touched by human wrongdoing (see 5.3.1). Although it turned out that the chosen texts did not entirely address the intended issues, all three led to significant insights into the Kongo understanding of 'sin' and wrongdoing as a whole.

All exegetical work done in class (groups of students) or individually followed the same pattern of questions (see Appendix 4). Although the students could choose from different texts for their individual work, the questions that were to be answered were all the same, displaying similarities to a structured interview. The responses by the students were analysed and integrated into the research cycle as data to which the participants agreed (for more details on the informed consent see 4.4.2, p.102). The responses were fed into the next planning and group phase for further discussion and verification.

4.2.7 Techniques

The group sessions were carried out in different places under changing circumstances. Wherever the circumstances allowed and whenever the participants or the interviewees agreed, I recorded the group sessions and the interviews. Some of the recordings turned out to be useless because of loud generators running nearby, landing airplanes, or buzzing overhead fans. In such cases I could fall back on notes that I took during most of the sessions and interviews.[17] The relevant passages of the recordings were transcribed. The homework papers (handwritten or in any e-format) submitted by the FTPB students I photocopied with their (oral) permission; I kept them as primary sources of information. Blackboard drawings and (flip chart) notes that evolved during the lessons I copied out on paper or my notebook. The collected data came in different forms as the following list shows:

- Recordings and verbatim transcriptions of group discussions and interviews
- Handwritten field notes (taken during group discussions, interviews)

---

[17] In one case it was a researcher friend who took the notes.

- Pictures, handwritten copies of blackboard drawings

- Reflecting notes, memos (taken after group discussions)

- Exegetical works, essays, homework (papers) by the students

- Notes and insights on 'breakdowns'

- Reading notes on findings in the literature

- Emails and other correspondence

I also kept noting my assumptions and interpretations whenever they arose during the research and through exchanging views with others, fellow students, academic advisors and missionary collaborators. The following table serves as a summary of the analysed data set.

Table 4.2-2: Summary of the data set

Group	No. of people	Age	Gender	Church background	Recordings/transcriptions & papers
Participation group I: Catechumens	25-30	18-40	f, m	*Église Évangélique du Congo* (reformed-presbyterian)	Recordings (26 min.), transcriptions, notes
Participation group II: Women's Bible study group	5-15	20-35	f	*Église de l'alliance chrétienne et missionnaire* (evangelical protestant)	Recordings (1:15h), transcriptions, notes
Participation group III: Theology students	18	20-30	f (4), m (14)	*Église Évangélique du Congo* (reformed-presbyterian)	Recordings (10:30h), transcriptions, notes Students' papers (92 documents, 418 pages)
Interviewees	5	--	f (2) m (3)	various	Recordings (4h), transcriptions, notes
Diverse (handwritten) field notes, black board drawings, memos, reflecting notes on 'breakdowns', evaluation notes, emails and other correspondence.					

Appendix 3 gives more details on the primary resources used and analysed.

4.3 Analysing the research data

The analysis of the collected data started already during the research process and was not only carried out a posteriori. I read and investigated the collected data repeatedly. By doing this, particular topics became apparent. In order to verify and refine these topics, as well as seeking feedback from the research participants, the findings were put under scrutiny in the next sessions and the following cycles. The emerging key themes (for example the Kongo society and its

hierarchical structure, or the Kongo traditional understanding of God) I thereupon cross checked with earlier data, the existing literature, my prior knowledge, and also with some missionary colleagues. Moreover I experienced the writing process as an important part of the analysis process; many things became either clearer or could be identified to be further examined. I processed the data through the following two key questions: 1) What is the Kongo view of wrongdoing and 2) what are the implications for a transformative understanding of sin? For keeping the data and its analysis manageable, I made use of the ATLAS.ti software[18].

The referencing system of the primary data I used in the project accounts for the different form in which it was collected and the group from which it derived (for more details see Abbreviations and Appendix 2).

4.4   Ethical considerations

Regarding the ethics in my research the following considerations were taken into account.

4.4.1 Participation

With the exception of some participants of the catechumen's focus group everybody involved in my research were adults over eighteen.[19] Although participation in all the focus groups was in general voluntary, the students at FTPB would not be allowed to miss classes without explanation according to the University regulations. However, the students were free not to contribute to the discussions; I did not mark their oral participation in class. The participation of the interviewees was also voluntary. None of the interviews took place behind closed doors; with one exception all of the interviewees were accompanied by friends listening in.

---

[18] ATLAS.ti is a program for managing and analysing large bodies of qualitative research data. For analysing the data I loaded the documents and notes into the software, coded and commented them, and noted emerging themes.

[19] In the case of the catechumens I had the explicit permission of the two catechists in charge of the group to talk to the participants, take notes, make recordings, and use those for my research.

4.4.2 Informed consent

The informed consent and agreement by the participants were given orally and recorded where possible; no written informed consent was signed by any participants. Before I started the research with the catechumens as well as with the students, the catechists in charge and the dean of the University respectively were asked for permission to use the outcome of the participation groups for my research; it was freely given in both cases. All the participants of all three focus groups were informed that the information given by them would be used for my academic research. There was no concern expressed or reported to me that certain information must not be used. All the interviewees who participated agreed on their names being given, as did the students at FTPB. I anonymised their contributions however, because I considered referencing none of the individual contributors by name more impartial than naming just a few.

The general outcomes of the second research cycle were written down in condensed form (see 5.5, p.173) and revised by the students. Because of health problems on my part, that revision could only take place ten months later on the occasion of starting the third research cycle with the same class. On the occasion when recordings were taken, I asked the participants for permission. In one case it was refused. In order to respect that decision I took only notes of the conversation, which was accepted. In order to avoid misunderstandings about the nature of the meeting with participants (alone or in groups) none of the recordings, interviews and participation groups was conducted behind closed doors; the doors of the classroom were kept open (common practice at FTPB).

4.4.3 Power relationships

During the first research cycle I twice found myself being given a position of authority that I could have used to exploit the participants. In both cases outside observers were present, the two responsible catechists (for the catechumen group) and a missiologist working in Congo (for the women's bible study group). All three can testify that I did not take advantage of the participants

102

in any way. They also helped me to understand the situation better and advised me how to interpret certain incidents.

As a teacher at FTPB I was an authority figure as well. That was the reason for my working constantly on the relationship with the students in order that they might be encouraged to tell me if I did not mirror back to them their statements accurately. Over time I observed an increasing openness of the students to question or express their doubts regarding my conclusions, interpretation and understanding of the topics discussed.

4.4.4 Tensions between ethnic groups

There were two unexpected sensitive situations that occurred while teaching at FTPB. The first one happened in the second research cycle. The FTPB students I was teaching were from different (ethnic) origins. Although my research concentrated on the Kongo people group, I could not exclude the non-Kongo students from the class because my assignment was to teach the course to the whole class (homework, exams, grading included). Focusing the research on the Kongo people group but not giving preference to their contributions in the classroom was like walking a tightrope. Being constantly aware of the danger of favouritism I tried to give equal voice to all the students by letting them work in groups during classes as much as possible and presenting their results in front of the whole class. At one crucial point however I gathered all the Kongo students around one table in order to talk to them 'alone' and sent everybody else to coffee break, away from the ears and cutting comments of non-Kongo students; they were free however to stay in the classroom. That one exceptional session was accepted by all the students.

The second sensitive situation occurred at the very beginning of the third research cycle right after the March explosions in 2012 that fanned the flames of hatred and strong feelings of injustice among different ethnic groups.[20] When we talked in classes about the things happening

---

[20] For an extensive discussion of ethnic conflicts in Congo-Brazzaville see Kitsimbou (2001).

in the streets I considered the issue too sensitive to record (and store) any spontaneous and maybe ill-considered (political) statements coming from the students.

4.5 Confidentiality

Although all the group participants and all the interviewees confirmed that I might use their names in my writing, I used generalizations or anonymised the contributor. None of the recordings were made public; most of the transcriptions were done by me. I had some help for the (French) transcriptions as well as for the translation thereof into English; none of the people helping me however knew any of the contributors.

4.6 Storage of the data

The recordings are kept in original length as wav sound files; the transcriptions are saved as Word documents. Handwritten notes or students' semester papers were scanned and stored as pdf files. All the primary sources and research data are kept on my computer and on an external hard drive.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I described the research procedures of the study, including the methods and techniques used for data collection and analysis. I primarily worked with people of three different participation groups; the focus was kept on representatives from the Kongo people group from Congo-Brazzaville. The model of 'critical contextualization' served as the guiding system in the research process. The analysis was done in a cyclical approach by applying my own hermeneutic research cycle.

Because of a severe illness hitting in the middle of the research, the process of the project had come to a temporary halt and lost momentum until I was able to return in order to finish the third and last research cycle. That interruption influenced the study in a way I did not anticipate and that might be generally seen as a disadvantage. The results of the research presented in the

following chapter however will testify that such an interruption of more than a year does not necessarily lead to a breaking off but offers the chance of reflecting on the data more comprehensively and in a transformative way.

In the following chapter 5 I will discuss the data collected in step 1 of the contextualization process (exegesis of culture). The discussion of the data resulting from step 2 (exegesis of Scripture) will follow in chapter 6 (p.175).

5. DISCUSSION OF DATA I: EXEGESIS OF CULTURE – THE KONGO UNDERSTANDING OF 'WRONGDOING'

If anybody asked in Congo about the word for 'sin', the direct answer would be *'masumu'*; it seems that there is no problem. On account of linguistic findings and a simple translation of the word *masumu* however it would be premature to conclude that there are no difficulties in understanding 'sin' in the Kongo context – the opposite is the case. The reasons for that will be presented in the two following chapters by looking at the Kongo understanding of life, the community, and God (chapter 5) and by inquiring into the understanding of 'sin' in the OT (chapter 6).

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter I will present the findings about wrongdoing in the Kongo culture and the resulting theological challenges. They will show that the Kongo concept of the community and the understanding of *Nzambi* (God) are key issues for the contextualization of the notion of 'sin'.

Although the research followed the first three steps of the critical contextualization model, I found myself unable to put the findings into clear cut sections representing those steps; overlaps are too many. Therefore the writing will only roughly follow the three steps that guided me through the research. The structure of writing aims to account for the cyclical research approach and includes literature, descriptions of the developing research process and self-reflective accounts. Details on the primary resources are given in Appendix 2.

5.1 Understanding community

When I first launched the field study in Brazzaville I started with only some vague ideas. One of these ideas was that the word 'sin' was probably too heavily loaded with biblical meaning and (West European) Christian theological teaching to be used to 'uncritically collect' Kongo traditional beliefs and customs associated with wrongdoing.[1] Looking for an alternative term that

---

[1] 'Uncritically collect traditional beliefs and customs' is the goal of the first step in Hiebert's model.

could open up the field, I came across Loba (2005; 2007) who suggested that any intercultural exegesis in Africa needed to be measured against the African worldview that values the promotion of life. His suggestion turned out to be very rewarding to follow.

5.1.1 Good life – bad life

Adopting Loba's suggestion as an entry point into the discussions I organized the first few questions in the participation groups around 'life', its promotion, its protection and destruction. In order to pitch the questions on a more practical level, each participation group was asked to describe what *luzingu ya mbote* (good life) and what *luzingu ya yimbi* (bad life) meant to them.

To get a general idea of the result coming from the first two participation groups (catechumens, women's bible study group), I classified the answers of the catechumens under three categories: material wealth, harmony and family/community. The answers were later supplemented by the answers given by the women (see Appendix 3) which are further described in more detail in the following.

5.1.1.1 Material wealth

As a start the catechumens described going to school or working as something good. This was followed by *avoir des moyens* ('having financial capability') and being rich, having a *commerçant* (businessman, merchant) with a proper metier in the family (FN_AC#02). The young people in the city, the catechumens agreed in unison, characterize the good life by material wealth, which means having a house, a car, everything that is nice and beautiful, conveniences, lots of money, moving in the best circles. If you do not have all these things you are considered an inferior person (FN_EEC#04). Most people *s'attachent au poteau* [2] – to the one who has money and resources. This is also applicable to the people living in the village where the more traditional view of good life is different. In the village good life means to have fields to till, harmony –

---

[2] English: They 'cling to the supporting pillar of the family'.

which means to know one's place and to be useful – five wives, food, livestock, and servants (FN_EEC#04).

5.1.1.2 Harmony

The word that struck me as odd in the list was 'harmony'. Stimulated to further explanations, the catechumens described it as follows. Harmony – a word of which no direct equivalent exists in the Kongo vernacular[3] – is expressed by *kintwadi* (agreement, [tacit] understanding, together-ness; being unified; association), and by *luzolo nsalasani*, (mutual love/ support).[4] The two expressions are understood as synonyms (TRSC_EEC#01).[5] Harmony is demonstrated in greeting people, for example. It is considered rude not to greet each other even if you already greeted the same person twice an hour earlier. The simplest greeting *mbote mama*[6] has more meaning than just being polite. To greet each other is a sign of *kintwadi*. *'[Se saluer] nous récomforte dans nos malheurs et dans nos joies.'*[7] (TRSC_EEC#01). It is reassuring to know that the greeting person is on one's side sympathizing with one's situation. Not greeting is a serious matter and is perceived as evil.

> *Mais si on ne dit pas bonjour pour nous c'est vraiment, c'est la catastrophe. ... C'est le Monsieur qui ne dit jamais bonjour aux autres ... on te dit déjà il est mauvais. Il n'est pas bien celui-là. Il dit jamais bonjour au gens.*[8] (TRSC_EEC#01)

Harmony is further demonstrated by being present at important occasions of joy and grief, the birth of a child, a wedding, illness, death, etc.

---

[3] This was confirmed by a professor and senior member of the linguist faculty of the University Brazzaville (COR-NDA#02).

[4] The combination of the words is difficult to translate. 'Mutual love' is not quite right. Literally *luzolo* means determination, desire; intention; love. *Salasani* means mutual aide assistance, support.

[5] For more details in lexical entries see Laman 1936; Dereau 1957; Swartenbroeckx 1973; SIL-Congo 2007.

[6] Meaning 'good morning' (addressing a woman).

[7] '[Greeting each other] comforts us in our misfortune and joy.'

[8] English: 'If you don't say good morning, for us, it is really, it is a disaster…. He is the one who never greets others… that already tells you that he is evil. He is not a good man, that one. He never says hello.'

Dans nos quartiers, il y a un décès dans le quartier, on ne te voie jamais, c'est mauvais. Tu viens t'asseoir une heure, même si tu donnes pas grande chose, ta présence est importante.[9] (TRSC_EEC#01)

Visiting the concerned person, sitting down for a short time, shows support; not visiting the concerned person is 'bad', evil.

Another element of that harmony is to know one's place in the community. In order to further illustrate this, one of the young men explained the model of *mbongi*. This term designates a traditional *paillotte* (straw gazebo) where the elders of a village meet in order to eat together and sort out community problems. Younger men are allowed to sit in these gatherings as well, on the condition that they don't speak up but only listen. The place of young people in the community is to listen to the elders and learn from them. It is equivalent to showing *buzitu* (respect), one of the cornerstones of the Kongo concept of community.

5.1.1.3 Family

Another element of 'good life' is *(di)kanda*[10] (family/clan) – an important one. The catechumens described starting (having) a family as a social obligation. Giving birth to at least one child is

---

[9] English: 'Where we live, when someone died in the area, and you never show up, that's bad. You come and sit down for one hour, even if you don't give much [money or present], your presence is important.'

[10] The term 'family' (*dikanda* or *kanda*) in this thesis is used in the sense of the 'wider family'. For the Kongo people family is never just father, mother and children ('core family') but includes everybody who is affiliated with the mother (matrilineal descendants) or the father (patrilineal descendants). The children are included in the mother's *kanda*, not the father's; they are centred upon their mother's brother (uncle). Dalmalm translates *kanda* as 'lineage' and refers to it as 'community'. Van Wing (1959:84f) confirmed that for the Kongo people there exists neither a word nor the concept of the European understanding of 'family'. He explains that *kanda* designates the clan (comprising all the individual descendants on the mother's side, male and female, living and dead). *Luvila* (pl. *mvila*) designates the clan's name that is sacred and only pronounced with great respect. Jacobson-Widding (1979:28f) suggests that *luvila* represents the sacred dimension of a clan, while *kanda* stands for the profane. She also maintains that the concept *luvila* has disappeared as nobody uses this word anymore. According to Bockie (1993) *kanda* is the term for a section of a clan, it is visible, well defined and has a designated chief or head. It cannot be used interchangeably with the term *luvila*. *Luvila* is the nucleus of social organization and consists of all members, alive and dead, descended from a common ancestor. The term sums up all various known and unknown clan-sections. There is no single chief or head of a *luvila*, nor is anyone really sure how extensive it may be and how many members it may include (for more details see Bockie 1993:11–16). MacGaffey (2000:71) describes local clans or clan sections as internally heterogeneous. According to him clans are divided into 'houses' and these in turn into 'lineages'. According to Dereau (1957) the paternal family is called *batata* in contradistinction to *kanda*, the maternal family. Bunseki Fu-Kiau (2001) translates *kanda* with community or clan. The students' plenary presentations led me to assume that the French words *'famille'* and *'communauté' are often used* interchangeably. For the sake of simplicity and in order to mirror my students' understanding of the social order I follow the students using 'family' in the sense of the wider family, using it interchangeably with 'community'.

essential. As a woman *'on est exclue sans enfants, on n'est pas considérée'*[11] (FN_EEC#04). Because of the catechumens' choice of words, the vehemence displayed in their voices, I realized that family was more than just important; it was essential to them. However, I did not hear the same vehemence in the women's discussion group, although they considered family, being married and having children as part of good life too (FN_AC#02); for them the most natural thing in the world.

5.1.1.4 Death and evil

In order to widen the view of 'good life', we also looked at the opposite, death and evil. In the conversation the women used words such as maledictions, 'witchcraft', suffering, sickness, not having children, not being married, not being respected, not being successful, and not having means, money or work (FN_AC#02).

Although in both participation groups family and community were the central themes around which 'good life' seemed to be placed, I realized in retrospect that I had been rather deaf to them.[12] From my formal training as a theologian and missionary I already knew without being able to empathize that family was fundamental to African culture in general. I was therefore not very enthusiastic about the participants' response; it seemed rather stereotypical. Since my socially individualistic background and my marital status upheld not family but independency as an ideal of 'good life' I felt unequipped to work constructively with the outcome of the catechumens' group and, moreover, uninterested in doing so. Hence I did not pursue the topic any further for the time being, neither with the catechumens nor with the women's group. By not picking up the outcome, however, I deviated from the adopted premise of the research being data driven; my ignorance was only corrected later (see 5.1.2 below). The objective of the group

---

[11] English: As a woman 'without a child you are excluded; you are not respected'.

[12] This was emphasized by a short individual chat with one of the catechumen who expressed her concern for me. 'You are lonely', she said. Because I perceived it at that time as a critique of me not being married and not having a child I rejected her concern. I further remember being tired of Congolese addressing my marital status, asking about my children and expressing concern or showing interest in changing such unfortunate conditions.

discussions moved instead to developing 'experience-near' vocabulary (suggested by Priest 2007) of wrongdoing, good and evil which I assumed essential for the research. The vocabulary used is presented in Appendix 3.

The reflection on 'good life' continued in the second cycle during which I worked with the group of theology students. However, I introduced the topic in a slightly different way than with the catechumens and the women's group for two reasons. First, I did not want to encourage another 'stereotypical' response; and second, both older and more recent literature to which I had turned in the evaluation phase of the first research cycle offered ideas I wanted to verify in the second cycle. Most prominent was the literature reflecting on 'life' in the Kongo context[13] that promoted the principle of vital power or 'life-force', something I had not come across explicitly in Congo-Brazzaville. In the hope of learning more about this principle and how the Kongo people perceived life, I asked the participants to individually write an essay on 'life'[14]. It was meant to be understood as a philosophical or conceptual question. However, the students' essays were far from offering the grandiose philosophical explanations that I anticipated. They offered instead real-world descriptions of the most important things in life and how they are lived out. They portrayed very strongly that family is THE most important thing in life – is even life itself – and everything that supports or brings harmony to the family/clan is a must-do because life is sacred (DOC-hw1#S01; #S03; #S15).

Being married and having as many children as possible is fundamental, even obligatory (DOC-hw1#S02; #S11; #S12; #S18); it is more important than all the material richness one can get (DOC-hw1#S02; #S11). Traditionally polygamy is encouraged (DOC-hw1#S05; #S11)[15]; monogamy is considered unsteady, like standing on only one leg: *… un homme qui a une seule*

---

[13] This includes the Bantu context because the Kongo people are a Bantu ethnic group.

[14] Original question in French: '*Qu'est-ce que c'est la « vie » dans votre propre culture?*' English: 'What does 'life' means in your own culture?'

[15] This is also true for the non-Kongo cultures represented in the class (DOC-hw1#S09; #S12; #S14 #S16).

femme est un homme déséquilibré à l'exemple d'un homme qui se tient debout par une seule jambe.[16] Not being married and not having children is truly unfortunate (DOC-hw1#S12); it is as if one does not really live but is dead; nobody will carry on his name (DOC-hw1#S02) and the very existence of the clan will end (DOC-hw1#S05). The unmarried person is not *considéré*[17] in the community (DOC-hw1#S03). Everything is undertaken to remedy this serious anomaly that renders the childless person isolated (DOC-hw1#S16). Moreover, the students' essays confirmed the catechumens' view of working being important for a 'good life'. It was however not linked to becoming materially rich as an individual, but to supporting the family, being responsible and becoming a respected person in the whole community (DOC-hw1#S02; #S03; #S06; #S09; #S11; #S14; #S16; #S18).

In summary of the essays it may be said that wealth, group-solidarity and progeny are the embodiment of 'good life', and an honourable person is the one who raises a large family, one of the greatest values in promoting life. Anything less than a prosperous life, having success in all endeavours and having a large family is abnormal (see also the primary texts presented by Janzen & MacGaffey 1974).

5.1.2 Plenary session: Community as the centre of life – more than a cliché

The emphasis in the students' essays on the family, its promotion, support and growth, revealed one of the cornerstones in the Kongo worldview (maybe THE one cornerstone): community. In order to orally verify the statements given in the students' written work essays, and to evaluate the emerging theory, I gave room for feedback and correction in a plenary session. On that occasion one of the students got to the heart of the issue with the following words.

---

[16] English: 'A man who has only one wife is imbalanced like a man standing up only on one leg.'

[17] English: 'respected'. This translation is not quite accurate, but I could not find a better term.

[La] vie dans la culture africaine est avant tout communautaire. L'africain vit pour les autres; il ne connaît pas l'esprit d'individualisme. De la naissance à la mort il demeure coller [sic] à sa collectivité où il partage des expériences aussi bonnes que mauvaises.[18] (DOC-hw1#S06)

This is neither a new discovery nor a surprise. Scores of researchers and African specialists have written about the importance of community in Africa in general,[19] but also regarding the Bantu and Kongo people more specifically.[20] *'Hors de la communauté il [l'individu] n'était qu'un pauvre naufragé!'*[21] (Kolélas 2006:134). Balandier accounts for an old Kongo proverb saying that a Kongo person who has left his clan is like *'une sauterelle qui a perdu ses ailes'*.[22] by leaving his clan that person has crossed the borders outside of which security, solidarity and affection are no longer guaranteed (Balandier 1965:178 quoted by Biemoundonghat 2000:26). 'When the community is, I am; when it is not, I am not. In other words, I am because the community is; without it my existence becomes dull and meaningless.' (Bockie 1993:10) 'I feel the other, I dance the other, and therefore I am.' (Nussbaum 2009:101 quoting Léopold Senghor[23]).

Community understood as being the centre of life is such an old truth that I had perceived it at first as a cliché that could be ignored or finally moved beyond in our contemporary age. But coming across it again in such serious terms in the students' essays marked one of the 'reality disjunctures' of the research. It was a wake-up call: it reminded me of the research approach being data driven, and I finally gave the matter full attention.

---

[18] English: 'Life in the African culture is above all life in community. The African lives for others; he does not know the spirit of individualism. From his birth to his death he rests attached to the group where he shares all the good and bad experience in life.'

[19] See authors such as Bujo 1992; 2001; Ikuenobe 2006; Mbiti 1990, etc.

[20] Balandier 1965; Bunseki Fu-Kiau 2001; MacGaffey 1986; van Wing 1959; Willoughby 1928, or Laman 1957, just to name a few.

[21] English: 'Outside of the community the individual would be nothing more than a pitiable castaway.'

[22] English: That person is like 'a grasshopper that lost its wings'.

[23] Léopold Senghor (1906-2001) was a West African poet, social philosopher and former president of Senegal.

In order to dig deeper, the students sat together in groups (in the plenary) and prepared short statements on community that were to be presented in the plenary. Parts of two of the statements are as follows:

Nous avons parlé donc de la communauté. Nous avons dit que, dans la culture kongo, la communauté est sacrée, elle est vraiment sacrée. Elle est le fondement solide pour la stabilité de l'homme et de la société. Et donc nous avons dit que dans la communauté il y a l'harmonie pour garantir l'unité fraternelle ou familiale. Des valeurs sont conservées et transmises de génération en génération. Chacun est considéré et aimé par l'autre. L'associativité, l'éducation est assurée par la communauté. … Et puis, la force de la communauté c'est l'unité. Dans chaque communauté il y a des normes et des valeurs qui garantissent l'unité de la communauté. Il faut donc - au cas où il y a un problème dans la communauté il faut donc vite le réparer parce que il faut toujours maintenir l'unité au sein de la communauté. Et aussi, et surtout, la communauté assure la sécurité pour les individus qui sont dans la communauté, et aussi, un dernier point, pour une communauté chrétienne.[24] (TRSC_Ms#01)

Nous parlerons de ce qui peut s'en suivre si la commuauté est en rupture. L'institution familiale traditionnelle forme un tout indivisible. Quand la communauté est brisée, il s'en suit beaucoup de faits néfastes. L'on peut mentionner pour la circonstance, le manque de protection. Car une famille, ou le clan peut être attaqué par un autre, l'amour qui se traduit par l'entraide est terni, la joie fait place à la souci et au détresse. On peut noter aussi la disette car la communauté favorise l'aspect coopératif. On court le risque de voir affaiblir le rendement dans le cadre alimentaire. Les valeurs culturelles disparaissent graduellement avec la dislocation de la communauté. L'exode rural ou l'éloignement des autres membres de la famille sera constaté. On pourrait aussi parler de la « disparition du village ».[25] (TRSC_Ms#02)

The centrality of the family is unmistakeably shown in these statements. Family, with all its obligations and positive and negative aspects, lies, as far as I came to understand, at the very heart of the Kongo worldview. I concluded that the key for a cultural outsider to understand wrongdoing and 'sin' in the Kongo culture will most probably be found within the conceptual framework of the family, or, in more general terms, in the community. Bujo confirms this when

---

[24] English: 'So we have talked about community. We said that in the Congo the community is sacred, literally sacred. It forms the essential basis for man's stability in society. That is why we said that a community has a harmony guaranteeing brotherly or family unity. Values are maintained and transferred from generation to generation. Each person feels cherished and loved by the other. The community spirit guarantees cooperation and education. … The strength in any community is its unity. In every one there are norms and values ensuring the unity of the community. So when a problem arises in a community it must be dealt with so that unity within the community can be maintained at all times. And furthermore, the community ensures security for each of its members and also, let it be said, for a Christian community.'

[25] English: 'We shall now mention what the consequences can be when community life breaks down. Traditionally, the family is an unbreakable whole. When community breaks down many bad things happen as a consequence. One thing that can happen is a lack of protection. A family or a clan may be attacked by another, and the love which is traditionally expressed in support of one's neighbour turns sour: joy turns to worry and distress. Famine can occur, because a community spirit should give rise to cooperation. But instead there is a reduction in the amount of food available to eat. Cultural values gradually are lost as community life fragments. People move off the land, other family members move away. We can talk about the village "disappearing"'.

he says that 'the community has a central place in African ethics' (2001:3) and that 'a Christian-African ethic ought not to lose sight of African attitudes about life and community' (2001:102).

Not satisfied with the research participants' idealistic view of the community, however, I wanted to tackle the issue from yet another angle. I decided to stimulate the students to some self-criticism and to reflect on their culture in a more discerning way. In order to get a more contrasted picture – and because I was supposed to work exegetically with the students[26] – I decided to underlay the discussion about the community with a biblical text against which the students' views would hopefully stand out more clearly. Results from the students' exegetical work are presented in the following.

5.1.3 Insights from exegetical work of biblical texts

For stimulating more self-critical reflections on community and the precarious role it can play – also with regard to 'sin' and wrongdoing – I had originally chosen Ex. 32:1-29 (The Golden Calf). It seemed suitable because in my view the story implies that a community must not be idealized since it can negatively influence a whole people to do what is against God's law. The students however did not support this understanding, and there was little comment on the role of the community. We gained more insight into the community matter from different texts, namely Josh. 7:1-26 (Achan's theft and punishment) and 2 Sam. 11:1-12:14 (King David's adultery), which uncovered community aspects as well. Since the work on all three texts shed new light on the community topic, they are all considered (more details on the chosen texts see 4.2.6 p.98).[27]

---

[26] At the time I was teaching the class a course in Old Testament exegesis.

[27] In this section, only the results are presented that I considered relevant for the discussion about the community. DOC-ex1 refers to exegesis done on 2 Sam. 11-12, DOC-ex2 to exegesis on Exodus 32, and DOC-hw2 to Josh. 7 (see also Appendix 2). These works by students of non-Kongo background (DOC-ex1#S04; DOC-ex2#S16) are not considered in the presentation here. Student #S04 is from Bomasa background, student #S16 is from Mbete (Mbere) background. The students' contributions #S09 (Nzebi), #S06, #S14 (Yaka), and #S03 (Lumbu) are to be considered with caution because these students grew up in the Kongo dominated area but mentioned influence by the Teke culture. Although Andersson (1958) described the Yaka, Nzebi and Lumbu (including Tsangi and Punu) as related to the Kongo, and although Laman (1968) linked the Nzebi and the Yaka to the Suundi (who are Kongo people), I was not confident to treat them as clearly Kongo based, because I simply do not know more details and the information available is confusing. Similar the Lumbu people who are by Laman not reported being of Kongo origin but live in Congo-Brazzaville in close vicinity to the Vili (Kouilou and Niari region).

Three main issues stood out in my eyes from the students' exegetical work. 1) Although the family/community is affected (e.g. humiliated, dishonoured) by wrongdoing of an individual member, the culprit must be found out and punished; any form of collective responsibility or even collective punishment is refused. 2) The leader (chief) bears full responsibility for the wellbeing and prosperity of the community. 3) The community seems to be beyond any criticism. More details on these three issues are given in the following.

5.1.3.1 The individual is called to account, not the community as a whole

The students expressed their bewilderment and incomprehension[28] of Moses (Ex. 32), who orders three thousand men to be killed without finding out who the real culprits were. He even blesses the ones who massacred the people (DOC-ex2#S03; #S11; #S12; #S14; #S18). The students found it striking that Achan's 'sin' (Josh. 7) is attributed to all Israel (DOC-hw2#S02) and has consequences for a whole nation (DOC-hw2#S08; #S07). It was moreover not understood why an individual person causes the punishment, condemnation and destruction, i.e. killing, of a whole family considered innocent [by the students] (DOC-hw2#S02; #S03; #S11; #S06; #S12; #S15; #S17; #S14; #S18), or why one man's fault is generalized (DOC-hw2#S11; #S09; #S15). It was incomprehensible to the students why the whole people was condemned although the covenant was violated by Achan only (DOC-hw2#S08; #S07). Along the same lines, it was questioned why in 2 Sam. 11-12 the innocent child gets punished instead of the culprits (DOC-ex1#S04).

These things caused bewilderment because in Kongo culture, in case of a violation of a principle or law, it is not the family or community that is sanctioned, but the one who did wrong. The family is nevertheless affected and offended (DOC-ex2#S12); there are consequences for the whole community (DOC-hw2#S03; #S11; #S16) because there is humiliation for the whole

---

[28] The students' contributions are taken from their responses to the questions 4a – 4e (more details to the exegetical assignment see Appendix 4). The questions were: 4a) What is striking or astonishing? 4b) What do you not understand? 4c) What is similar in your culture? 4d) What is different regarding your culture? 4e) What is the main point you would preach about in your EEC congregation?

family, which shows the filiation, the bond that reigns in a society (DOC-hw2#S04). The children are not punished for their parents' or brothers' fault (DOC-ex2#S18). The culprit is not rejected but the clan invests in getting him out of the situation which he has brought on himself. Moreover, the family/community cannot be asked to put to death a brother, a parent or another clan (DOC-ex2#S07; #S14; #S18). The death penalty is however given in the event that the prohibited[29] is violated, especially when the sacred is profaned (DOC-ex2#S14).

In many aspects the Kongo people are not different from other cultures when it comes to breaking norms of the community. One is punished, depending on the seriousness of the offence, if one does not respect the norms of the village, the clan, the family, or if the traditional laws are not observed (DOC-ex2#S18; #S12; #S14). The Kongo bring charges in the case of offences such as stealing, lying, hiding, committing despicable acts, envying, (DOC-hw2#S02; #S06; #S09; #S12; #S17; #S14), committing adultery (DOC-ex1#S09; #S15) that break the good relationship between the offended and the offender (DOC-hw2#S03); also infidelity in a covenant between people, disrespect of agreed clauses, envy and greed (DOC-hw2#S17). Infidelity can cause the death of men and women; in 2 Sam. 11 it was war, in the Kongo culture it is poisoning and sorcery [that kills] (DOC-ex1#S04).

5.1.3.2 The chief is regarded as being responsible for the wellbeing of the community

What opened up the field a bit further was the students' comments on the leaders in Ex. 32 (Moses, Aaron, Levites) and 2 Sam. 11 (David). Although leadership was not the targeted topic, there is valid information regarding the understanding of the community resulting from those comments. The fact that the students commented on the leaders helped me to understand that leadership in the Kongo understanding cannot be segregated from the community; it is a part of it and must be assessed in the light of the community concept.

---

[29] The student probably alludes to a 'taboo'.

One student expressed her incomprehension of the Levites who betrayed their brothers by taking sides with Moses (Ex. 32); they had the same wish as all the others (the fabrication of the golden calf). If they had not, why had they not hindered the people from doing so? Why did they not stay unanimously with the people saying, 'we live together, we die together' (DOC-ex2#S11)? It was also incomprehensible why Aaron remained unpunished even though he made the golden calf and linked it with a feast for Yahweh (DOC-ex2#S03). For another student it was bewildering that Aaron, God's servant, let himself be influenced by the perverse ideas of the people; he lacked authority to refuse the fabrication of the calf and to rebuke the people (DOC-ex2#S07) and disqualified himself as a leader by giving way to the will of the people. The clan or village chief must ensure the good behaviour and protect the life of his people against the many aggressions; and the people cannot impose anything against the rules of the ethics of the village. If a chief let himself be led away as Aaron did, he would be condemned.

Celui qui est supposé d'être chef de clan ou chef de village, il a pour devoir sinon obligation de veiller au comportement et de protéger la vie de son peuple contre diverses agressions. Le peuple ne peut pas lui imposer quelque chose qui est contraire à l'étique du village. Si un chef se laisse entrainer comme l'a fait Aaron, il est condamné.' [30] (DOC-ex2#S16)

It was also incomprehensible why David committed adultery, an act that brings about curses and causes desacralization (DOC-ex1#S04), and how he let himself be seduced so rapidly and violently, just to sleep with a woman without thinking of his honour (DOC-ex1#S15). David's behaviour caused bewilderment because in Kongo culture a chief of a village or clan (comparable to King David) is sacred and an incarnation of ancestor spirits who watch over the well-being of the population (DOC-ex1#S04). It is very rare that a village chief, a responsible person of high rank, would commit such a dishonouring act as David's adultery, because the

---

[30] English: 'Whoever is the head of a clan or the village chief, his duty is to watch over the conduct of his people and to protect their lives against various attacks. The people cannot impose something that is contrary to the ethics of the village. If a leader allows himself to be influenced the way Aaron did, the village is doomed.' This contribution came from a student with Mbeti background. I let it stand because it explains the situation well to a cultural outsider and as further research shows, it is also valid for the Kongo.

proverb says, *'Le chef du village ne voit pas le diable'*[31]. This means that if the chief himself causes chaos (by doing evil) the whole population will be unprotected, suffer and eventually scatter.

If the community is to prosper, the chief is obligated to behave well, to preserve his dignity and be a good example (DOC-ex1#S09). Traditionally however, the chief could have as many wives as he wanted and still follow the norms regarding marriage (DOC-ex1#S17). It is the clan's chief who finds the solution to settle the problem that is produced by his clan members (DOC-ex2#S03). When a chief is dishonoured by the people, they get punished (by the chief); that's what Moses did (DOC-ex2#S07).

5.1.3.3 The community seems to be beyond overt criticism.

Apart from the insights resulting from the exegetical work presented above, the self-critical reflections on the community by the students for which I had hoped did not emerge. In all their submitted papers and throughout the subsequent plenary discussions they seemed to maintain their idealistic view of the community. Of course this could have had different reasons to which however I do not give space for inquiry here. For whatever reasons, the students seemed to be very protective of the community and to prevent anything from touching it. From my everyday dealings with the Congolese I knew of disturbing community aspects that kept many Congolese from prospering in their lives. On exchanging experiences about their daily woes I could not miss the fact that most Congolese suffer under the many exigencies imposed by the family and the clan (for example providing shelter, food, money, gifts by the haves to the have-nots). These established traditional obligations are often experienced as burdensome and constraining, and are linked with the constant fear of measures taken against them such as curses that bring about

---

[31] 'The village chief does not see the devil.' There are different version of the proverb in the vernacular. Laari: *Mfumu gâta ka monaka nkuyu ko*. Lingala: *Mokonzi ya mboka amonaka ndoki te*. Teke: *Ngaa-ola k'aamuna upfu wɔ*. (COR-RAHA#01)

sickness, misfortune, or accidents resulting from *kindoki*[32] in case of not meeting those obligations. Dorier-Apprill confirms this. The demands are increasingly seen as intolerable intrusions into the household economy. Non-compliance with family obligations fester under the surface or burst into open conflict, calling on 'witchcraft practices' and having a serious impact on the perception of disease and even the mental health of the parties involved (Dorier-Apprill, Kouvouama & Apprill 1998:99). *'La famille n'est jamais satisfaite. Quand on ne s'occupe pas d'elle, on est victime de beaucoup de maux.'*[33] (Devauges 1977:139)

Overwhelmed by the growing complexity of the issue, and at the time still not aware of the centrality of the community to the understanding of 'sin', I decided at the end of the second research cycle not to investigate the topic any further. It was only much later that I began to understand the significance of the matter. The insight that the rationality of beliefs and thoughts among the Congolese cannot be understood unless such beliefs and thoughts are placed in the context of the community logic[34] (Ikuenobe 2006) developed only after having finished the third research cycle, when I started to re-read the collected data and the literature on community, to which I turn now in the following.

5.1.4 Centrality of community: literature

The centrality of community in African thought is firmly established in the extensive literature on the topic. One fundamental point stands out to me in particular: It is the community that shapes the understanding of the person as individual. The community and the individual are intrinsically linked; the one cannot be thought of without the other. The community **is** the individual (Verhoef & Michel 1997); He/she is inseparable from his/her community (Sogolo 1993). Thus researching into the understanding of community in the African context is at the same time researching into the understanding of the individual person.

---

[32] More on *kindoki* see 5.1.4.3, p.131.

[33] English: 'The family is never satisfied. If you don't take care of her [the family], you become the victim of many troubles.'

[34] Ikuenobe calls it the 'communalistic logic'.

5.1.4.1 Community and the individual in sub-Saharan Africa

'African society is characterized by the prevalence of the idea of the community' (Westermann 1949:65 quoted by Awolalu 1976:278). For me as the researcher coming from a West European culture that generally appraises the individual over the community[35], it is difficult to really comprehend the African view. Menkiti, a Nigerian philosopher describes the understanding of community in my own cultural context as a non-organic bringing together of individual, self-interested persons, each with his or her private set of preferences. We gather nonetheless, according to Menkiti, because we realize that together we can accomplish things which we are not able to accomplish alone.

> In this primarily additive approach, whenever the term 'community' or 'society' is used, we are meant to think of the aggregated sum of individuals comprising it. (Menkiti 1984:179).

Although Menkiti's description of the (West) European understanding of community is a disputable oversimplification, it nonetheless resonated with me and became key in realizing how completely at odds my individualistic preference must be with the view of my African discussion group participants.

The community to which the 'we' refers does not only consist of the men and women currently alive, but also of the departed ancestors (Bockie 1993; Ikuenobe 2006; Menkiti 1984) whom Mbiti called the 'living dead' (Mbiti 1990; 1974a), and the yet unborn; they are part of the community. It seems that in Africa community is seen as a fundamental human good because it advocates 'life in harmony and cooperation with others, a life of mutual consideration and aid and of interdependence' (Gyekye 1997:75f; Nolte-Schamm 2006:371).

One of the most famous quotes regarding the general understanding of community and its individual members in the sub-Saharan African context originates from Mbiti (1990:106): 'I am,

---

[35] Writing this section I am realizing that my mother tongue (Swiss German) does not have a word that really fits the African concept of 'community'. The selections of words I can choose from are *Gemeinschaft*, *Gemeinde*, *Kommunität* and *Kommune*. All of them however come with misleading connotations that do not mirror the understanding found in African contexts.

because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.' In other words, 'when the community is, I am; when it is not, I am not' (Bockie 1993:10); an individual who is disconnected from the community is nothing (Taylor 2001:83). According to Tempels the Bantu psychology does not conceive human beings as individuals; the individual is not a 'force existing by itself apart from its ontological relationship with other living beings' (Tempels 1959:103). I think it would be a misunderstanding however to conclude from all this that the individual is self-less (Verhoef & Michel 1997; Bujo 2001; Venter 2004). It rather means that 'the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of individual life histories' (Menkiti 1984:171) and that 'the self is ontologically, cosmologically, spiritually, and normatively connected to the community' (Ikuenobe 2006:53). Consequently one's moral obligations and rights in the African traditional view are based in and tied to the community. According to Bujo (2001:88) each member's actions 'contribute either to the growth in life of the entire community or to the loss or reduction of its life, depending on whether they are good or evil'. Thus, in order to appreciate the foundation and the nature of moral reasoning in the Kongo culture, I should not put aside the topic of community as a mere stereotypical answer to the question about life that is fed to the cultural outsider. The community **is** life. And if one wanted to put forward any philosophical proof of human existence it would most certainly be close to Pobee's dictum: *cognatus ergo sum* – I am related, therefore I am (Pobee 1979:49).[36]

What in the literature is generally described as the African characteristics of community is expected to be found true for the Kongo context as well; the findings from the participation groups presented above confirm it. Yet these are only sketchy and leave us with still more questions about the specific givens of the Kongo communal context and the relations within it. The following aims to unearth some underlying principles by digging a bit deeper into the Kongo worldview.

---

[36] Bujo (2001:4) suggested another one: *coginatus sum, ergo sumus* ('I am known, therefore we are').

5.1.4.2 Community and the individual in the Kongo context

As expected from the explanations above in sections 5.1.1 – 5.1.3, the understanding that the self is ontologically connected to the community is true for the Kongo context as well.

> *L'ordre social est fondé sur l'ordre ontologique symbolisé par le lien de sang. La personnalité du Kòongó se réalise dans et à travers la société et c'est au sein de celle-ci qu'il est considéré comme un homme. S'il vient à se sépare [sic] de la société, il est en quelque sorte une personne morte.*[37] (Biemoundonghat 2000:27)

Dalmalm explains that *kanda*[38], the community, *est le lieu où se vit la vie.'*[39] The identity as an individual member is given through *kanda*; outside of *kanda* there is no real existence, no real identity (Dalmalm 1985:58; Mulago 1973). The *kanda* is the essential unit for the social structure (Hilton 1985); it is the framework within which the perception of the world is forged; it stays the main element of the Kongo person's participation in life. Members of the *kanda* community are the living, the *bakulu* (the dead)[40], and the children still to be born. According to Dalmalm the community bears responsibility for the individual member in such a way that an older brother for example can be made answerable for an offence committed by a younger sibling. A Kikongo proverb says: *Ngazi kudya banswini, lemina kubaka bantyetye* – the sparrows eat the nuts, but it is the larks that get thirsty. Stenström (1999:163) explains the meaning as follows: When a child does a bad thing, it is its father who gets punished. It is obvious that this contradicts what the students emphasized: the real culprit must be found in order to settle the matter. Yet, when it comes to children who break the law, the situation might be judged differently.

---

[37] English: 'The social order is based on the ontological order represented by the blood ties. The personality of the Kongo person is realized in and through the community, and it is within the community that he is considered a man. If he is separated from the community, he is somehow a dead person.'

[38] Detailed explanations about the term *kanda* see footnote 10 on p.112.

[39] English: 'The community is where existence is lived out.'

[40] The *bakulu* are dead persons of whom one still remembers the names.

It is however undisputed that the action of a single person concerns the whole community because the individual is part of a greater whole (Mulago 1973). In the same sense Ekholm Friedmann (1991:103) explains that in the Kongo culture every single person is entirely integrated in a larger 'ontological hierarchy'.

> His life is entirely integrated in a larger sphere and he has no existence outside this higher unity…
> The individual has no autonomous existence, but is integrated in an 'ontological hierarchy' which is his effective universe.

In order to be a powerful community, every individual member is expected to contribute (Stenström 1999:171). *Mbu wazadiswa kwa zinzadi ye zinto* – the sea is filled by streams and rivers. And the strength and power of an individual lies in a strong community, as implied by the Kikongo proverb: *Ngolo za ngandu mu maza* – the strength of the crocodile is in the water.[41] 'The individual who lacks the directives of the group is a deviant.' (Ekholm Friedman 1991:108). *Nto wayenda yandikaka wayenda tengama* – the river meanders because it travels alone. The individual does not know how to behave on his own; going it alone is 'sickness' and leads to evil (IVW-MIA#01b; Ekholm Friedman 1991:108).

The community into which a Kongo person is integrated rests on a complex social system that I found difficult to grasp as a cultural outsider. In order to better understand that system Figure 5.1-1 below (modelled after the diagram found in Ekholm Friedman 1991:129)[42] provides an illustration that clarifies certain aspects simplifying its complexity. The Kongo community rests on a matrilineal filiation system and is structured hierarchically. It is based on the principle of seniority and of the genealogical proximity that implies inequality in status and in power (Dalmalm 1985:59). The uncle (the mother's brother) has the authority and power over his nephew, the older over the younger, and above all is the ancestor. Everybody is expected to

---

[41] Stenström (1999:171) explains: Like 'the strength of the crocodile is in the water', the strength and power of an individual lies in a big and powerful clan.

[42] Ekholm Friedman's diagram does not integrate the influence of *kindoki*. Moreover, her labelling of the three different sectors of influence and power as 'social sector' (the mother's side), 'political-religious sector' (the father's side) and 'magical-religious sector' (*nkisi* and *nganga*) is much influenced by West European categories. I found myself challenged to modify her otherwise very helpful diagram.

exercise his power over his inferiors, in the sense of protection but also in the negative sense of correcting by exercising *kindoki* ('witchcraft'[43]; see also sub-section 5.1.4.3 below) over the one stepping out of line and causing social disorder.

Figure 5.1-1: Sources of influence and power[44]
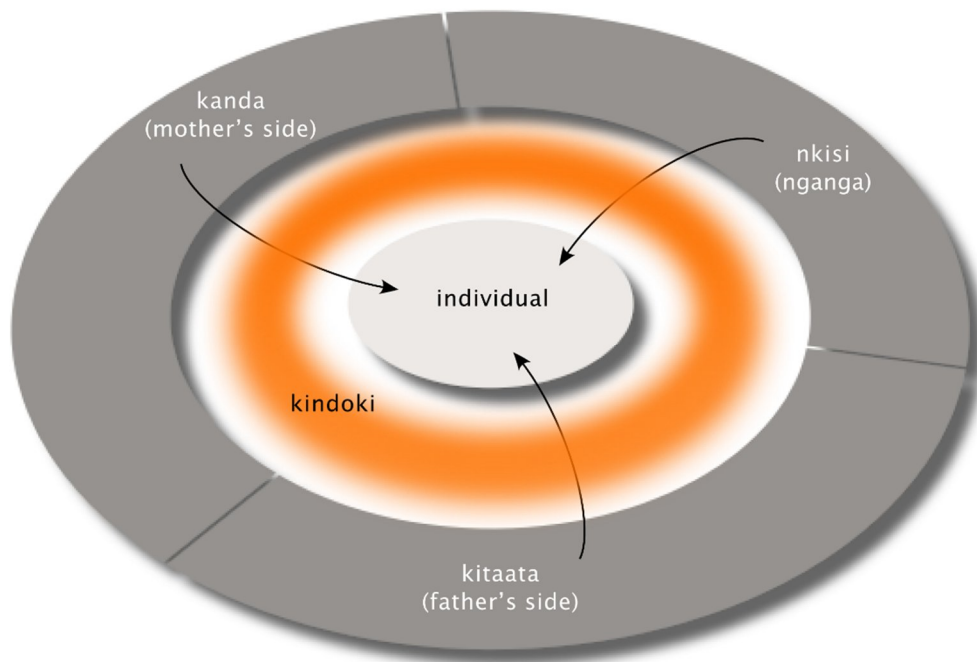
In Figure 5.1-1 the Kongo individual's *kanda* represents the influence of the mother's side (matriline). According to Ekholm Friedman the matriline was in the past, and to a large extent still is today, the source of social power.[45] The individual is contained in the matriline (see footnote 10 above p.110) and obtains support through it, materially, financially and socially.

The mother's brother, the maternal uncle, plays a significant role (see also Dalmalm 1985). He gives not only real material support, but also supernatural support. He protects and enables his nieces and nephews to develop through special power. 'When angered he might withdraw

---

[43] In the literature *kindoki* is generally translated by 'witchcraft' or French *sorcellerie*'. More details on the topic see the following sub-section 5.1.4.3.

[44] The illustration is adapted from Ekholm Friedman, supplemented and modified by me.

[45] The matrilineal system in the Kongo society does not imply female leadership (Bockie 1993:11).

his protection with disastrous consequences for his dependants.' (Ekholm Friedman 1991:130; see also Bockie 1993). Withdrawal of protection might lead among other things to attacks by *bandoki*[46] ('witches') who 'eat' the person which results in the sickness or death of the 'eaten up' person.

Kitaata represents the power of the paternal side of the family. Although the matrilineal descent centres on the responsibilities of the mother's side, and the father and his *kanda* are given only secondary consideration[47] (Laman 1957), the father occupies nevertheless a special position and carries special obligations. He is entitled to scold, punish, assist or advise. The father has the right (*kitaata*) to receive gifts from his children (for example part of the entrails of a shot animal, an occasional calabash of palm wine, the first catch of game, a prepared meal). When honoured, reverenced and given respect in this way he can bless[48] a child (Stenström 1999; Bockie 1993; Laman 1957). Blessing in this regard for a daughter means above all the ability to have children. Blessing for a son means having luck in his job and in making money (Ekholm Friedman 1991:131, reporting from Laman 1916:220; 1919:199f). According to Laman (2000) the father's curses are greatly feared. *Kitaata* is also the power to 'lock up' (*fermer*), to bind, to render powerless and to curse, by which livestock, palm trees, etc. might also get affected. According to Laman *kitaata* is not only held by the father but also by the head of the family group and the head of the clan. *Kitaata* applies even after the death of the father. The father keeps his power even after death; it is satisfied by offerings or sacrifice of different kinds (Laman 2000:27f).[49]

---

[46] *Bandoki,* pl. for *ndoki* ('witch'), the one performing *kindoki* ('witchcraft'). The *ndoki* has hidden knowledge that allows him/her to obtain secret techniques, usually employed secretly (Janzen & MacGaffey 1974:45). More on *kindoki* see 5.1.4.3).

[47] According to Laman the father is only given consideration for the sake of his begetting. 'Apart from this, they would be referred to the class of unknown persons or enemies.' (Laman 1957:46).

[48] According to Nguila (COR-NGUI#01) the idea of blessing in Kongo terms should not be compared to what is found in the Bible (e.g. Jacob blessing his sons). The former is always 'linked to the transmission of some kind of sorcery or occult power giving special abilities to people'.

[49] Laman (1962:44) explains that the ancestor cult seemed to be directly linked to the *kitaata*. 'The ancestor cult is based upon the power that is ascribed to the father in relation to his children.'

The third sphere of influence and power is that of *nkisi* and *nganga*. *Nganga* could be described as a traditional healer, an expert or technician (Janzen & MacGaffey 1974:6), and a specialist in making *nkisi* objects ('fetishes'[50]) and operating them. *Nkisi* includes the idea of the medicine which the *nganga* uses. Bouana explains that *nkisi* is the abode for a protecting ancestor. It is the place where supernatural power is concentrated; an object through which one enters into contact with this power. (Bouana 1961:6f; translation by Ekholm Friedman 1991:133[51]). Van Wing describes *nkisi* as an object in which a disembodied spirit resides and exists under the domination of a living person (van Wing 1941:86; see also Jacobson-Widding 1979:131; MacGaffey 2000:79). Important *minkisi*[52] are depended upon by whole communities for justice and prosperity; lesser ones serve more particularly for protection, wealth or healing. By making and empowering *minkisi* the *nganga* is expected to defend individuals against *kindoki* done by *bandoki* who are usually to be found in their own *kanda* (Dalmalm 1985; Mengi 1981).[53] *Nkisi* is a very complex issue. This section, however, is neither the place to expand upon it, nor is *nkisi* the main subject of this study, therefore the explanations given must be sufficient at this

---

[50] *Nkisi* is a Kikongo word that has no equivalent in any European language. 'Fetish' is a usual but inadequate translation (MacGaffey 1988). The term 'fetish' or the pidgin word fetisso derives from the Portuguese feitiço, which in the late Middle Ages meant magical practice or witchcraft (Pietz 1985:5); today it means charm or spell. Feitico derives from the Latin adjective *facticius* that, in its original commercial use, meant manufactured (as opposed to naturally formed), artificial (as opposed to something of quality and value) or fraudulent (as opposed to genuine; Pietz 1987:25).In the early Christian doctrine the Latin term *facticius* was used to describe 'false gods', or 'idols'. Janzen & MacGaffey (1974:2) remark that 'fetish' corresponds closer to European expectations of African religion than to the original concept and functions of an entirely different cognitive structure.

[51] I double-checked Ekholm Friedman's translation in the French original myself.

[52] *Minkisi*, pl. for *nkisi*.

[53] Different from Ekholm Friedman's description of the Kongo social structure, MacGaffey (1970b) suggests that the 'sources of order' are built on four commissions, the commission of *mfumu* ('chief'), *nganga* ('healer'), *ngunza* ('prophet') and *ndoki* ('witch'). Unfortunately the description of the social system put forward by MacGaffey did not help me to understand the dynamics of the relations and the hierarchy into which a Kongo person is integrated. I had come across all the four roles, I experienced the Kongo people however to be concerned in the everyday life with the ideals outlined in the *kanda-kitaata-nganga*-structure described above. Although giving preference to Ekholm Friedmann's structure, I found that MacGaffey' suggestion uncovers a problematic that is not sufficiently integrated in the *kanda-kitaata-nganga*-model; it is the problematic of *kindoki*.

point.[54] *Kindoki* is another complex issue operating in the Kongo community that, from my point of view, is only unsatisfactorily integrated in Ekholm Friedmann's *kanda-kitaata-nganga-*model. Hence, I will tackle the problem in the following sub-section.

5.1.4.3 Community and *kindoki*

Beside *kanda*, *kitaata* and *nkisi/nganga*, *kindoki* ('witchcraft') is a fourth element exercising power and influence in the Kongo community system. As the following will show, *kindoki* is a complex issue.

As already explained above *kindoki* is usually translated by 'witchcraft' (see also footnote 43, p.126)[55]; it is closely linked with antisocial behaviour. Any person who does not behave according to the norms and order of the community, such as cooperation, sharing, propriety, transparency, etc.[56], is not an oddity or merely unsociable but deeply immoral because he/she questions the life protecting rules and thus ultimately 'denies life and embraces death, the utmost affliction' (Magesa 1998:174). The ones using *kindoki*-power, the *bandoki* ('witches') are described by a Kongo writer as 'malicious, greedy and jealous people who are in effect murderers because they all have the same motive: killing or preventing them from enjoying happiness' (Yakobi Munzele in Janzen & MacGaffey 1974:45).[57] *Bandoki* are 'morose, unsociable people, people who eat alone and do not share, arrogant, passing by others without greeting, people who are readily offended' (Magesa 1998:170 quoting Mair 1969:43). Thus it is believed that anybody

---

[54] For a detailed discussion see Dalmalm 1985; MacGaffey 1970b; 1977c; 1988; 1990; 1994; Jacobson-Widding 1979; Pietz 1985; 1987; 1988; Devauges 1977; van Wing 1938; 1941; Bockie 1993; Laman 2000 and others.

[55] The distinction between 'witchcraft' and 'sorcery' – as reported by certain anthropologists (for example Evans-Pritchard 1965, Parrinder 1969) is not made by the Kongo people in Congo-Brazzaville.

[56] Magesa (1998:170–174) describes behaviour outside of the norm with the following examples: 'A proud man who treats his neighbours with disdain; a retiring man who always keeps silent in public; a person who is habitually surly, who builds his house in the bush far away from other people, who neither invites others to eat with him nor accepts invitations from neighbours to share their food and drink.'

[57] Early explanations about *kindoki* mention *kundu*, a special gland found in the *ndoki's* body from which proceeds his internal powers (see examples given in Laman 1968; MacGaffey 1970b; Dalmalm 1985). Today, *kindoki* is explained as springing from malice or jealousy.

who behaves outside of the community's norm, who 'does not control the impulses that good members of society must keep in check' (Mair 1969:38) could be *ndoki*, willingly or unwillingly.

Kindoki is often discussed in relation to religious issues[58]; its strong political and sociological character however must not be overlooked. MacGaffey insists that it belongs with other theories of the uses of power in society (2000:3); it belongs to the government of the community. Bockie (1993:82) regards *kindoki* as

> …a complex system of social checks and balances that works for the health and wholeness, the preservation and continuance, of the community, capable of providing opportunities for wealth, power, knowledge, and dedication to the common good while controlling the disruptive factors of anger, vengeance, and violence.

Kindoki is understood by Tshiamalenga (1974:179) as a 'social therapeutic' for all forms of hate and jealousy, if restrained in right proportions. According to him it is thus a 'socially useful category' because the fear of being accused of *kindoki* 'constantly warns individuals, through the community against meanness, inhospitableness, quarrelsomeness, rudeness, suddenness, disloyalty, false or reckless speech and disrespect towards elders.' Mbonyinkebe suggests that *kindoki* 'contributes to strengthen an egalitarian ideology of community life and as a consequence to penalize the ones standing outside of the norms, the deviants.' (1974:161)

Because of the communal outlook of the Kongo people, personal profit or any sign of antisocial activity falls under suspicion of *kindoki*, 'simply because doing better than your neighbour is what witchcraft is all about – they are the same thing' (MacGaffey 2000:34). According to Yakobi Munzele (in Janzen & MacGaffey 1974:45) – and also suggested by the women of discussion group II (FN_AC#05) – *kindoki* 'manifests itself very strongly in connection with malice and theft'. For somebody to be exceptionally blessed indicates that he/she has made use of *kindoki* to the disadvantage of someone else (Janzen & MacGaffey 1974). Thus, if

---

[58] The unfortunate translation of *kindoki* as 'witchcraft' fosters the idea of putting it into the domain of magic, religion and superstition. Its deep roots however in the community, the government of such and the complexity of the issue call for more differentiated reflections. Unfortunately such a detailed discussion cannot be led in this thesis. A critical and essential discussion on the issue is presented by Luyaluka (2009; 2010).

one wants to be successful, one must be careful to be generous in fulfilling his obligations, otherwise one is suspected of having used witchcraft to attain his position (La Fontaine 1963:217), since it is from jealousy and enmity that *kindoki* is born.

Everybody must exert oneself to show love, care and concern (Magesa 1998:171) because departure from the norms of everyday conduct attracts the suspicion of others. Hence, according to Magesa, the fear of being accused of *kindoki* enforces conformity and good, normative behaviour. There is not only the fear of being accused of *kindoki* however, but also the fear of being attacked or 'eaten' by *bandoki* in case of nonconformity or wrongdoing. An attack by *kindoki* might be launched because of an unpaid bride price or any consciously or unconsciously unmet expectation of the family or communal obligation (Dorier-Apprill, Kouvouama & Apprill 1998). The fear of 'being eaten' by *bandoki* encourages the people to maintain good relations within the community, to help each other and participate in all family contributions (Mengi 1981:39).[59]

Mbonyinkebe points out that *kindoki* might also serve as an excuse for personal failure. The belief in 'witchcraft' may

> *…être sollicitée en vue de disculper un coupable qui avoue avoir agi sous l'impulsion d'un ensorcellement par un ennemi particulièrement jaloux. Elle fonctionne alors comme un "alibi", un "prétexte" pour excuser des faiblesses, des défaillances personnelles. Elle exprime de manière biaisée un ensemble de désirs ou d'aspirations frustrés chez une personne incapable d'assumer pleinement, courageusement et avec lucidité, sa condition existentielle.*[60] (Mbonyinkebe 1974:161)

I heard it many times in Congo: *'C'est la sorcellerie.'* It is customary to call something 'witchcraft' for disavowing any responsibility but also for explaining abnormalities. Because the Kongo people expect to lead a prosperous life (see 5.1.1 above), anything less is perceived as abnormal. Abnormalities, such as infertility, sickness, an epidemic, an accident, famine or inexplicable death, are often seen as an indicator of the influence of *kindoki* (Gray 1990; Mengi

---

[59] According to Laman (2000:28) the *kindoki*-powers do not have any impact outside of the clan.

[60] English: 'The belief in 'witchcraft' may on occasion be applied to exonerate the guilty who admits having acted under the influence of bewitchment by a particularly jealous enemy. In this case the belief in witchcraft works as an 'alibi', as a 'pretext' to excuse the weakness of personal failures. It expresses in a biased manner a set of desires or frustrated ambitions of a person unable to fully assume courageously and lucidly, his/her existential condition.' (English translation mine)

1981). Only widespread illnesses (e.g. normal diarrhoea, intestinal parasites, malaria) that can be easily treated are considered 'natural' (Biemoundonghat 2000:28); difficulties which arise abruptly such as a relapse or refractory or chronic illness, are supernatural (i.e. *kindoki*) and need proper treatment, that is, the evil cause must be dealt with (Dorier-Apprill, Kouvouama & Apprill 1998). *Kindoki* serves as an explanation of disease and other afflictions and answers the question why bad things happen in the community and in the world.

Although I do not understand *kindoki* as a positive or constructive practice, it is to mention that there are authors who maintain that beside the destructive kind of *kindoki* it can be exercised for the 'good' of the community (see for example Bockie and Tshiamalenga above). Janzen & MacGaffey claim that *kindoki* is in itself regarded as neutral power and serves as a 'social science' through which the Kongo 'express psychological, sociological, political and moral truths' (1974:42). Dalmalm (1985) explains that *kindoki* is knowledge of the initiated specialist that also inhabits the chief. It presides over the wisdom of the head of the *kanda* who assures the prosperity of the community. Chiefs, as the defenders of the public good, are empowered by *kindoki* in order to protect and defend against evil powers and curses (MacGaffey 2000). Yet *kindoki* as it is used and experienced in Congo-Brazzaville must not be idealized or even romanticized. Whatever its corrective and protective intent might have been, it actually produces what it supposedly fights against: life-quenching disruption of the community and great fear by its members. 'The witchcraft business is the Mother of all evil, the Grandmother of confusion, the Child of harm and the Grandchild of jealousy' (Kamuna Joseph in Janzen & MacGaffey 1974:48). *Kindoki* is *'la puissance de mort et de destruction'* (van Wing 1938:112).[61]

'Witchcraft' is not to be understood as something of past 'uncivilized' or 'savage' ages, but it is 'intrinsic to the modern world' as MacGaffey put it (2000:2); it is everyday business. From my own experience in Congo I know that the fear of being accused of *kindoki* among the

---

[61] English: *Kindoki* is 'the power of death and destruction'.

Kongo people (and not only them) is pervasive. Considering the horror-like experiences by many Congolese I perceive it a sheer mockery when Tshiamalenga calls *kindoki* a 'social therapeutic' or when Bockie understands it as working 'for the health and wholeness' of the community (see p.130). The connection between *kindoki* as the power to protect and the power to curse might display a deep ambivalence and ambiguity in the literature. In daily life however, *kindoki* is perceived as evil through and through. *Sorcellerie* is still the most serious accusation made against an individual today. An allegedly, 'unmasked' *ndoki* risks suffering severe reprisals, even of being killed. According to Dorier-Apprill (1998:106) this accusation is still frequently brought before the state courts in Brazzaville and calls for traditional interpretation and healing procedures. Because of his magical power to unmask *bandoki* and to identify the reasons for aggression in the family, the *nganga* is still often a sought-after and important person. The high interest and the intensity with which the students discussed the issue showed the urgency with which the topic ought to be addressed by local practical theology, but unfortunately is not (TRSC_Ms#08; #09; #11), because the EEC banned *kindoki* from being practised, believed in and discussed by Christian believers.[62]

Much more could be said about 'magic' as Laman and Van Wing translated *kindoki*. Its complexity, ambivalence and interconnectedness with almost countless social, political and moral issues however make it necessary for delimiting the subject to the immediate and practical interests to the research which I presented above.[63]

---

[62] Because of the intensity I dedicated two lessons to let the students talk about their experiences. In their internships in the different congregations of the EEC most of the students had been confronted with *kindoki*. When faced with Christians who sought deliverance from *kindoki*, the students reported to be overwhelmed and helpless, unable to respond appropriately. Their theological education did not prepare them to deal with such situations. The personal testimony of an initiation into *kindoki* given by one of the students was received with high interest in class and found deep resonance with the other students.

[63] More on *kindoki* and its implications and effects on today's society see Devauges 1977; Dorier-Apprill, Kouvouama & Apprill 1998; MacGaffey 2000; Julian 2004; Kolélas 2006; 2007.

5.1.5 Emerging theory: Community – the key to understanding 'sin' in the Kongo culture

The above findings regarding the community and the insights on *kindoki* suggest that misfortune, sickness, death, etc. are forms of outside evil overpowering the individual. It would appear that explanations for wellbeing and success are to be sought **outside** of the individual as well. Ekholm Friedman observes the Kongo individual's dependency upon external sources of power in order to get strength, health and success. This entails a constant hunt for these sources of power, and at the same time living in a constant fear that the same external forces (*kindoki*) and their agents (*bandoki*) may 'eat' or 'reduce' them. Any loss of vital power results in sickness, misfortune and social failure (Basunga N'soni 2013:68; Ekholm Friedman 1991:103).[64] In this regard the women of the first research cycle talked about people being *bloqué* (FN_AC#05); MacGaffey (2000:13) describes people being 'tied' when they are unsuccessful in their occupation.[65] In such a worldview where everything depends on manipulating powers and having access to the external sources of such, the idea of a **relationship** with God – the perspective displayed in the biblical Scriptures – seems out of place. And thus the concept of 'sin' being a loss of or the break in the relationship with God (Gräb 2001:437) is foreign to the traditional Kongo understanding of wrongdoing.

5.2 Understanding theft, disrespect and broken harmony

By way of reminder, the data presented in this chapter results from following step I of the contextualization model, the non-critical exegesis of culture. This step started with inquiries about 'good life / bad life' in all three discussion groups (see previous section 5.1). The

---

[64] Nguila (COR-NGUI#01) disagrees that illness or death in Kongo culture is linked to an increase or decrease of life-force. According to him diseases come from God (*maladie ya Nzambi*), from 'witchcraft' (*maladie ya bandoki*) or sent by an *nganga* specialist (*maladie ya bankisi*) 'on order of a rival or a person with whom one is at odds'.

[65] MacGaffey explains that the governing idea is the Kongo understanding that souls and bodies are built in such a fashion that the animating force inhabiting human beings (as well as objects and animals) can be transferred from one to another. The vital souls of people can be wholly or partially removed or transferred to other bodies or 'containers' (e.g. *nkisi*) to add strength to them.

continuing process in research cycle two eventually led to opening up the question and further inquiring into the issue of 'good things/ doings' and 'bad things/doings' in the students' cultures in general. In order to do so the students met in groups and first tackled the problem by brainstorming. This resulted in a long list of good and bad things (see Appendix 3). Two topics ranked the highest in the list of 'good things'. These were 1) harmony in the community and 2) respect (e.g. for elders, parents, older siblings). On the top of the list of 'bad things' again two topics stood out, 1) theft and 2) everything that undermines 'family' or clan (e.g. not being married, not having children, adultery). At first sight that outcome looked rather random to me, especially the fact that theft ranked so high on the list and *kindoki* was almost absent. It turned out during further discussion however that the students held the topics of community, broken harmony, disrespect, theft and *kindoki* closely together; it even became difficult to talk about one without the other four strangely resonating with it. The resultant inquiries into the topic of the community/family and *kindoki* have been already discussed in the previous section 5.1. The following section presents the outcomes of the discussions on theft, disrespect and broken harmony.

5.2.1 Theft and disrespect

Taking my puzzlement about the seemingly random brainstorming outcome as an occasion to learn more about the Kongo perspective on good and evil I challenged the students to explain why theft was a bad thing. The students' response was revealing, and it became clear why the students held theft and disrespect in close connection: Theft is never just a private offence concerning only the thief and the one who is stolen from, but it affects always the thief's whole family. It is disrespectful of parents, it dishonours the whole family and it can have severe consequences for the next generations.

In order to discuss theft and its implications in their cultures the students met in groups. What follows are some of the students' statements resulting from the group session reports delivered in plenary (TRSC_Ms#02).

- Theft is *yimbi*[66] because '*il y a manque de dignité dans cette pratique.*'[67]
- Theft '*entraine à la mort et engendre des maladies surtout dans les cas de représailles dans le cadre du fétichisme.*'[68]
- Theft '*engendre des divisions au sein de la famille.*'[69]
- Theft '*encourage l'oisiveté et la paresse.*'[70]
- Theft '*oblige à mentir et il conduit au meurtre.*'[71]
- Theft '*disloque les foyers, déshonore les parents qui tiennent aux respects.*'[72]

Theft is not only bad because it is a disregard of moral values, and violation of ethical laws, but it results in the dislocation of the community, families are separated, and there is a risk of killing and death. Because the statements given in plenary sounded to me rather pretentious I again challenged the students with exegetical work, this time with the text in Joshua 7:1-26 (Achan's theft).

5.2.2 Insights from exegetical work of biblical texts (Josh. 7:1-26)

The exegetical work done by the students individually and subsequently discussed in class resulted in a 'reality disjuncture' (see 3.2.1.2, p.69) on my part that gave the research an unexpected turn towards the topic of God, a problematic issue I had assumed to be solved by the early missionaries long ago.

5.2.2.1 The individual is called to account, not the community as a whole

As already presented in 5.1.3 the students expressed their incomprehension that Achan's theft was attributed to the whole of Israel and that the whole family had to submit to the punishment

---

[66] The vernacular word can be translated by 'bad'; depending on the context it takes the meaning of evil.

[67] English: 'There is no dignity in such practice.'

[68] English: Theft 'leads to death and brings about sickness above all in cases of retaliation coming from fetishist practices.'

[69] English: Theft 'generates divisions in the family.'

[70] English: 'Theft encourages idleness and laziness.'

[71] English: Theft 'forces to lie and it leads to killing.'

[72] English: Theft 'takes families apart, dishonours the parents to whom respect is due.'

(DOC-hw2#S17). For them the individual is called to account (DOC-ex1#S15), not the family as a whole.

5.2.2.2 Theft affects the whole family

Although in the Kongo culture the punishment of a thief is not inflicted on the family, theft still affects the whole family (DOC-hw2#S03; #S04; #S11; #S16; see 5.1.3 above).

5.2.2.3 Sanctions

The procedure to find out the one responsible for Israel's defeat in Aï resonated with the Kongo culture (DOC-hw2#S15) as well as the erection of a monument where the culprit was punished (DOC-hw2#S03; #S16). The students expressed in unison that the death penalty for Achan was unreasonable and the massacre of his (innocent) family a sheer act of brutality (DOC-hw2#S02; #S04; #S06; #S09; #S12; #S15; #S18). By taking life (that is sacred) the community for its part incurs guilt as well (DOC-hw2#S06). A thief who is found guilty should be punished, however not with death but with the payment of a fine (DOC-hw2#S03; #S12; #S18). It was argued that it is important to lead the culprit to repentance (DOC-hw2#S11) and to integrate him into the community (DOC-hw2#S03; #S17). Moreover it is essential to know the culprit's motivation of his action (DOC-hw2#S12) before any punishment is imposed.

5.2.2.4 Tutoring of the wrongdoer

Throughout all the students' exegetical work one notion was brought up with striking frequency: *éduquer* – to educate, to tutor.[73]

- *[Il faut] l'éducation… au sujet du vol, mensonge, avoir envie, prendre les biens, etc.*[74] (DOC-hw2#S02). For the purpose of changing the mentality and giving the wrongdoer the chance to re-establish his/her reputation, education is to be applied. *Au lieu de tuer, il est d'emprisonner l'intéressé, en procédant à une éducation systématique en vue de changement de mentalité afin de lui accorder une chance d'affirmer le bon*

---

[73] The French *éduquer* means more than a cursory English translation (to intellectually educate) might lead the reader to assume. The French verb *éduquer* is not only to educate or to train (in school), but also to raise (children), to teach good manners, to give moral and social direction, to discipline, to civilize, etc.

[74] English: 'Education… is necessary regarding theft, lying, want, taking assets, etc.'

témoignage dans la tribu et dans la famille et pourquoi pas dans la société.[75] (DOC-hw2#S16). *Cest mieux d'éduquer que de tuer le coupable.*[76] (DOC-hw2#S06)

- *Le vol n'est pas toléré c'est pourquoi la famille prend soin d'enseigner les enfants à travailler pour ne pas arriver aux actes de vol.*[77] (DOC-hw2#S06(

- *Il serait mieux de transformer la peine de mort infligée au voleur par un emprisonnement avec possibilité de rééducation pour permettre à ce dernier de réintégrer dans la société.*[78] (DOC-hw2#S03)

- *Le voleur au lieu de le tuer, on peut le châtier de moins en moins, pour le rééduquer, pour être utile.*[79] (DOC-hw2#S14)

- *Dieu donne les commandements à Moïse (tu ne tueras pas), et il instruit Moïse de demander aux Lévites de tuer 3000 Israélites: quel contraste! Est-ce qu'il n'y a pas une autre manière d'éduquer que de tuer?*[80] (DOC-ex2#S16)

- *Il est important d'enseigner nos fidèles sur les conséquences du péché afin de vivre en parfaite harmonie avec Dieu. ...il est important d'instruire le peuple de Dieu à demeurer fidèles à la parole de Dieu, à marcher selon sa volonté et à s'éloigner du péché.*[81] (DOC-ex2#S18)

The notion of education was also suggested in earlier homework by the students on 'good life' (see 5.1.1).

- *A certains moments on attribuait à la famille (le père, la mère, l'oncle) le tort si par hasard un garçon ou une jeune fille se comportait mal (mauvaise éduction de la part des parents).*[82] (DOC-hw1#S15)

---

[75] English: 'Instead of killing [the wrongdoer], he is to be put into prison, followed by a systematic teaching (education) regarding the change of mentality in order to offer him the chance to affirm his good reputation in the tribe and in the family and why not also in the society.'

[76] English: 'It is better to educate than to kill the culprit.'

[77] English: 'Theft is not tolerated: that is why the family takes care of teaching the children to work so that they won't steal. '

[78] English: 'Instead of imposing the death penalty it is better to re-educate the thief in order for him to be reintegrated into the community.'

[79] English: 'Instead of killing the thief, he should be **re-educate** for being useful [for the community].'

[80] English: 'God gives Moses the commandments (do not kill), but he instructs Moses to order the Levites to kill 3000 Israelites: what a contrast! Is there not another way to **educate** instead of killing?'

[81] English: 'It is important to educate our Church members regarding the consequences of 'sin' in order to live in perfect harmony with God. … It is important to instruct God's people to stay faithful to God's word, to conduct their lives according to His will and to keep away from sin.'

[82] English: 'In certain moments the family (father, mother, uncle) was made responsible [lit. the fault was imputed to the family] when a boy or a young girl accidentally behaved badly (bad education by the parents).'

138

- *La vie dans ma culture est le fait d'être d'abord éduquer [sic] car cette éducation permet à l'homme de vivre en harmonie avec les autres dans la société.*[83] (DOC-hw1#S02)

- *La vie chez le beembe c'est savoir éduquer les enfants et la famille en les initions [sic] dans différents domaines afin que la culture subsiste de génération en génération.*[84] (DOC-hw1#S11)

Education of course can have different forms. Stories, tales, proverbs, but also the institution of *mbongi*[85] were put forward as a place where the elders teach and educate the younger ones.

- *Les adultes eux qui sont les détenteurs de la tradition, certaines soirées, regroupent les enfants autour des contes pour les instruire et les avertir.*[86] (DOC-hw1#S14)

- *La vie c'est aussi savoir transmettre à la jeune génération l'expérience acquise sur tout [sic] les plans de la vie (au village cela se passe souvent au « mbongi » qui est un lieu de retrouvaille autours d'un grand feu. Beaucoup de choses se disent au « mbongi » et ce sont les anciens qui dirigent ces moments).*[87] (DOC-hw1#S18)

Through these comments I came to understand that theft – and whatever other offences – can be avoided by education which is seen as the best way to enable the individual to live in perfect harmony with the community and God. Tutoring is seen as a prophylactic measure against wrongdoing and 'sin', but also a means to correct and mend the malefactor.

5.2.2.5 Why should *Nzambi* be interested in punishing theft?

Another issue standing out throughout the students' exegetical work was the question why God is involved when it comes to theft. Surprise was expressed that God is affected by a theft by a mortal person and that he interferes (DOC-hw2#S03; #S11; #S16). A similar thought had emerged by one student asking why God was affected by David's adultery (DOC-ex1#S09). The

---

[83] English: 'Life in my culture is first to be educated because this education allows the human being to live in harmony with the others in the society.'

[84] English: 'Life in the Beembe culture is to know how to **educate** the children and for the family to initiate them into the different domains so that the culture subsists from generation to generation.'

[85] Explanation about *mbongi* see 5.1.1.2.

[86] English: 'The adults are the keepers of the tradition; on certain evenings the children are gathered and stories are told in order to **instruct** and warn them.'

[87] English: 'Life also means to transmit to the young generation the experiences gained in all the areas of life. In the villages this happens in the *mbongi* (a place where people gather around a big fire). Many things are said in the *mbongi*-meetings that are directed by the elders.'

point that the things taken by Achan were declared taboo or banned (Josh. 7:1)[88] did not seem to register with the students. I assumed this to be the reason why Achan's profanation of the sacred was (mis)understood by the students as a petty theft. For further discussion of God being affected by the theft see 5.3.

5.2.3 Ensuing plenary discussion

The above described insights outlined in the students' work became more concrete when we entered into further discussion in the plenary. In order to stimulate our conversation I picked up the thread of Josh. 7 and asked how a thief in the Kongo culture was found out and what the punishment was.

The students explained that the Kongo culture knows different traditional methods for divination: Palm oil is heated up until it is boiling; the suspect puts his hand into the oil; if he is not burnt, he is innocent. As an alternative method a fire is lit and the same procedure applied. Poison can serve as divination method as well. The suspect is forced to drink a poisonous drink; if he vomits the liquid, he is innocent (FN_Ms#04). Another possibility is the application of *nkisi*[89] who then exposes the culprit. Thinking of a strikingly similar procedure for proving adultery in the OT, I read Num. 5:16-28 out loud. The students agreed that it was very similar indeed, however with one decisive difference: *Nzambi* is not involved in the Kongo divination procedure.

The punishment for theft is often a fine. In more severe cases there are other possibilities too. In order to 'educate' a culprit – especially a notorious malefactor who continuously dishonours the family – he can be traded with salt, rice, animals, food, guns, etc. (FN_Ms#04) and be sold far away. There, he works as a slave without a chance of going back home. A person sold is called *mwana ntsumba* (bought child). To sell a culprit is to avoid killing him. Still another method of punishment is to throw the wrongdoer alive into a deep hole. There he is left to die.

---

[88] The King James Version translates the Hebrew חֵרֶם – *ḥērem* (what is forbidden, banned) 'accursed thing'.

[89] Explanations to *nkisi* see sub-section 5.1.4.2, p.128f.

When he is dead, the hole is filled up and a Baobab tree is planted on top as a symbol.[90] Both punishments contrast with the idea of 'tutoring' that aims at integrating the culprit into the community. This might be the reason why selling or burying the culprit alive are extreme measures taken only in intractable cases. The descriptions seemed strikingly close to the Joseph story in Gen. 37 which I pointed out to the students. To my disappointment however they did not share my excitement which made me drop the discovery and turn to the illustration on the blackboard that slowly developed throughout the plenary discussion (Figure 5.2-1) [91.]

When a theft is discovered and the culprit is a family member, the family with its chief usually takes care of the incident. In any other case, the village chief is appealed to. Often the high fine imposed on the culprit in a lawsuit cannot be paid without help from the family. A Kongo proverb nicely describes that situation. *Kisa kya mante kyatebokela mu muntu muntu.* – A cooking-pot is filled with spittle by one person after another (Laman 1968:56).[92] That kind of support of an offender however does not mean approval of his/her actions. As the wrongdoer has ruined the family's honour, justice is relentlessly carried out (Bockie 1993).

---

[90] The students explained that theses sanctions were traditional, imposed on a culprit in the past. In modern days however, in the cities, thieves often get away with much more lenient consequences if any. The reason is that in the cities, the traditional jurisdiction – the family or clan chief, the village chief or the *mbongi* institution (depending on the case) – is replaced by governmental powers of which its arm is often too short to deal with everyday problems. The situation in the village is different. However, the students did not comment in detail on the situation in the villages or in town districts, where communities still can be very traditional. They assured me however that if one wants to find out about cultural roots, one needs to go to the village. *'Quand on essaie de découvrir les racines [de notre culture], ça nous amène au village, les racines sont dans les villages, pas dans les villes'.* (FN_Ms#05.)

[91] During the discussion on theft I kept drawing on the blackboard trying to illustrate the students' explanations. The final version was refined by the class (FN_Ms#04).

[92] Explanation by Laman (1968:56): 'It is impossible to fill a cooking-pot with spittle all by oneself, but if everybody takes a turn spitting, it will soon be full. In the same way, one man alone cannot pay the high fines imposed on him in a lawsuit, and he must get help from his relatives.'

Figure 5.2-1: The dynamics of theft
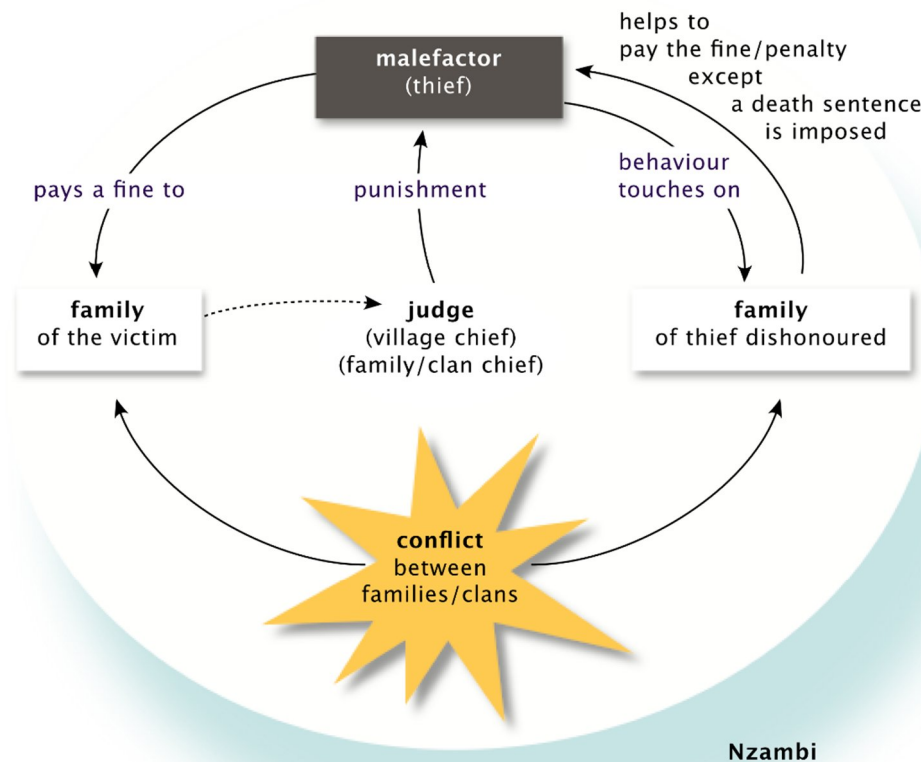
Because the thief is not an independent unit but an integral part of the family, his wrongdoing dishonours the family.

> *Le vol occasionne la dislocation au sein de la société et du village. Il y a des familles qui se séparèrent et il y a des gens qui se séparent aussi. Le voleur qui a volé accorde aussi le malheur sur sa famille et sur sa lignée, sa descendance.*[93] (TRSC_Ms#01)

The culprit's elders or seniors are quietly perceived as being unable to direct the family/ clan and to uphold harmony which can become a danger for the whole community.[94] Thus

---

[93] English: 'Theft too causes dislocation within the society and the village. Families separate, and other people separate too. The thief brings about misfortune for his family and for is lineage, his descendants.'

[94] Theft can bring about misfortune for the whole lineage. The story goes that a hunter had put down a trap in the forest. When he went to see if any animal was caught in it he found the trap empty. He noticed that previously an animal must have been in it but had been taken by somebody. In fact, it was taken by a woman who happened to walk the same path. The hunter went home and informed the whole village. He called upon the unknown thief to return the animal and promised not to take any measures of retribution. But sadly, the women did not own up; in fact she had already eaten it. Years later the consequences of the theft showed: her sons and daughters to whom the woman gave birth were all paralytics; generations became marked by this physical handicap (TRSC_Ms#05, full text see Appendix 5). Bujo (2001:97) helps to understand that physical illness is 'the crystallization point of the invisible dimension in the community'. A conflict situation in the community, like the theft in the story, leads to bad health and usually finds a biological expression which is in this story paralytics born for generations. Bujo

whatever the punishment, it is the thief's family's highest interest to gain back their honour. Often resentments are held against the malefactor and his family which lead to conflicts and disharmony.

The finding that theft brings dishonour and provokes a break in the relationship between the two families concerned was not too surprising, but it came nevertheless as a kind of revelation to me. The Kongo understanding that anything done secretly or publicly is closely related to the whole group (Bockie 1993) and is not just a private matter, is still a challenging thought to me, yet it confirms what section 5.1 has already established: the community is key to understanding and contextualizing the notion of 'sin' in the Kongo culture.

5.2.4 Evaluation: 'sin' – an outside matter?

The findings on tutoring the wrongdoer (see 5.2.2.4) left me with the impression that the Kongo people view wrongdoing as an external thing (outside of the person) that can be educated away. None of the research participants' comments indicated that evil could also be something coming from inside of a person, something inherent. The understanding of human nature being sinful, or human actions being marked by the corruption of the human heart seemed to be a foreign concept (see also Julian 2004:303). Reading further literature on the topic however reminded me not to jump to conclusions.

To conclude that the Kongo people understand evil and wrongdoing exclusively as existing outside of a person would have been indeed misleading. Bujo (2001:24) notes that education in ethical conduct plays indeed a decisive role in African communities because the ethical conduct of its members is understood to assure their future existence, their very life. The human person however, including his/her ethical living, needs to be understood only holistically in the sense that there is no separation between being and doing. External actions cannot be separated from

---

continues and explains that 'there is no genuine healing in traditional Africa without rites of reconciliation, which include both the visible community and the invisible community'.

internal convictions; the physical existence is ethically impregnated. 'Everything connected with a human person reveals his essence and his ethical character' (Bujo 2001:124).

Bujo further explains that in general African ethics locates the seat of ethical conduct in the organs of the human person of which the heart occupies the primary position. Laman confirms this for the Kongo people and notes that the heart is 'the centre of all information and instruction, the source of anger, wit, and all other feelings and character traits' (1968:39). Working on the Munukutuba-French dictionary myself it caught my eye that *ntima* (heart) is used in many different expressions. The heart is the seat of the human emotions and thoughts, of wisdom, of remembering and forgetting, of envy and desire, of good or bad character, of opinion and decision, perseverance, determination and indifference, but also of endurance and stamina. Somebody with *ntima ya kulemba* (tired heart) feels discouraged and depressed. *Ntima ya yimbi* (evil heart) stands for a bad character, lack of love and egoism; *ntima ya mbote* (good heart) stands for a good character and a kind personality. A liar, somebody being double-tongued or double-crossing another person is said to be 'double-hearted' – *kuvwanda na bantima zole* (to be with two hearts). Having two hearts means being hypocritical, deceitful, cunning, fraudulent, despicable, villainous, insidious and treacherous (SIL-Congo 2007).

To conclude from the findings that wrongdoing is understood as 'inherent' however is not necessarily adequate. Tshiamalenga points to yet another aspect of the 'heart'. According to him in Bantu ethics the heart constitutes a serious limitation of the offender's responsibility; in fact it yields to the culprit the position of a victim, exemplarily expressed by the rendering 'my heart has deceived me'.

> *C'est que 'je' ne suis jamais responsable tout seul du 'mal': l'inhospitalité du cosmos, la malice des autres hommes et mon 'cœur' sont toujours complices.'* (Tshiamalenga 1974:183f)[95]

---

[95] English: 'Is that "I" am never alone responsible for the "evil": the inhospitality of the cosmos, the malice of other humans and my "heart" are always accomplices.' (Translation mine).

According to Tshiamalenga the 'heart' summarizes the external complicity of all sorts (lack of knowledge, physical weakness, etc.) and waters down the individual's responsibility to the point where it is reduced to nothing. He further refers to the Luba people who express responsibility for an offence with the words 'I am with fault' and suggests that the moral fault does not contaminate the one culpable of an offence; he is not even proprietor of the fault, he **has** not the fault, he is only **with** the fault. That wording corresponds to the Kikongo expression *kota mu nsoki* (to enter into a fault; see 5.4.3). Apart from the *ndoki* ('witch'), human beings are generally not considered as bad in the sense of being inherently bad; the fault is only external; fault is only a possibility.

An issue I came across repeatedly by turning to literature regarding theft and disrespect in particular and wrongdoing and 'sin' in general: the differences in orientation of conscience between peoples and cultures. The differentiation between guilt and shame oriented cultures is an issue that is often raised in missiology.[96] In this connection guilt and shame are understood as the two main reactions of conscience to violating norms.[97] The exponents of that differentiation suggest that a culture can be categorized as either predominantly shame-oriented or guilt-oriented. In shame-cultures it is assumed that concern for approval of an action by the community predominates. Only if the outside 'significant others' are present, do control and punishment of violating social norms happen; the wrongdoer's conscience reacts with feelings of shame. In guilt-cultures in contrast it is argued that the internalized tribunal of the conscience judges and

---

[96] Käser suggests that predominantly guilt-oriented cultures are mainly found in industrially influenced European-Western. Predominantly shame-oriented cultures are mainly found in 'pre-literate ethnic groups holding to their oral traditions' (Käser 2014:117).

[97] In order to understand the discussion about guilt and shame oriented cultures it is important to notice that the classical position taken in cultural anthropology assumes that social behaviour is controlled by the conscience or 'superego' that examines actions to see if they harmonize with the norms of the society/community. In case of non-compliance with these norms, feelings of doing wrong arise (popularly called 'bad conscience'). These feelings are held to be a punishment; they control the individual's actions and prevent offences against the social norms (Käser 2014:114). In cultural anthropology it is widely assumed that the reactions to violating norms take basically two forms, guilt or shame. The orientation of the conscience is laid down in childhood and adolescence and depends on the culture; the conscience of an individual from a collectivist society works differently from that of an individual enculturated in an individualistic society. It is asserted that a member of a collectivist society mainly reacts with feelings of shame, and a member of an individualist society mainly reacts with feelings of guilt.

controls the actions of the wrongdoer who then gets punished by feelings of guilt. The violation of norms is viewed as wrong the moment it happens (Schirrmacher 2006) and not only when the violation is found out or 'seen' by the 'significant others'.

My experience of researching and discussing wrongdoing in the Kongo culture however led me to understand that the main reaction of the conscience of the Kongo people is not to be found in the area of shame as promoted in elenctic studies[98] – as I initially expected – but is found in the area of fear, that is fear of the consequences in any form of harm or evil.

> *Il y a toujours le peur, Madame. Quand il a posé un acte sa conscience c'est l'interprète. Vraiment, donc un moment assez long on n'est pas passé, lui il vit dans la peur. Parce que dans notre culture on subit toujours lorsque tu fais quelque chose, les ancêtres te voient. Et donc les ancêtres sont garants d'aller [dire au] chef de famille: 'Voici ce que un de tes éléments a eu fait.' ... les ancêtres me voient et c'est sûr que ce ne sera inaperçu. ... Et en hors de ça il a aussi le fait que quand on commet, même si les gens ne t'ont pas vu, c'est lié à un rite - parce qu'il [y a] des manifestations. Et la personne est obligé d'avouer et dire la vérité. Et il peut tomber même malade. Et pendant qu'il est malade il en foue [fuoille ?]: Je suis malade c'est parce que j'ai touché à ça et fait ça.[99]* (TRSC_Ms#14; FN_Ms#07)

The fear of being found out and getting punished or fall ill is pervasive.

This insight corresponds with Nida's suggestion (1954:150) that fear is the third in the trio of typical reactions to violating norms. Assohoto (2002:51) offers a different explanation again. He critiques the classification of shame and guilt cultures and notes that it does not give full account of the African reality where shame is closely bound up with culpability because of the link between fault and evil.

> *S'il faut caractériser l'univers africain par rapport à une logique de la faute, c'est le paradigm du mal qui lui conviendrait, et non celui de la honte: une vision du mal étroitement liée à celle de la faute.[100]*

---

[98] Elenctics is a study field within Missiology researching the problematic of guilt and shame orientation.

[99] English translation: 'There is always the fear, Madame. When he does something wrong, his conscience interprets it. Really, so when for a long time nobody comes around, he lives in fear. Because in our culture we always suffer. When you do something, the ancestors see you. So the ancestors are guarantors to go [tell] the family chief: "Here's what one of your subjects has done." ... the ancestors see me and it is certain that it won't go unnoticed. ... And beyond this there is also the fact that when we commit an offence, even if people have not seen you, there is a ritual - because there are manifestations. And the person is forced to confess and tell the truth. And he might even fall ill. And while he is ill he start brooding: I am sick, and it is because I touched this or did that.'

[100] English: 'If one wants to characterise the African universe in relation to a logic of misconduct [*logique de la faute*], it is the paradigm of evil that fits and not the logic of shame: an understanding of evil that is closely connected with fault.' (Translation mine)

It is the understanding of evil that directs the understanding of fault: to live in evil is to fail and therefore to live for nothing.

Magesa emphasized that a clear distinction between shame and guilt cannot be made given the holistic perception of the human person (1998:156). Because the shame-guilt distinction sets apart being and doing, it cannot be maintained in Africa. 'Being and doing cannot be divorced in the African understanding of things.' (Magesa 1998:157; see also Bujo 2001:156).

After much reading and taking into consideration the suggested differentiation between guilt and shame-oriented cultures I concluded that such simplified concepts did not help to better understand the issue of 'sin' and wrongdoing in the Kongo culture. Rather it posed a misleading risk of steering my study away from the complex key issues that arose from the collected data to which I return in the following section, presenting the emerging theory.

5.2.5 Emerging theory: Broken harmony

As stated in the opening words of section 5.2 above, and shown in its ensuing sub-sections, theft and disrespect were two 'bad things' that the students held closely together; theft stands for disrespect, and disrespect and respect respectively have to do with identity and credibility of the person.

> *Le respect sauvegarde l'identité de la personne et lui donne de la valeur notamment les valeurs éthiques. Le respect de l'homme concerne sa crédibilité. Et du coup toute la communauté est respectée.*[101] (TRSC_Ms#07)

Disrespect and theft interrupts the harmony in the community which opens the door to great harm. The protection of the family is breached and invites attacks by *ndoki*. Because family means life, and because *kindoki* is seen as the very enemy of life, *kindoki* is found very close to the family, very close to everything that threatens the unity and harmony of the family.[102]

> *La personne qui manque de respect perd immédiatement sa crédibilité… même des petits enfants. Ce manque fait naître des frustrations pour la personne impolie. Ce manque suscite des représailles car la personne qui est offensée peut agir dans le sens négativ: On peut assister à des bagards et même au déchirement de la communauté. Le respect unit les clans, les familles et garde la comunauté*

---

[101] English: 'Respect ensures a person's identity and accords him a value, specifically ethical values. A man's respect is tied up in his credibility. Thus the whole community achieves respect.'

[102] Details on *kindoki* see 5.1.4.3.

indivisible. Mais le contraire peut entrainer le pire, c'est-à-dire la division, la haine, les guerres fratricides. On peut aussi noter l'aspect sorcellerie dans ces représailles.[103] (TRSC_Ms#07).

In cases of disrespect, and when the situation gets out of hand, harmful curses are put on to the disrespectful which means evil breaking into the harmony; protection is breached and life is threatened. Respect on the other hand

> *…permet de bien cohabiter en bonne relations et en bonne harmonie parfaite entre humains. Le respect apporte pour les bienfaits. Le respect apporte l'honneur, la bénédiction, la dignité, la confiance, l'amour et la survie du clan.*[104] (TRSC_Ms#06)

Respect is an obligation and not just a matter of good manners; hierarchical structures are to be observed.

> *Dans la culture kongo le respect est une obligation. Le respect de l'aîné est primordial. Quand il y a le manque du respect il est difficile à l'individu d'être pardonné.*[105] (TRSC_Ms#06)

Respect is critical because in cases of disrespect, forgiveness is difficult to grant and severe sanctions might be imposed (see 5.2.2 above).

The intriguing observation that the students held the topics of harmony and respect on the one hand, and theft and anything that undermines the 'family' (for example adultery) on the other hand, closely together – with all four strangely resonating with each other – becomes plausible from the account above. Yet Bujo offers another confirming thought. He explains that a comparison with African sensibilities in general shows that the accusation of theft seems to be the worst insult. Theft takes apart what builds a harmonious whole (Bujo 2001:30), it dishonours the family and thus ultimately undermines the very fundament of life. Everything that

---

[103] English: 'The person who has no respect immediately loses credibility… even with small children [or grand-children]. This lack [of respect] gives rise to frustration for the rude person. This lack entails reprisals because the person who is offended can react negatively: He might take part in a fight or even [initiate] tearing apart the community. Respect unites clans, families and keeps the community undivided. But the opposite can cause the worst, namely division, hatred and fratricidal wars. One needs also to be aware of the aspect of witchcraft in the reprisals taken.'

[104] English: Respect 'allows to live in good relationships and in perfect harmony among humans. Respect brings about blessings. Respect brings about hour, blessing, dignity, confidence, love and the survival [or life] of the whole clan.'

[105] English: 'In Kongo culture respect is an obligation. Respect for the senior person is critical [paramount]. When there is a lack of respect it is difficult for the individual to be forgiven.'

undermines the existence of the family (for example not having children) or the harmony of such (for example adultery) is understood as evil.[106]Whenever the life-ensuring and life-protecting security – provided by the community – is ruptured, the very fundament of life is threatened which has all evil in tow: barrenness, sickness, murderous anger, unexpected death, losing a job, etc. Any 'anti-life phenomena' whether personal, social, physical, psychological or natural, put life in danger and show the broken harmony of the community (see also Magesa 1998:158ff).

In order to avoid or restore such intolerable conditions the Kongo take measures: Protection for the community and the individual is sought by *nkisi* and *ndoki* (see 5.1.45.1.4 above); by tutoring (*éduquer*) malefactors they are not only mended, but future harm is thought to be kept away from the community (see 5.2.2.4 above); by finding the source that brought about the intolerable condition, the responsible party is called to account and the broken harmony can be re-established, and protection restored (see 5.1.3; 5.2.2 above).

Important to note is that in the Kongo understanding there is only one real culprit.

C'est toujours l'origine *dans tous les domaines qui est décisive, même surnaturelle ou sainte. Le premier pas d'un acte, la première diffamation devient... l'acte principal qu'il faut juger. Si une querelle s'ensuit, une bagarre ou un assassinat, c'est le premier, l'origine de cette lutte qui en est coupable et c'est lui qui payera toutes les amendes. ...il n'y a qu'un seul coupable, c'est celui qui était le tout premier à commencer la bagarre.*[107] (Laman 2000:40; emphasis in the original)

Any wrongdoing as a reaction to that one initial evil act is not seen as 'sin' and thus not to be punished.

To conclude this section 5.2 on theft, disrespect and broken harmony it could be said that the findings confirmed that community is key to understanding wrongdoing and 'sin' in the

---

[106] The aim of maintaining balance and harmony among the various aspects of life is not unique to the Kongo people. According to Magesa, 'wrongdoing relates to the contravention of specific codes of community expectations including taboos' in African Religion in general. For preserving order and assuring the continuation of life in its fullness, the individual as well as the community must observe the codes of conduct. 'To threaten to break community codes endangers life, it is bad, wrong or "sinful".' (Magesa 1998:166). For Ikuenobe it is the goal of nature and the human reality in the whole traditional African view. 'Disequilibrium results in trouble such as human illness, drought, or social disruption' (King, Dixon & Nobles 1976:63 quoted by Ikuenobe 2006:64).

[107] English: 'It is always the **origin** [original source] that is decisive in all areas, even if it is of supernatural or divine nature. The first step of an act, the first insult ... becomes the main act to be judged. If a quarrel results, a fight or an assassination, it is the first, the one causing the clash who is guilty and who shall pay all fines. ... There is only one culprit; it is the one who was the first to start the brawl.' (Translation mine). Laman adds that this kind of moral principle is of 'strange legal nature' (*caractère juridique étrange*) and that the 'Whites' do not really understand it (*les Blancs ont du mal à comprendre*).

Kongo culture. The good is what makes the community flourish, the bad – or 'sin' – is what destabilises the community (see also Mbonyinkebe 1974:158f). This is not to be misunderstood as the individual's welfare being irrelevant. As I pointed out in 5.1 the individual is ontologically connected to the community and cannot be thought of as a separate unity. Although the individual's interests might be subsumed by those which relate to the enhancement of the community his/her real contribution to the community depends on his/her personal well-being. 'Well-being of the community as such is a reflection of the morality of the individuals who constitute it.' (Sawyerr 1972:136)

5.3 *Nzambi*, the far away and paradoxically close God?

Taking a social scientist's or anthropologist's view of the presented findings in 5.1 and 5.2 everything looks coherent and not very surprising. Adopting a theologian's view however one thing stands out remarkably: When it comes to wrongdoing and evil in the Kongo culture there is one element missing: God.

5.3.1 Insights from exegetical work and plenary discussions: *Nzambi* is not involved

In all the discussions about theft, disrespect and broken harmony I noticed that the students never mentioned God nor did they apply the vernacular term for 'sin' used in the Church, *disumu*. When I asked the students where *Nzambi* (God) would come into the picture of wrongdoing and 'sin', the answer was: he does not. The Kongo tradition views *Nzambi* as a God distant from human beings. *'Nzambi est tellement éloigné que l'intermdédiarie entre lui et les humains se fait au travers des ancêtres.'*[108] (DOC-ex2#S12). Humans do not deal with God and neither does *Nzambi* object to their wrongdoing. A student with Loumbou background wrote that it was surprising that Yhwh was offended by an act committed by mortal beings. *'[C'est] pour nous très frappant, qu'un Dieu créateur de l'univers, omnipotent, omniprésent, immortel puisse être*

---

[108] English: '*Nzambi* is so far away that the mediation between him and the humans is done by the ancestors.'

touché par un act commis par des mortels.' [109] (DOC-ex2#S03). Another student with Yaka background stated that it was also surprising how close God was to the people of Israel. *'Ce qui est frappant c'est la manière avec laquelle Dieu est proche du peuple et qu'il entretien [sic] des relations permanente avec ce peuple.'*[110] (DOC-ex2#S06a). Both statements resonate deeply with the traditional Kongo view of *Nzambi*. The given evidence in 5.2.2.5 above further substantiates the students' description of *Nzambi* as not being involved. *'Il n'y a rien à faire avec des affaires quotidiennes'*[111] (FN_Ms#04); God does not intervene (DOC-ex2#S12). *'Il est loin, loin!'* a student explained. It is the ancestors I am attached to, and the ancestors are attached to *Nzambi* (FN_Ms#04). Together with the *banganga* (*nkisi*-specialists) the ancestors take the place of 'intermediaries' (see Figure 5.3-1 below).

Nzambi is far away, and that is why *Nzambi* is not offended or even touched by a bad action. Wrongdoing in the Kongo culture is not perceived as touching God (as for example in Josh. 7). The students went even a step further in their explanations: *'Dans la culture, puisque le Nzambi est loin, on ne voit pas un thème de péché.'* [112] (TRSC_Ms#13). In the (traditional) cultural context 'sin' has nothing to do with God. Therefore the terminology used is not that of 'sin', *péché* or *masumu*, but when talking about wrongdoing the term *yimbi* (evil) is applied, and *mbote* (good) for contrasting it.

---

[109] English: 'For us it's very striking that God the Creator of the universe, omnipotent, omnipresent, immortal is touched by an act committed by mortals.'

[110] English: 'What is striking is the way in which God is close to the people and that he maintains a permanent relationship with that people.'

[111] English: 'He has nothing to do with daily affairs.'

[112] English: 'In the culture, because *Nzambi* is far away, the connection with the topic of sin is not made.'

Figure 5.3-1: Hierarchy human beings – ancestors – *Nzambi* (FN_Ms#04)
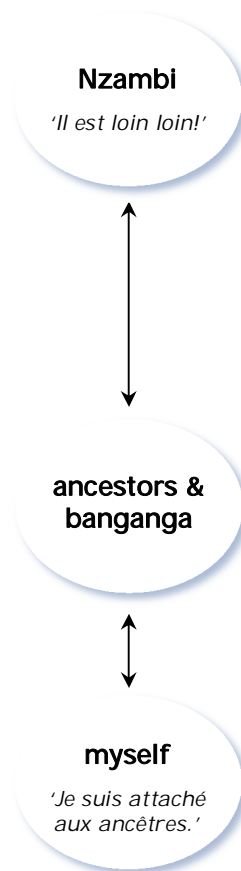
Taken very much by surprise by the students' explanation I went back to the topic of theft and its diagram we developed previously on the blackboard (see Figure 5.2-1 above p.142) it soon became apparent what key element made the most important difference between the dynamics of theft developing in the Kongo culture and the one in Josh. 7: the covenant element. The diagram shows *Nzambi* clearly outside of the matter of wrongdoing (theft); Yhwh however is a covenant-God involved in his people's affairs and thus gets offended by the wrongdoing of his people (FN_Ms#04).

When I challenged the students with my opinion that such a theological discrepancy between the conception of *Nzambi* and that of Yhwh was too big to let it remain unresolved, a short discussion developed. Some students claimed that *Nzambi* is and always has been the same God as Yhwh. Others supported the view that the traditional conception of *Nzambi* being distant was already successfully transformed into the Christian conception of God being close

(TRSC_Ms#13) by missionary teaching and evangelization. Again others argued for the transformation maybe being true for modern towns, but not necessarily for the villages (FN_Ms#04). Considering that a culture has a 'deep structure' (see Figure 1.5-2, p.25). I pointed out that the worldview is not transformed by cognitive means of teaching alone (see also Hiebert 2008). Disappointingly however, the students seemed to be reluctant to discuss the matter in more depth. One of them explained: 'God is mystery. The African does not try too much to understand the mystery. He accepts that way and surrenders to the mystery.' According to that student, asking to resolve the discrepancy between the distant *Nzambi* and the close Christian God is a typical 'white man's question', it is unimportant.

> *Le blanc est curieux. Il cherche à découvrir. C'est pourquoi? Pourquoi ça? Pourqoui? ... [Mais] si on voit dans la culture africaine, Dieu est mystère. Et l'Africain ne cherche pas trop à comprendre le mystère. Il accepte comme ça et il s'abandonne au mystère.*[113] (TRSC_Ms#13)

His statement meant the end of our short discussion because I did not see a way forward to constructively discuss the matter further in class.

To discover that the Kongo understanding of God is still marked today by some confusion and theological misunderstandings came as quite a shock to me, marking another research 'reality disjuncture'. It opened up a whole new field of research that needed attention which I had not anticipated; and I began to suspect the origin of the early missionaries' complaints about the Kongo people not understanding the notion of 'sin' (see 1.1) was rooted in the question about God. If I wanted to get across that the OT notion of 'sin' was closely linked with who God is, then I had to dive into further inquiries about the Kongo conception of God, the supposed equivalent *Nzambi*-figure.

5.3.2 Literature: *Nzambi a Mpungu Tulendo*

The view of God being mystery and the students' ambivalent understanding of *Nzambi* found wide echo in the literature. The information about *Nzambi* is vast. The majority describe *Nzambi*

---

[113] English: 'The white man is curious. He seeks to know. Why this? Why that? Why? ... [But] when you look in the African culture, God is mystery. The African doesn't try too much to understand the mystery. He takes it as it is and he leaves himself to the mystery.'

– or *Nzambi a Mpungu Tulendo* in the traditional full name – as the Supreme Being. The name means what it is today generally taken to mean, 'God Almighty' (Janzen & MacGaffey 1974:14). Inquiries about the original meaning of the term however unearthed confusing ambiguities. *Nzambi* can be anything from the Creator God to *nkisi*, and from the personal biblical God to an impersonal force or fate (Thiel 1983). The details of the findings in the literature are presented in the following.

5.3.2.1 Meaning of the name

The name *Nzambi* is not unique to the Kongo culture. It exists in many variations[114] and is used throughout the western part of the central African region to designate the Supreme Being. Yet Laman (1962:57–60; 2000:15) explained that the Kongo people did not use the term exclusively for the Supreme Being. *Nzambi* also designated a human being (alive or dead)[115], the first whites[116], a spirit that could be invoked for rain, parents, a paramount chief, mysterious, unusual things or a huge animal. Laman (2000) also links the name with 'light' suggesting that *Nzambi* derives from the root *nza* (light) or *nzazi* (lightning). In Swartenbroeckx (1973) the term *nzambi a mpungu* designates an insect, the praying mantis.[117] Randles (1968:32) thought of *Nzambi Mpungu* designating 'royalty', the eternal spirit *Bumba*, that was incarnated in each king. Similar

---

[114] Laman (2000:15f) lists the following names: Chambi, Nchembe, Nzyambi, Nzembe, Dzampi, Nzami, Nza Nyambi, Anyambie, Jami, Shama.

[115] The first human for example was called *Nzambi a nsi* – *Nzambi* of the country (meaning pioneer). Dead people were *banzambi za mpungu*; a corpse could be called *nzambi*, *mpungu* (great) or *nkulu* (ancestor) because the dead is transformed into another, invisible being with greater powers and possibilities. This might explain why in some Bantu tribes it is the term *Nkulu* (or *Mukulu*) that designates God and not *Nzambi* (Laman 1962:58–60).

MacGaffey implicitly links the term *nzambi* with the modern term 'zombie'. He calls the victims of *kindoki*, whose soul had been wholly or partially removed and transferred to other bodies or containers, as 'zombies' and adds in brackets the term 'nzambi' (see MacGaffey 2000:13).

[116] Laman interpreted it as an indication that white people were regarded as supernatural beings.

[117] Bitumba claimed that the term *Nzambi* derived from the verb *kwanzambilakana*, meaning to be everywhere at the same time (IVW-BIT#01). I could not verify his claim however because I did not find the verb in any dictionary.

154

Thiel (1983:115) who suggested that Nzambi was originally a royal title; it was only through the Christian mission that the word was established to mean exclusively God's name.

The meaning of the attribute *mpungu* is even more obscure. According to van Wing (1938:140) *mpungu* was the commonly used attribute for the Supreme Being. Further, *mpungu* filled the role of a patron or protector of the village and consisted of a bag filled with charcoal and clay. Without giving further explanation Janzen & MacGaffey stated that what the association *mpungu tulendo* brought to mind was related to *minkisi* (1974:14). For Yakobi Munzele[118] (ki)*mpungu* was a type of *kindoki* 'everybody knows about' (Janzen & MacGaffey 1974:45). According to Bitumba *mpungu* derives from an eagle-like bird[119], designating *Nzambi's* freedom and being above everything (IVW-BIT#01). This corresponds with Felner's report about *Nzambi* being called 'the Lord of the Sky' (Felner 1933 quoted in Balandier 1968:245). Laman (2000:15f) connected the term with the meaning of light. *Mpungu* could also be interpreted as supreme in the sense that all qualities attributed to the term, *Nzambi* possessed in the highest degree. Gatabantou (2001:40) understands *mpungu* as synonym of might, force and power which is supported by Swartenbroeckx's dictionary. Dereau (1957) translated the term as 'sublime'. The second attribute, *tulendo*[120], means force, power and grandeur (Swartenbroeckx 1973; SIL-Congo 2007). Notwithstanding the many attempts at scholarly explications, the original meaning of the two words, *Nzambi* and *Mpungu* remains obscure; the terms cannot be derived satisfactorily and the etymology rests dubious (van Wing 1938; Thiel 1983).

Knowing what the name *Nzambi* means did not really help to get a clearer picture of who Nzambi is; I had to dig deeper for more information.

---

[118] Yakobi Munzele was a Kongo researcher. Original text title *Bakulu beto ye Diela diau* ('Nos ancêtres et leur intelligence' – Our ancestors and their knowledge) from 1965.

[119] Bitumba called it '*panthère du ciel*' - panther of the sky. Most probably he referred to the Bateleur (lat. *terathopius ecaudatus*).

[120] Often the singular form *lulendo* is used.

5.3.2.2 *Nzambi's* character

Information about *Nzambi's* character turned out to be diverse and contradicting as well. In general *Nzambi* is identified with creation, power and freedom (Balandier 1968:245).[121] The most detailed description was given by Laman (1962:53–62). *Nzambi* is seen as the creator of the universe[122], the master of every being and every thing (also Balandier 1968; Mengi 1981; Gatabantou 2001:40); he is superior to *minkisi*, *bandoki* and the ancestors, but similar to them; his greatness is unequalled (also Mengi 1981). He was credited with universal power (Laman 1962) and is perceived as omnipotent, strong and powerful, 'a perfect being that no intelligence can comprehend or apprehend, an unfathomable and immeasurable gulf' (Gatabantou 2001:40). According to Boutsana (2013:103f) it is impossible to locate, define or access *Nzambi*. He is so elusive that he cannot be represented or contained in material form; he is 'beyond all knowledge and all communication with men' (Balandier 1968:245f; Dalmalm 1985). He is everywhere, sees everything and knows everything (Mengi 1981:26). Others described him as living in the sky and thus unable to visit the earth; he did not show himself to people (Laman 1962; Mengi 1981). The Kongo people feared *Nzambi* who was not somebody to be trifled with (Descourvières 1953; Mengi 1981:26). *Nzambi* is perceived as good and evil at the same time (Laman 1962); he 'does what he thinks right' and is of 'great unshakable spirit' (Laman 1936:821). Because the people believed that *Nzambi* had let death come and that he provided them with *minkisi* of all sorts dealing with all kinds of evils, 'the people's relationship with him has never been marked by confidence or intimacy' (Laman 1962:57).

---

[121] Bitumba associated *Nzambi* with a different threesome: 1) spirituality – because he is love, desire and preserves the universe, 2) science – because he is intelligence and created the universe, 3) politics – because he is power and reigns over the universe (IVW-BIT#01).

[122] Laman (1962:60) reports also other creator-figures: *Mentete* (the first man, and founder of the human race) is said to have created man and to have understood the mystery of life. He is credited with transforming the dead after burial, so that the crippled and the blind become like other people. Therefore he was often put on an equal footing with Funza, an *nkisi* that was regarded as the creator of the foetus in the womb; Funza is evoked in case of anomalies at birth (deformation, monstrosity, deafness, etc.). Dalmalm (1985:66) confirms that 'the tradition names also other creation powers'.

5.3.2.3 Contradicting descriptions

The conception of *Nzambi* being remote is on the one hand confirmed in the literature. 'God, omnipotent and omniscient does not intervene in the life of the human beings.' (Gambeg 2001:39; Gatabantou 2001:40). According to Mengi *Nzambi* is believed to be so distant from humans that he cannot take care of them; but he is always present (Mengi 1981:26). Balandier (1968:246) stresses *Nzambi's* inaccessibility. And as he is inaccessible, the vicissitudes, misfortunes and chances affecting human existence are understood to depend on powers over which man can exert influence, such as ancestors, *minkisi* or spirits. *Nzambi's* inaccessibility might be one of the reasons why early missionaries and more recent scholars recorded that no worship accorded to *Nzambi* was observed (Cavazzi 1937; Pigafetta & Duarte 2002:97; Cuvelier Mgr & Boon 1953:26 referred to by Balandier 1968 and Axelson 1970; see further van Wing 1941:85; 2001:40; N'sondé 2003b:55, 167).

On the other hand *Nzambi* is also described as being involved with human life. Gambeg (2001:139) notes that 'God has mercy on no one'; he punishes the transgressors[123] of the laws he had taught the ancestors (van Wing 1938; 1959); he is the cause of death, illness and all other evil to which people are subjected (Descourvières 1953). But *Nzambi* is also seen as the protector of all the living (Mengi 1981:26). On the one hand *Nzambi* governs the course of human lives, but on the other hand, he cannot be 'swayed by repentance, prayer or sacrifice' (Laman 1962:57).

N'sondé (2003a) disagrees with most of the above description of *Nzambi*. He connects *Nzambi* with the idea of the prohibited, the sacred, or the primal Kongo conception of the absolute (what is complete in itself) which is not to be sought out or to get to know. He justifies it with the derivation of the term *Nzambi*. According to N'sondé *nza* designates space (the

---

[123] Van Wing (1959:139–142) lists the following 'punishments': devastating diseases, drought, famine and infertility of women in case of incest; the illness called *kesa* (vomiting, swelling and decay) in case of adultery. Other illnesses that are understood as sent by *Nzambi*: unfortunate death, 'pustules' (special kind of leper) and high mortality rate in the clan or lineage. The punishments are often collective. *Nzambi* only punishes, he does not reward (van Wing 1938:34).

universe as a whole or a locality anywhere); *mbi* designates what is evil, harmful or forbidden.

Thus, he reconstructs that *Nzambi*

> *…est le lieu de ce qui est sacré, qui à proprement parler ne se manifeste que dans des rares circonstances. En effet, Nzambi relève de l'invisible, de ce qui doit rester non-visible, interdit.*[124]
> (N'sondé 2003a:105)

N'sondé puts forward that the translation of the term *Nzambi* by 'Supreme Being' or even 'God' is erroneous. The Kongo understanding of *Nzambi* is far away from the Christian conception of God.[125]

5.3.2.4 Invoking the ancestors

Although the findings in the literature about *Nzambi* are contradictory, the large majority of authors agree in one point: the religious practice of the Kongo people was fundamentally oriented toward the ancestors (Balandier 1968; Dalmalm 1985; Dorier-Apprill, Kouvouama & Apprill 1998; Gambeg 2001; Laman 2000; van Wing 1959)[126]; *Nzambi* is traditionally not called upon for help in the affairs of daily life, but the ancestors are (Bockie 1993; Axelson 1970; Mengi 1981; Gatabantou 2001; Boutsana 2013).

The practice of invoking the ancestors is based on the position of the father in relation to his children (Laman 1962:44ff), on the paternal right, the *kitaata* (see 5.1.4.2, specifically Figure 5.1-1 p.126). It consists in the children's obligation to honour the father through gifts. This obligation continues after the death of the father and is extended to all forefathers. Remembering

---

[124] English: '[The meaning of *Nzambi*] is the space of the sacred, which strictly speaking manifests itself only in rare circumstances. In fact, *Nzambi* raises from the invisible, from what must remain non-visible, prohibited.' (Translation mine)

[125] Original French quote: '*Le* Nzambi-a-Mpungu *des Lari, sorte d'émanation des Esprits protecteurs des Ancêtres, est loin de la conception chrétienne de Dieu, père de Jésus.*' (N'sondé 2003a:101; 2003b:36 quoting Peleka-Mvouza 1988:247). English: 'The *Nzambi a Mpungu* of the Laari [a Kongo people group in Congo-Brazzaville], an emanation of the protector spirits of the ancestors, is far away from the Christian conception of God, Jesus' father.' (Translation mine).

[126] Hersak (2001:615) argues that this is not the case for the Vili for 'they do not venerate the ancestors. Rather, they rely on powers.'

158

the forefathers adequately[127] the children are to receive gifts and blessings in return in the form of health, long life, fertility and prosperity in business (van Wing 1959:321). If the father or the ancestors are not respected, an individual or the whole clan can be 'blocked' which is shown by all kinds of misfortune. In order to recover, restitution can be made in the stipulated manner either face to face with the living father or at the grave of the deceased (Laman 1962:44f).

5.3.2.5 Christian influence

Researching the issue of the Supreme Being in the literature I always carried the question with me, how much the Kongo conception of *Nzambi* was original and how much it was due to Christian influence. Most authors did not comment on it. Laman (1962) noted that the conception of *Nzambi* owed much to the influence of the early Catholic missions, yet he seemed not to discern the pre-missionary view of *Nzambi*. Axelson (1970:144) expressed his reservations about *Nzambi* originally referring to the Supreme Being. He raised the question whether it was *Kadiapemba*[128] designating 'God' of the indigenous population rather than *Nzambi* that seemed to be the preferred term of the conquering immigrants from Europe.

Thiel expressed his suspicion that *Bunzi* could have been the God of the Kongo before the Christianization. He mentioned Bastian who encountered *Bunzi* on his trip to the Loango- coast (Bastian 1874) and quotes Doutreloux (1967:212) who wrote that the term *Nzambi* was introduced by the missionaries.[129] For Dalmalm it is impossible to say what importance *Nzambi*

---

[127] Remembering or honouring the ancestors consists of a ritual of respect in the cemetery, keeping the ancestral graves clean, and observance of the laws and traditions that the ancestors passed on (Julian 2004:57 referring to van Wing 1959:116).

[128] Julian (2004:56ff referring to Hilton 1985) explains that *kadiapemba* (or *nkadia mpemba*) was the 'sky spirit dimension', one of the three basic forces upon whom the Kongo could call in order to get help with life in this world (the other two being the ancestors and the *bisimbi*, the water and earth spirits). 'Individuals could implore the sky spirits, through an intermediary *nganga*, in order to gain their own wealth or protect themselves against *kindoki*'. From the seventeenth century on, the term *kadiapemba* was used by the Catholic Church referring to the devil or demons (Axelson 1970). This practice had probably its roots in the cultural and religious confrontation of the Church with exponents of the Kongo religion, especially with the *banganga*.

[129] Laman (2000:32) supports the view that Bunzi was seen as the High God: '*Les esprits tribaux et héroïques (c'est en effect des dieux) avaient une puissane telle qu'ils pouvaient à la fois servir pour vaincre les esprits de maladie (domaine médical), pour combattre les mauvais esprits et pour servir de gardien du droit et des bonnes mœurs. L'esprit le plus en vue, c'est Bunzi de Mayombe. Les vivants le prenaient pour le créateur de tout, le Dieu suprême.*'

had for the Kongo people before the arrival of the first representatives of Christianity. She observed that the myths, proverbs and sayings witnessing *Nzambi* were ambiguous. Over time *Nzambi* got assimilated into the Christian God, and his name became reserved for being the creator of the *nkisi*, the ancestors, the *simbi* water spirits etc., in order to give permission for existence of those (Dalmalm 1985:66).

Considering the literature on *Nzambi*, including the discussion about what the term originally designated, I came to agree with Janzen & MacGaffey that today one must fail 'to discover how much the modern conception *Nzambi* owes to missionary teaching' (1974:14; see also Thiel 1983). Asking Kongo people today, one gets an answer along the following lines:

> *C'est lui,* [Nzambi] *l'Être Suprême qui est à la base de toute création et la source de toute vie. C'est le Dieu tout-Puissant, qui faisant preuve de justice et d'équité, distribue ses bénédictions aux riches comme aux pauvres. Il punit par diverses malédictions ceux qui commettent le mal. Par les prières et les invocations incessantes que lui adressent les Bakongo de toutes conditions, l'on peut se faire une idée de l'importance qui lui est accordée.*[130] (Goma-Foutou 2001:21)

However, voices such as Goma-Foutou must be interpreted as a modern view rather than the primal Kongo conception of *Nzambi*.

5.3.3 Evaluation: 'sin' not 'before God'

Considering the above and taking into account what the students told me about the traditional conception of *Nzambi* there is little doubt that the equivalence of *Nzambi* and the biblical God is generally assumed by the Kongo people (see also Janzen & MacGaffey 1974:14). This however does not rule out the existence of misconceptions about Yhwh. I interpreted the surprise about God's intervention in daily affairs expressed by the majority of the students as a strong indication of that. The first chapters of Genesis however paint a different picture. In Genesis God is presented as one who 'creates, blesses, gives laws, judges, grieves, saves, elects, promises, makes

---

[130] English: 'It is him [*Nzambi*], the Supreme Being, who is at the basis of all creation and the source of all life. It is God Almighty, who exercises justice and equity and distributes his blessings to the rich and the poor. He punishes by various curses those who commit evil. Through the prayers and incessant invocations addressed to him by the Bakongo from all walks of life, we can get an idea of the importance that is accorded to him.' (Translation mine).

covenants, provides counsel, protects, confers responsibility to human beings, and holds them accountable' (Birch et al. 1999:41). The book of Genesis portrays a relational God, one who 'enters a relationship of integrity with the world, and does so in such a way that both world and God are affected by that interaction' (Birch et al. 1999:42). This stands in contrast to the findings above regarding *Nzambi* notwithstanding my students' claim that their traditional God was identical with Yhwh, and despite the transformation that has already happened, exemplified by Goma-Foutou (see quote on page 160).

In order to better understand the contradictory issues such as the findings presented here, Andrew Walls (2012) offers the concept of 'worldview' as a 'mental map' of the universe by which human beings navigate through life. He explains that items on that map are plotted according to their operational importance. The size of those items reflect their relationship to each other and their relative importance. On many people's worldview maps a 'God component' can be found. Looking at the 'atlas' of the religious system it might look almost infinite in size. However, if it is not something that one is steering by, the God component may not occupy very much space on a map used for operational purposes. According to Walls it may be **conceptually** important to believe that God is the creator of the universe. But the practical **operational** significance of the God component may be much less than that of some other entities that are seen as controlling, or ancestors who maintain the family or the clan. In these circumstances the territorial spirits or the ancestors will occupy more space on the worldview map than the God component.[131]

Given that worldview maps reflect operational significance rather than conceptual significance of the different items, Walls' image of the 'mental map' might help to explain the discrepancy between the (conceptual) importance of *Nzambi* upheld by the Kongo people on the one hand and the great (operational) significance of invoking the ancestors, appealing to the *banganga* and *nkisi*-powers on the other hand. Some of the characteristics of God found in the

---

[131] See also the lectures given in March 2011 (Walls 2011).

Bible, especially God's closeness and his desire to be engaged in human affairs, might have been added over time to the conceptual significance of God – and thus confessed in credal statements about *Nzambi* – but not to the operational significance.

Assuming after all this that the concept of God being a relational God remains unimportant on the Kongo worldview's operational map it is not surprising that traditionally human wrongdoing has no operational connections to *Nzambi*. Or to put it in more drastic words, not surprisingly in the traditional Kongo understanding, 'sin' has nothing to do with God. It is from that perspective that Laman's note on Kongo morality not being of a 'religious character' makes sense. The Kongo people do not experience 'sin' and guilt in their relationship to God; instead their morals concern man himself, his family and his clan alone (Laman 2000:40).

> Tous les règlements, les tabous et les ordonnances ne découlent pas d'un Dieu personnel, transcen-dant… ce qui fait que l'homme n'a pas de sentiment d'obligation, de culpabilité ni de responsabilité devant Dieu.[132]

It is in the same sense that Tshiamalenga (1974:181ff)[133] suggested that the Bantu 'sin' 'before the community'; they do not 'sin' 'before God'. The category 'before God', he observed, is absent from the language used regarding the confession of wrongdoing. Bantu people do not experience and do not even say that wrongdoing is unfaithfulness or an offence against God (or even against the ancestors); it does however 'destroy' the community. Accordingly they do not 'convert' or 'return' to God (or the ancestors), but 'repair' their mistakes before the community. It is the category 'before the community' and the vital union with the 'deceased ancestors' that controls the full experience of the fault. According to Tshiamalenga the category 'before God'

---

[132] English: 'All the regulations, taboos and instructions do not come from a personal, transcendent God ... with the effect that the human being has no sense of obligation, of guilt or responsibility before God.' (Translation mine)

[133] Tshiamalenga discusses ethics in the tradition of the (ba)Luba (mainly the Luba-Kasai), a Bantu people group in DRC.

does not exist because the Bantu do not believe in a covenant with God. *'Dieu ne leur a rien dit, seuls les ancêtres sont censés leur "parler".'*[134] (Tshiamalenga 1974:185)

Tshiamalenga's view that the Bantu people do not know the concept 'before God' regarding wrongdoing and 'sin' resounds with my research findings. Certainly it is possible to render grammatically the phrase 'before God' in the Kikongo languages; in fact the SIL-Munukutuba dictionary suggests translating 'to sin before God' as *kusumuka na ntwala ya Nzambi* – to 'sin' before/in front of *Nzambi*. I suspect however that this is a mere literal translation of a European concept, neither rooted in the Kongo culture nor sensibly contextualized.

Evaluating the thoughts about the categories 'before the community' and 'before God' described in this section leads to new concluding insights which will be presented in the following.

5.3.4 Emerging theory: the covenant God

The insight that community is key for the understanding of 'sin' in the Kongo culture (sections 5.1 and 5.2) was confirmed again by the findings about *Nzambi* in this section. The Kongo view of wrongdoing is couched in community ills and is not seen as affecting God. Because the operational importance of wrongdoing is plotted down on the Kongo worldview map 'before the community' and not 'before God', the importance of the social dimension of wrongdoing must not be minimized.

When I first started to dig deeper into the Kongo conception of the community, the perception of *Nzambi* and the resulting consequences for the understanding of 'sin', I assumed rather stereotypically that the Kongo view of wrongdoing could be subsumed under 'societal' in clear contradistinction to 'individualistic', the individual completely disappearing in the 'societal view'. Therefore I further assumed that the core issue for contextualizing 'sin' in the Kongo culture would be for the Kongo communities to apprehend that every member is individually

---

[134] English: 'God did not speak to them, only the ancestors are meant to communicate.'

responsible for his/her transgressions. Through the research findings however I realized that the main problem does not seem to be the denial of individual responsibility. The main problem is, it seems, that the category 'before God' seems to be foreign; only conceptual importance is attributed to it or merely lip service paid. The Kongo concept of wrongdoing is strongly built on a horizontal aspect (harmony/relationship within the community); the OT however presents 'sin' as including the vertical aspect (relationship of Yhwh with his people). The idea is alien to the Kongo people that 'sin' affects not only the (human) community but God as well because of his covenant. For a contextualized understanding of 'sin' therefore, it is not only the Kongo understanding of community that is key, but also the understanding of God as a covenant-God.

5.4 Kongo renderings for the Christian term 'sin'

By way of reminder, one of the leading questions for data collection is about the Kongo discourse and the semantics used regarding 'sin'. This section will focus on precisely that. Although I consider the Kongo discourse on 'sin' much wider than the few Kongo words for 'sin' presented below, I will concentrate on the Kongo terms translating the word *péché* ('sin') given to me by the discussion group participants. The wider discourse on wrongdoing and 'sin' becomes apparent not only in the sections above but can also be seen in the word lists put in Appendix 3. However, the specific Kongo term for 'sin', *masumu* (*disumu*)[135], and other alternative terms have not been discussed so far and are thus presented in the following. The different terms mainly result from the students' participation group; I will complement the findings with the information collected in interviews and found in the literature and dictionaries.

5.4.1 Main term for wrongdoing before missionary teaching: (*yi*)*mbi*

Whenever 'sin' is talked about in the Protestant and Catholic churches in Congo, the term *masumu* is applied; anything bad or evil is usually referred to as *(yi)mbi*. Eager to learn more

---

[135] *Disumu* is the singular form, *masumu* the plural form. I will mostly use the plural form because this is the form used more often by the Congolese themselves.

164

about the terms I asked the students to explain. In order to have a better overview I summarized their explanation[136] in Table 5.4-1 below.

As can be seen the root *(m)bi* (the Bantu root for bad) lies at the basis of most of the words and expressions used in the examples (see underlining). What the missionaries translated by *masumu* were expressions that traditionally designated 'bad things' or 'evil'. .In Laari *fu bia mbi* meant to rebel against the code of the community or the whole people group (DOC-ex1#S17)[137]. It designated actions and attitudes that had harmful consequences for the individual or the community. The rebel was called *muntu wa mbi*. *Bu'bi* was the evil done to one's neighbour; *bu'ntunta* (banditry; disobedience, mind/spirit of contradiction)[138] and *bumpumbulu* (brigandage)[139] the violence done to the social norm (DOC-ex2#S18).

Table 5.4-1: Vernacular renderings for 'sin' (students)

Kongo language family			Teke language family	
Before missionary preaching[140]				
Laari	Suundi	Beembe	Teke Tyee	Yaka
bu'bi (evil/bad)	–	*bubi* (evil/bad)	*bubi* (evil/bad)	*ndha yimbi* (problem/thing bad/evil)
muntu wa mbi (person of evil)	–	*ngaa-bubi* (proprietor-evil)	–	–
fu bia mbi (habit/manner of evil)	–	–	–	*masa ndha yimbi* (do problem bad/evil)

---

[136] I follow strictly the spelling by the students although it often differs from the more official spelling by SIL or the university.

[137] Today's use: *fu bia mbi* describe attitudes that are judged as impolite. But it can also designate a child who commits little thefts at the parents' home or who insults others by not showing respect for example (COR-NDA#01). It might also be used by parents when they speak to children about the sexual act.

[138] Example: somebody who often fights with somebody, who is on the lookout for a brawl all the time, or other acts that are judged as official offence (COR-NDA#01). The dictionary by Swartenbroeckx translates 'disobedience, spirit of contradiction'.

[139] This is more serious than *bu'ntunta*. It can be translated as brigandage or even a criminal act such as murder, armed holdups, etc. (COR-NDA#01).

[140] No dates were given by the students. It seemed not important to them to identify the time 'before the missionaries' came. I assume they meant the time around the turn of the 19th to the 20th century. The Gospel had been preached long before that. The most famous convert who became the first Christian Kongo king was Mvemba Nzinga (Afonso I), ruling from 1506 – 1545. See Axelson (1970).

				mayilu ndha yimbi (arrange problem bad/evil)
bu'ntunta (disobedience, banditry)	–	–	–	–
bumpumbulu (brigandage)	–	–	–	–
–	sumuna mitsieno (disobey law)	–	–	–
–	sumuna bulongo (uproot taboo)	–	–	–
After missionary preaching / translation by the missionaries				
masumu	masumu	masumu	masumu (loanword)	masumu (loanword)
The noun means 'impurity' and stems from the (Kikongo) verb sumuna to defile, get dirty, be impure, violate a taboo (DOC-ex2#S06a)				

According to one student, the Suundi expression *sumuna mitsieno* was most used to designate the transgression of a law (of a clan, family or village).[141] *Sumuna bulongo* ('uproot a taboo') was used in the case of not respecting the sacred or the well-being of somebody else. Every bad act committed had its proper name: *buivi* (theft), *bifouelele* (adultery), etc. (DOC-ex1#S15). According to the Suundi student, 'sin' was more closely linked to the disobedience of the *bulongo* (the sacred) than it is in Christianity. The *mbûla* (ancestral spirit of protection) of a family (or clan or village) took sanctions against every transgressor of a *mulongo* (taboo).

In Beembe (and Teke Tyee[142]): *bubi* is the evil and is everything that contradicts *bubwe*, the good (DOC-ex2#S02), everything that is bad, everything done voluntarily that leads to evil (DOC-ex2#S12). *Nga-bubi* (literally the 'proprietor of evil') is the evildoer or 'sinner'. The

---

[141] For example it was strictly prohibited for women to enter a village (and her house) with a fagot that was tied up. It was mandatory that the fagot was untied. In doing that the spirits of the forest would not be tied to the pieces of wood putting the forest at any risk (DOC-ex1#S15).

[142] Teke is a separate language family. Some dialects (like Tyee) are spoken in the South, the traditional area of the Kongo people.

dictionary describes *bubí* as 1) ugliness, state of everything that is bad, 2) malice, 3) disaster, evil (SIL-Congo 2010:14). In Yaka[143] *ndha yimbi* designates a 'bad action' (DOC-ex2#S14).

5.4.2 Term for 'sin' influenced by missionary teaching: *masumu*

It was striking that the students mentioned only the word *masumu* as the translating term for 'sin' throughout the different languages; no alternative was given. It also struck as odd that unlike *(yi)mbi*, *masumu* did not seem to have been part of the everyday vocabulary in the time before the missionaries' teaching. This raised the question about the origin of the word and its meaning. Moreover, on account of the previous research findings, I suspected that the 'concept of sin' (understood as wrongdoing 'before God') was rather foreign to the Kongo people; I thus challenged the students with the question whether the 'concept of sin' existed before Christianity came to Congo.

The students gave different and sometimes contradictory answers. I also observed that they did not make a clear distinction between **concept** and **word**. Some claimed that because the word *masumu* existed originally in their language, therefore the concept of 'sin' preached by the missionaries existed too. However I had not offered any preceding guidance for my question about the 'concept of sin', what it implied or what it should contain. I simply threw the question at them and let them work through it by themselves.[144]

One student remarked that in most of the cultures in Congo the concept of 'sin' did not exist (DOC-ex1#S04). Another explained that…

> *Le concept péché en tant que concept religieux n'a pas existé dans notre culture… Ce qui a existé c'est le sens profane (païen) du mal. La connotation du terme péché est venue avec le christianisme qui a adopté le mal au péché (masumu).*[145] (DOC-ex2#S06a)

---

[143] Yaka belongs to the Teke language family.

[144] One side effect of that method was that the majority of the students turned to dictionaries. To my big surprise and disappointment as a theologian all students who consulted a reference book turned to the 'Le Robert', **the** (non religious) standard French dictionary. Only a few students also consulted a biblical dictionary.

[145] English: 'The concept of sin as a religious concept did not exist in our culture. … What did exist was the secular (pagan) meaning [of sin] as evil. The connotation of [of evil as] sin came with Christianity that adopted the term sin, *masumu*.'

The majority of the students explained in one way or another that everything that had been conceived as 'bad action' traditionally was translated by the missionaries as *masumu* (see for example DOC-ex1#S09; #S17; DOC-ex2#S02; #S07; #S11; #S14; #S18), influenced by the first Bible translation into Kikongo fiote[146] in the early 1900s by Karl Laman.[147] Some non-Kongo students argued that *masumu* was a loanword from Kikongo (DOC-ex2#S03) which originally meant 'impurity' (TRSC_Ms#13). *Masumu* was introduced by the missionaries who used it to translate the French word *péché* that came with the Gospel (DOC-ex1#S09; DOC-ex1#S17; DOC-ex2#S02; DOC-ex2#S11). With the arrival of the Christian missionary, the Kongo culture and Christianity was 'brewed' together: *'Avec l'arrivé du missionnaire chrétien, il y a eu brassage entre la culture kongo et du christianism.'* (DOC-ex2#S18). Today, many students claimed, *masumu* is well understood in the Kongo tradition that has integrated the term in the cultural concept of 'sin'. *'Aujourd'hui la difficulté n'existe plus parce que le terme est bien compris dans notre tradition qui a intégré cela dans notre conception culturelle.'*[148] (DOC-ex2#S06a) On the grounds of the research findings however, I doubt whether his interpretation mirrored the reality.

5.4.3 Original meaning of the term *masumu*

Because the students' explanations about the origin of the term *masumu* were unclear, I turned to literature on the matter. Janzen & MacGaffey (1974:14) explained that it derives from the Kikongo verb *sumuka*, designating the traditional concept of ritual pollution. Similarly the

---

[146] Kikongo fiote is a dialect primarily spoken in DRC (along the Congo River) and Angola (language code from the Ethnologue: kwy; see <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/kwy> [last accessed 30.07.2015]). According to MacGaffey (2000:46) the first 1000 copies were sold out in two months (1904) at a price equivalent to a month's wages for an unskilled worker.

[147] From my point of view the missionaries' influence on the use of *masumu* as the term for 'sin' dates from much earlier than from the time the Bible was translated by Laman (early nineteenth century). Missionaries came first to Congo in the 1480s.

[148] English: 'Today the difficulty doesn't exist anymore because the term is well understood and incorporated in our cultural conception.'

Kikongo dictionary by Laman that renders the word *sumu* and its derivations as sin, transgression, impurity and defilement (Laman 1936:505, 924). Andersson (1968:151) clarified that 'what can be defiled are principally the fetishes or the magic remedies'. Ekholm Friedman (1991:165) noted that *disumu* (singular form of *masumu*) derives from the verb *sumuna* (active form of *sumuka*) which simply means 'break a law, a prohibition'. She further stated that the concept of *disumu* could be described as 'certain prescribed actions that they have omitted to carry out or… certain prohibited actions that they have carried out' (Andersson 1951:66 quoted by Ekholm Friedman 1991:165). Sundberg suggests that *sumuna* and *sumuka* were activities disturbing the communal life in the *kanda*; in the Kongo tradition the terms have 'really nothing to do with Nzambi' (2000:72).

Auguste Miabeto, a native specialist for Kongo culture[149], retired University professor living in Brazzaville, disagrees with the original meaning of *sumuna* as defiling or polluting. For him, such a translation is a forcing of terms, a projection by the dictionary makers, a re-interpretation of the word in order to apply a biblical meaning (IVW-MIA#01a; 01b):

> *Il y aussi ce problème d'adoption des concepts de la langue kikongo pour les vêtir, pour les re-sémantiser, [pour] leur donner la signification d'un contenu biblique. Donc on a forcé des termes, à dire, à parler de la réalité biblique.*[150]

According to Miabeto the term *sumuna*[151] originally belongs to the semantic field of agriculture and means *déplanter, arracher* (un-plant, pull out a plant). It is the opposite of planting, or of putting something into the soil, also used to dig in a pole or a pillar for constructing a house. In the figurative sense – if one forces the meaning of 'sin' (*disumu*) into the term – it could be understood as retreating/withdrawing from a law, as leaving/abandoning a rule (IVW-MIA#01b). Ndamba, a linguistic professor at the university, supported the meaning of *sumuna* as taking something out of the ground that was buried, dug in or planted there before, and as a

---

[149] He is of Laari background.

[150] English: 'There is also the issue of adoption of the concepts of Kikongo language to clothe them, to re-interpret [*re-sémantiser*], to give them the meaning of a Biblical content. So the words were forced to say, to speak of biblical reality.'

[151] The radical of the word being -*sum*-.

second meaning to 'transgress a law', to 'fall into sin', to 'uproot something that was implanted'
so to speak (COR-NDA#01). Swartenbroeckx adds the meaning of *causer de la douleur* (to cause
pain).

Mostly neglected and absent from these reflections about 'sin' there are three other terms
designating the idea of a fault or misconduct beside the general use of *masumu*.

1 *Lufuma*. According to Miabeto it designates 'fault'. Swartenbroeckx translates the
   term as enmity, rancour, offence, injustice, brutality, wickedness, malice. The
   derivation *kifuma* means deformity (SIL-Congo 2007)

2 *Nsoki*. According to Ndamba (COR-NDA#03) it is the most adequate word for
   translating 'fault', but it is less and less used although still common. *Kota mu nsoki*
   (to enter into a fault) is 'to commit a misconduct/mistake' (see also Swartenbroeckx).
   Swartenbroeckx translate *nsoki* by harm, fault, iniquity, malice, injustice.

3 *Nkombo* also means 'fault' originally. Today *nkombo* designates a goat because
   traditionally, when a case was judged, the offender was sentenced to pay a goat to the
   offended. In case of an illness, a goat was sacrificed for the sick person to get healed.
   The real word for goat is *ntaba* (COR-NDA#03; IVW-MIA#01a).

It is revealing that none of these alternative words were used by any focus group
participants. When the students examined Ps. 51, a text most suitable for using alternative terms
for *masumu*, none of the alternatives above were used either (FN_EEC#11), which can be seen
in Table 5.4-2 below. It is evident from the table that the term *masumu*, occasionally alternating
with the term *mbi*, predominates in the translation of the different Hebrew terms in the Laari and
Kituba version. Only the Kikongo version presents minimal alternatives.

Table 5.4-2: Vernacular terms in Psalm 51

Segond 21[152] (NRSV)	Hebrew	Laari	Kikongo	Kituba[153]
péché, pécheur (sin, sinner) v. 4; 5; 6; 7; 11; 15	חַטָּאָה *ḥăṭāʾâ*	*disumu* (sin) *musumuki* (sinner)	*masumu* (sin)	*masumu* (sin) *mbi* (evil)

---

[152] The counting of the verses in Psalm 51 in the French version Segond 21 (the one used during the field
research in Congo) is different from the NRSV, the English version to which I usually refer in this write-up. The
Segond 21 follows the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), the reason why I follow the BHS counting in this
table instead of the NRSV counting.

[153] Kituba is spoken in the DRC. It is a version of Munukutuba spoken in Congo-Brazzaville. For more
explanation see footnote 19, p.21 in sub-section 1.5.3. Because the OT is not yet translated into Munukutuba, I had
to refer to the Bible version from DRC.

	(missing a target and its consequences)	kusumuka (to sin)		
faute (iniquity) v. 4; 7; 11	עָוֹן ʿāwōn (bend, crooked-ness and its consequences)	tona[154] (stain, mark) mambi (evil)	minkanu (litigations) mambi (evil)	mvindu samu na mbi (dirt because of evil) mbi (evil)
transgression (transgression) v. 3; 5; 15	פֶּשַׁע pešaʿ (break with a social partner)	masumu (sins)	nangumukuna (to stand up against, attack)	masumu (sin) mbi (evil)
mal (evil) v. 6	רַע raʿ (evil, disaster)	wambi (evil)	mambi	mbi

Miabeto claimed in an interview that the term *masumu* expressed a concept internal only to Christianity but foreign to the Kongo culture, tailored by the European Bible translators (IVW-MIA#01a). Laman's research contradicts Miabeto's view. Referring to his Kongo informants Laman explained that the translation of the verb to 'sin' was rendered by *rendre impur le tabou de Dieu*[155]. This rendering is to be understood in the context of being the *nganga* (*nkisi*-specialist) or the person profiting from *nkisi*, who must strictly observe the rituals and prohibitions in order for the 'medicine' (*minkisi*) to be effective. If they failed they rendered themselves and *nkisi* impure (*sumuka* or *sumuna*)[156], reducing or 'blocking' the *nkisi*-power. Laman explained (2000:20f) that human laws and commandments – in distinction to *nkisi*-laws – were not rendered impure but they were 'killed' or 'demolished'.

Janzen & MacGaffey confirm Laman's view of *disumu* originally referring to ritual defilement. They suggested that the early missionaries adopted the term and extended its meaning to cover the Christian idea of 'sin'. How far the conversion of the term *masumu* from a term portraying ritual defilement into a 'broad ethical concept covering all forms of shortcoming, even a propensity of human nature' (Janzen & MacGaffey 1974:14), was at the root of the

---

[154] The term *tona* means *tache sur le pelage* (stain on the fur), *ocelle* (spot) , *mocheture* (speck), *marque* (mark), *bigarrure* (piebald), see Swartenbroeckx, p.648

[155] English translation: to render God's taboo impure.

[156] *Sumuka* is the passive form of the verb *sumuna*.

misunderstanding between the early missionaries and the Kongo people, however, cannot be assessed with certainty. Yet I found that, supposing the term did originally refer to ritual defilement, *masumu* did not portray 'sin' as something that was done 'before God'. Moreover it might have put the *nkisi*-powers precariously close to the Christian idea of God even to the extent of mistaking the biblical God, Yhwh, as just another kind of *nkisi*, the *Nzambi-nkisi*[157] demanding from the follower a special set of rituals, rules and laws to observe.

Despite the fact that today 'sin' is widely translated by *masumu* it cannot be denied that terms may be easily exchanged. The concepts behind them however, deeply rooted in the worldview of a people, take a much longer time to be transformed.

5.4.4 Emerging theory

From the above data and before having proceeded with the next step (exegesis of Scripture) I strongly suspect that the Kongo term *masumu* is not a good fit for expressing the OT notion of 'sin'. The term implies the understanding of 'sin' as defilement or the breaking of a taboo. Whether such meaning is a serious reduction or an apt choice for expressing the OT perspective of 'sin' is the subject of further studies (see the following chapter). I expect that the term needs to be filled with new meaning and complemented by other terms. Whether *lufuma*, *nsoki* or *nkombo* (see 5.4.3) are appropriate to be used cannot be concluded here; in this regard more theological and linguistic research is needed which cannot be offered within the limitations of this study.

Moreover, as a theologian I am not satisfied with the answer that the concept of 'sin' in the Kongo culture corresponds to the Christian concept simply because decades ago it was decided to translate 'sin' by the (Kikongo) word *masumu*. This begs the question if a 'Christian

---

[157] Interestingly enough, the Catholic priest was called and is still called today *nganga-Nzambi* which could be interpreted as the Catholic priest being the specialist of making the *nkisi* called Nzambi.

172

concept' of 'sin' actually exists, and if yes what that concept looks like. The following chapter will pursue the issue and ask how 'sin' is understood in the OT.

5.5 Summary

In order to summarize the main findings of the 'exegesis of culture' I formulated seven propositions that I submitted to the students for discussion, verification and revision (FN_MS#01). The finalized propositions are as follows:

1 *Tout ce qui menace ou détruit l'harmonie de la famille est une « mauvaise chose » (voler, commettre l'adultère, pas avoir de respect, etc.).*[158]

2 *Faire une « mauvaise chose » n'est jamais privé mais touche toute la famille / toute la communauté.*[159]

3 *Quand l'harmonie de la famille est menacée, la mort, des maladies et des malédictions entrent dans la communauté et la protection n'est plus assurée.*[160]

4 *Dans la vue traditionnelle le mal est quelque chose qui n'est pas inné mais c'est quelque chose qui vient de l'extérieur. Pour éviter que des « mauvaises choses » soient commises Il faut éduquer les gens.*[161]

5 *Dans la vue traditionnelle Dieu n'est pas concerné par des « mauvaises choses » commises par des humains car il est loin des personnes vivantes.*[162]

6 *Contrairement aux cultures traditionnelles au Congo le Dieu de la Bible est véritablement touché par le péché de son peuple (ou par le péché d'un individu) parce qu'il est proche, parce qu'il s'est attaché à son peuple par une alliance.*[163]

7 *Dans les églises le terme « mauvaises choses » ou « (faire) le mal » est généralement traduit par* masumu.[164]

---

[158] English: 'Anything that threatens or destroys the harmony of the family is a 'bad thing' (theft, adultery, disrespect, etc.).'

[159] English: 'Doing a 'bad thing' is never private but affects the whole family (the whole community).'

[160] English: 'When the harmony of the family is threatened, death, diseases and curses enter the community and protection is no longer assured.'

[161] English: 'In the [Kongo] traditional view evil is something that is not innate but something that comes from the outside. In order to avoid that "bad things" being committed, the people must be "educated".'

[162] English: 'In the [Kongo] traditional view God is not affected by the 'bad things' committed by human beings because he is far away from the living.'

[163] English: 'Contrary to the traditional cultures in Congo the God of the Bible is truly touched by the sin of his people (or by the sin of an individual) because he is near, because he is committed to his people by a covenant.'.

[164] English: 'In the Churches the term 'bad things' or '(commit) evil' is generally translated by *masumu*.'

These seven propositions will be evaluated in chapter 7 which will present the findings resulting from the third step of the contextualization model, the 'critical response'.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the collected data resulting from step I, the 'uncritical exegesis of culture'. I brought into focus four relevant issues for understanding 'sin' in the Kongo cultural context. These issues regard the Kongo concept of *kanda* (community), the understanding of theft, disrespect and harmony, the (traditional) image of Nzambi, and the vernacular semantics used. The chapter demonstrated that 1) the Kongo understanding of 'sin' is anchored in their concept of community; 2) any action that breaks the harmony of the community is viewed as 'sin', 3) the idea of God's involvement in the issue of 'sin' and wrongdoing is at odds with the Kongo worldview; 4) the term *masumu* is most probably unsuitable for expressing 'sin' in full depth.

6. DISCUSSION OF DATA II: EXEGESIS OF SCRIPTURES – THE OT UNDERSTANDING OF 'SIN'

6.0 Introduction

Having presented the findings resulting from step 1 of Hiebert's contextualization model (exegesis of culture) in the previous chapter, this chapter concentrates on the findings of step 2 (exegesis of Scripture). The chapter mainly contributes to finding answers to the leading questions concerning the discourse on 'sin' (see 1.2.1, p.9). Its focus lies on the OT Hebrew discourse. I will allow the 'voices' of the students to speak as regards their interpretation of the biblical passages under examination. This is a consequence resulting from the premise of hermeneutic phenomenology adopted for this research. There is no 'neutral ground' from which exegetical work can be done. Thus I consider the students' cultural and personal 'horizon' as potentially contributing to a deeper understanding of the texts.

The chapter consists of three parts. The first part (6.1) will present the findings resulting from the exegetical work on four OT passages: Ex. 32 (Israel's idolatry), Josh. 7:1-26 (Achan's theft), 2 Sam. 11-12 (David's adultery) and Ps. 51 (David's repentance and prayer for restoration).[1] The second part (6.2) focuses on word studies that aim at completing the insights from 6.1. A smaller third part presents further reflections on issues I considered important in order to continue with step 3 of the contextualization model (critical response) that will be the focus of the ensuing chapter 7.

6.1 Exegesis

What I present in this first section focuses on the insights gained by reading and studying biblical passages with the students' participation group in class and their exegesis papers (to which appropriate reference is given) as well as the complementing work done by myself. The following sections are not meant to be a comprehensive study of all the aspects of 'sin' found in

---

[1] The chosen texts are the same as the ones from which cultural insights were gained in step I, previous chapter 5.

the OT. Moreover, the exegetical work presented below pays little attention to textual criticism, except where I considered it to be decisive for the OT understanding of 'sin' in general. The sequence of the passages follows the biblical order not considering the cyclical sequence in which they were exegetically examined by the students. Because I assume the discussed texts to be known to the reader, I will not reproduce the stories as a whole.

6.1.1 Exodus 32:1-35 – the golden calf

The text of Ex. 32:1-35 was studied by the majority of the students in the course of a term paper (DOC-ex2#S02; #S03; #S06; #S07; #S11; #S12; #S14; #S16; #S18).[2] Most of the insights gained from their work have already been presented in chapter 5. The students focused on cultural aspects, studying the theological implications only cursorily. Hence their exegetical insights addressing the question how 'sin' is understood in Ex. 32 were only thin. This made it necessary for me to work on the text in more depth myself. Reference to the students' work is given where appropriate.

6.1.1.1 Context of the narrative

Within the Pentateuch I consider that the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers build a self-contained unit.[3] The three books contain the continuous narratives of Israel ranging from the exodus from Egypt to the conquest of the Transjordan, complemented by the insertion of the Priestly Code[4]. The text discussed in this section is found in Exodus which introduces the main themes that characterize Yhwh's history and relationship with his people (see Figure 6.1-1 below). The breaking of God's covenant by the people is one of those basic themes underlining

---

[2] The alternative text was 2 Sam. 11-12:25 (David's adultery), see 6.1.3, p.194.

[3] Adopting the perspective by Westermann (1991), I understand the Pentateuch containing three main parts: The pre-history and the Patriarchs (Genesis), the Exodus and conquering of the Promised Land (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers), Moses' speech recapitulating the events to the people of Israel (Deuteronomy).

[4] By Priestly Code I refer to Ex. 25-31; 35-40; the whole book of Leviticus and supplementing parts in Num. 1-10.

my perspective that the topic of 'sin' is not peripheral but foundational to Christian understanding.

Figure 6.1-1: Characteristic themes and structure of Exodus

The book of Exodus

Section	Theme
1-11 Trouble	God's salvation out of trouble.
12-14 Salvation	
15 Worship	Worship of the redeemed people.
16-18 Protection	God's protection of the people to which corresponds the people's obedience towards God's commandments and law.
19-23 Law	Obedient observation of the law by the people.
24 Covenant	The redemption, protection by God and obedient observation of the law by the people tied together in the covenant.
25-31 Law	(Priestly Code)
32-33 Break	The covenant broken by the people to which God reacts by judgment and punishment
34 New covenant	Renewal of the covenant despite the people's unfaithfulness.
35-40 Law	(Priestly Code continued)

Priestly Code continued
(Leviticus; Num. 1-10)

The context of Ex. 32:1-35 follows the story line left off in chapter 24 that describes the covenant with the people of Israel made by Yhwh with Moses as the intermediary. Moses is then called to meet Yhwh on the mountain. It is reported that Moses stayed there 40 days. Moses' protracted absence is the reason for the people's frightened impatience at the beginning of Ex. 32. They seem to have a problem with their leader gone (Stuart 2006 [NAC]). They ask Aaron to make them gods to lead them (literally 'go in front of', v.1), taking the place of Moses who

led them out of Egypt. According to the WBC (Durham 1998) the story needs to be understood within this context: With Moses' absence, the people's one God seemed gone as well; the access to God is cut off and thus another deity is needed. Having come out of Egypt only recently, and having been deeply influenced by the pagan culture – 'as they had been for hundreds of years' as the NAC points out (Stuart 2006:576) – it is of no surprise, though by no means excusable, that the people fall back to what has probably been familiar to them in terms of divinity images.[5] They produce a golden idol in form of a bull[6] and worship it.

6.1.1.2 Nature of the 'sin' committed

The 'sin' committed in Ex. 32 is undoubtedly idolatry by the people of Israel. The text offers some remarkable details. What is striking in v.5 is that Aaron designates the feast that follows the idol worship as a 'festival to Yhwh'.[7] The text leaves it open what Aaron actually intended by doing so. However, I see parallels to the sacrifices offered to Yhwh after entering the covenant in Ex. 24 clearly displayed. What in Ex. 24 was the 'celebration of an obligating relationship', becomes in Ex. 32 an 'orgy of the desertion of responsibility' (Durham 1998:422).[8] By declaring that kind of celebration as in the name of Yhwh, Israel did not only break the first two commandments, they also violated the third commandment by grossly misusing the name of Yhwh. Durham points out that the attempt to worship **Yhwh** by an idol, which had been declared

---

[5] Durham suggests that the widespread presence of bull images in Ancient Near Eastern worship has been thoroughly confirmed by Eissfeldt (1941) in *Zeitschrift für Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*. There were also attempts to connect the golden calf with the lunar cult of the god Sîn, brought by the patriarchal fathers form Haran (and might be even reflected in the name of 'Sinai'). Oswalt (1973:19) connected the golden calf with the Egyptian representation of Amon-Re as a bull, 'the "Bull, chief of all the gods"'.

[6] The term 'calf' might be polemic for showing that the idol was 'impotent' and powerless.

[7] The same term is used in reference to the Passover in Ex. 12:14 and to the three principal events of Israel's religious calendar, in Ex. 23:14–17.

[8] The term ṣḥq – 'rising up to revel' (or 'to laugh, make fun') – in v.6 has a connotation of sexual play (see for example Gen. 26:8 and 39:14), which might imply sexual debauchery as well, and as such the break of the seventh commandment (adultery).

totally unacceptable not long before, makes the 'sin' of the golden calf so destructive: It is far more than the abandonment of Yhwh for foreign gods. Ex. 32 is…

> …an account of the transfer of the center of authority of faith in Yahweh from Moses and the laws and symbols he has announced to a golden calf without laws and without any symbols beyond itself. (Durham 1998:421f)

The total destruction of the golden calf (burnt, ground to powder, scattered on the water and drunk by the people, v.20) is a further indication of the dreadful nature of Israel's 'sin'. The absurdity of Israel's idol worship is described in Ps. 106:19f as exchanging the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass. Some students expressed their astonishment about Israel turning away from the covenant although the experience of God's goodness (the deliverance from slavery) and his power must have been still very recent (DOC-ex2#S02; #S07; #S16). One of them interpreted the people's 'forgetting' as a form of ingratitude (DOC-ex2#S16).

6.1.1.3 Reaction to 'sin'

God's reaction to the people's idolatry is that of 'burning anger' that is paralleled with Moses' anger in response once he realizes the gravity of Israel's action. Moses breaking the tablets (v.19) is often understood as displaying his anger (e.g. DOC-ex2#S14; #S16). The WBC suggests that the broken tablets are less an expression of Moses' anger than a symbol of the shattered relationship between Yhwh and his people Israel (Durham 1998:430). The NAC (Stuart 2006:586) underlines that breaking the tablets was a reasoned symbolic act 'done carefully, deliberately, and openly for the benefit of the Israelites', demonstrating a fact: the covenant is broken which is much more than a regrettable faux pas.

Confronted by Moses, Aaron tries to hide behind the people by blaming them for what has happened. Aaron's attempt reminded me of Gen. 3 when Adam and Eve refused to take responsibility for their action by blaming others. However, Aaron has no excuse. The absurd line about the calf 'coming out' of the fire by itself (v.24) underlines the hopelessness of his excuse. It also displays Aaron's weak leadership, as two students suggested (DOC-ex2#S07; #S16); he had

allowed the people 'to run wild', to become out of control (v.25). Thereby he left them vulnerable to the shaming mockery of their enemies.

6.1.1.4 Consequences

By the petition of Moses not to carry through with the destruction of his people, Yhwh tempers his fierce anger; he is moved with pity (vv.11-14). Yet, he does not waive his judgment which is later confirmed in the following chapter 33. The slaughter in the camp was not ordered by Yhwh which at first led me to assume that it needs to be understood as resulting from Moses' own anger (vv.26-29). Such brutality of the Levites is incomprehensible. That was also repeatedly expressed by the students (DOC-ex2#S02; #S03; #S11; #S14; #S16; #S18). They pointed out that in their understanding the Levites killing their own people was nothing short of treason; it was fratricide (DOC-ex2#S11). Some students expressed a certain empathy for Moses' order by pointing out that as the leader, Moses was dishonoured by his people and was thus authorized to impose sanctions (DOC-ex2#S07); disrespecting norms and rules (of a village, clan, family) deserves punishment depending on the gravity of the transgression (DOC-ex2#S12; #S14; #S18). The NAC suggests a more careful reading of v.27. Stuart points out that Moses' order to kill was not his angry reaction, but Yhwh's word. Moreover, the Levites going back and forth through the camp from one end to the other means 'carefully and systematically approaching everyone and finding out whether or not they intend to return to Yahweh, abandoning their idolatry' (Stuart 2006:589). Only the ones who did not repent but stayed committed to idolatry were killed even if they were relatives, friends or neighbours of the Levites.

The ordered killing is not the only deadly result of the Israelites' idolatry. The people's judgment by Yhwh is still to come. As I already pointed out in 5.3, from a Kongo culture perspective God's intervention is surprising (DOC-ex2#S03; #S12). God's closeness to the people per se is astonishing.

180

Dans ma culture ce qui est frappant c'est la manière avec laquelle Dieu est proche du peuple et qu'il entretien des relations permanentes avec ce peuple. Il a même la possibilité de faire des alliances avec les hommes, qui n'arrivent pas à respecter cette alliance.[9] (DOC-ex2#S06a)

Another student pointed out that '*Nzambi n'intervient pas dans les affaires des humains*'[10] (DOC-ex2#S12); it is thus surprising that Yhwh does. Another noted:

Il est clairement signifier ... que Dieu est touché par rapport au péché du peuple. Ce fait est pour nous très frappant, qu'un Dieu créateur de l'univers, omnipotent, omniprésent, immortel puisse être touché par un acte commis par des mortels.[11] (DOC-ex2#S03).

However astonishing from a Kongo perspective, Yhwh announces to Moses his punishment (v.34). Moses pleads for the people (vv.30-32; and again in 33:12ff). Yet God's response to Moses in v.33 makes clear that Yhwh cannot overlook what Israel has done. Moses' plea either to forgive his people or to blot him out of Yhwh's book, is not granted. According to the WBC (Durham 1998:432) 'the petition dramatizes the impossibility of the healing of relationship by anyone save the persons who have compromised it.' Moses cannot atone by sacrificing himself for 'sin' he did not commit. No one except Yhwh alone can do what Moses wants to accomplish.

The repeated pleas for forgiveness by Moses and Yhwh not accepting these, leaves the impression that Israel's 'sin' remains an ongoing problem. The question keeps hanging in the air whether the committed 'sin' has set something in motion that cannot be healed, restored or atoned for. Israel's transgression keeps looming in the background and seems to move toward some severe 'punishment' that is still to come (v.34): 'When the day comes for punishment, I will punish them for their sin.' It is not clear if the announced punishment is the plague mentioned in v.35. It is not clear either if the plague was sent right after its announcement or much later.

---

[9] English: 'What is striking in [from the perspective of] my culture is the way in which God is close to the people, maintaining ongoing relationships with these people. He even makes a covenant with the humans who fail to comply with this covenant.'

[10] English: 'Nzambi does not intervene in human affairs.'

[11] English: 'It is significant … that God is touched by the people's sin. This fact is very striking for us, that God who created the universe, omnipotent, omnipresent, immortal can be affected by an act committed by mortals.'

6.1.1.5 Impact on the continuation of the narrative

The narrative about the golden calf lingers on in the ensuing chapters 33-34. Repeated reference is made to the 'stiff-necked' people (Ex. 33:3, 5; 34:9). As a consequence of Ex. 32 Yhwh does not want to go with the people to the Promised Land, he wants to send a messenger to go before them instead (33:2f). Durham (1998:437):

> In the place of his Presence, there was to be only Absence. It is a punishment… that negates every announcement, every expectation, every instruction [given in the past].

The intended withdrawal of God's presence gives rise to abysmal grief (33:4-6)[12] and makes Moses again plead for forgiveness (33:12ff and again in 34:9).

In chapter 34 Moses makes new tablets and the Covenant is re-established, being repeatedly very explicit on idolatry issues underlining that Yhwh is a jealous God (34:1-15, 17-18). With Yhwh declaring that he will visit the iniquity of the parents upon the children to the third and fourth generation (34:7) one cannot stop thinking that there will be still some punishment to endure or some other consequences to bear for generations to come. From all this I understand Israel's idol worship as 'sin' of the most serious sort that has a far reaching impact on the people themselves, on Yhwh and on their relationship.

6.1.1.6 Terminology

Looking at the language used for describing the wider field within which 'sin' is understood, the following vocabulary can be derived from Ex. 32 (see Table 6.1-1):

---

[12] The term used for 'mourning' designates mourning for the dead (Brown, Driver & Briggs [BDB] 1977:5). And the ornaments or fancy dresses that are stripped off might suggest not just putting down joyful life, but even life as normal (see BDB p.725f).

Table 6.1-1: Vocabulary in Exodus 32

V.	English (NRSV)	Hebrew (translit.)	Comments
Vocabulary regarding the nature of 'sin'			
7	The people *have acted perversely...*	*šāḥaṯ*	Alternative translation: they *have behaved corruptly* or *caused trouble*. The verb describes destructive behaviour leading to damage (to ruin); when human beings are the responsible subjects of the verb it refers exclusively to culpable actions contrary to the divine will (see Conrad 1974-2006 [TDOT]).
8	... they have been quick to *turn aside* from the way that I commanded them.	*sûr*	to turn aside, deviate
9	The people is *stiff-necked.*		Phrase expresses obstinacy and stubborn-ness (also in Ex. 33:3, 5; 34:9; etc.)
22	The people are bent on *evil.*	*rāʿ*	The term appears in secular and theological contexts: bad water (2Kings 2:19), bad figs (Jer.24:2), loathsome sores (Job 2:7); morally wicked or evil persons and actions (Gen. 6:5; Deut. 13:5). The noun sometimes denotes concrete evil or disaster (1 Kings 14:10; Am. 3:6) as well as morally religious evil (Gen. 6:5; Isa. 57:1).
25	The people were *running wild.*	*pāraʿ*	Leaving unattended. In priestly law the verb refers to hair hanging loose (e.g. Lev. 21:10); the dishevelled hair is to be understood in the context of (im)purity.
21	...brought *great sin...*	*ḥăṭāʾâ ḡəḏōlâ*	*ḥāṭāʾ* repeatedly used in vv.30-34
Vocabulary regarding the reaction to 'sin' (consequences)			
10	Reaction of Yhwh and Moses: they burn with *anger.*	*ḥārâ ʾaph*	Common expression for being angry. The term *ʾaph* (anger) also means 'nose'. At times the nose plays a role in the descript-tion of anger: God was angry, smoke went up from his nostrils (Ps. 18:7f). In Ex. 15:8; Ps. 18:15; Job 4:9 there is a connection with anger and snorting.
12	To bring *disaster* on the people.	*rāʿâ*	harm, evil (see also v.22)
32f.	To *blot out of (erase from) the book*	*māḥâ*	The 'book' is a reference to a register of those loyal to Yhwh and thereby deserving his blessing (e.g. Ps. 69; 28; Isa. 4:3; Ezek.13:9; see Durham 1998:432)
35	Yhwh *sent a plague.*	*nāḡap*	to *strike* (it is not specified). In Ex.12:13 and 30:12 (and elsewhere) it means 'plague' or (divine) punishment
34	to *punish*	*pāqad*	literally to *visit* (for inspection)
Vocabulary regarding the restoration / forgiveness			

| 30 | to *atone* | *kāpar* | For the ritual of atonement see Lev. 16 |
| 32 | to *forgive* | *nāśā* | to *carry (away), to forget* |

6.1.1.7 Emerging theory

In the light of the leading question about the OT discourse on 'sin' I consider the following issues resulting from Ex. 32 as the most important:

- Ex. 32 identifies idolatry as 'sin'. The transfer of divine authority from the living God to a dead golden idol has severe destructive consequences.

- 'Sin' is understood as breaking the covenant between Yhwh and his people of Israel, shattering their relationship.

- God's reaction to 'sin' is that of 'burning anger'. Although God is reported to be moved with pity (v.14), he does not waive his judgment; he does not overlook 'sin' as if nothing had happened.

- The 'sin' by the people cannot be atoned for by Moses who is willing to sacrifice himself, but will affect generations to come.

- 'Sin' makes God withdraw his presence. The people's abysmal grief indicates the deadly consequences that will arise from God's absence.

- For describing 'sin' the Hebrew term *ḥāṭā* is used. It is understood as destructive behaviour, and as turning aside from God's instructions. Moreover 'sin' has to do with the human nature, being stiff-necked and bent on evil. 'Sin' is also associated with impurity ('running wild') and is understood as bringing harm and death to the community.

The following exegeses will show if the above findings are further supported and could be generalized for the OT understanding of 'sin'.

6.1.2 Joshua 7:1-26 – Achan's theft

The narrative of Josh. 7 was the first text on which my students worked exegetically. They followed the questions set up in the worksheet previously used in class (see Appendix 4). The focus was on the 'application' (point 4 in the worksheet) rather than on the theological exegesis. This is the reason why the exegetical insights presented in this chapter will mainly be my own rather than deriving from the students' papers.

Although most attention is paid to vv.10-26 it is important to understand the narrative of Achan's theft in the wider context to which I turn first.

6.1.2.1 Context of the narrative

As Figure 6.1-2 below shows, the text of Josh. 7:10-26 is embedded in a much bigger narrative; it is linked to the destruction of Jericho (Josh. 2; 5). The connection is made in 7:1 referring back to 6:18. Achan's theft is again embedded in another story, the capturing of Ai. The battle for the city is first lost because of Achan's 'sin', but is later successful because Achan's 'outrageous' action (7:15) is dealt with.

Figure 6.1-2: Context of Joshua 7:10-26
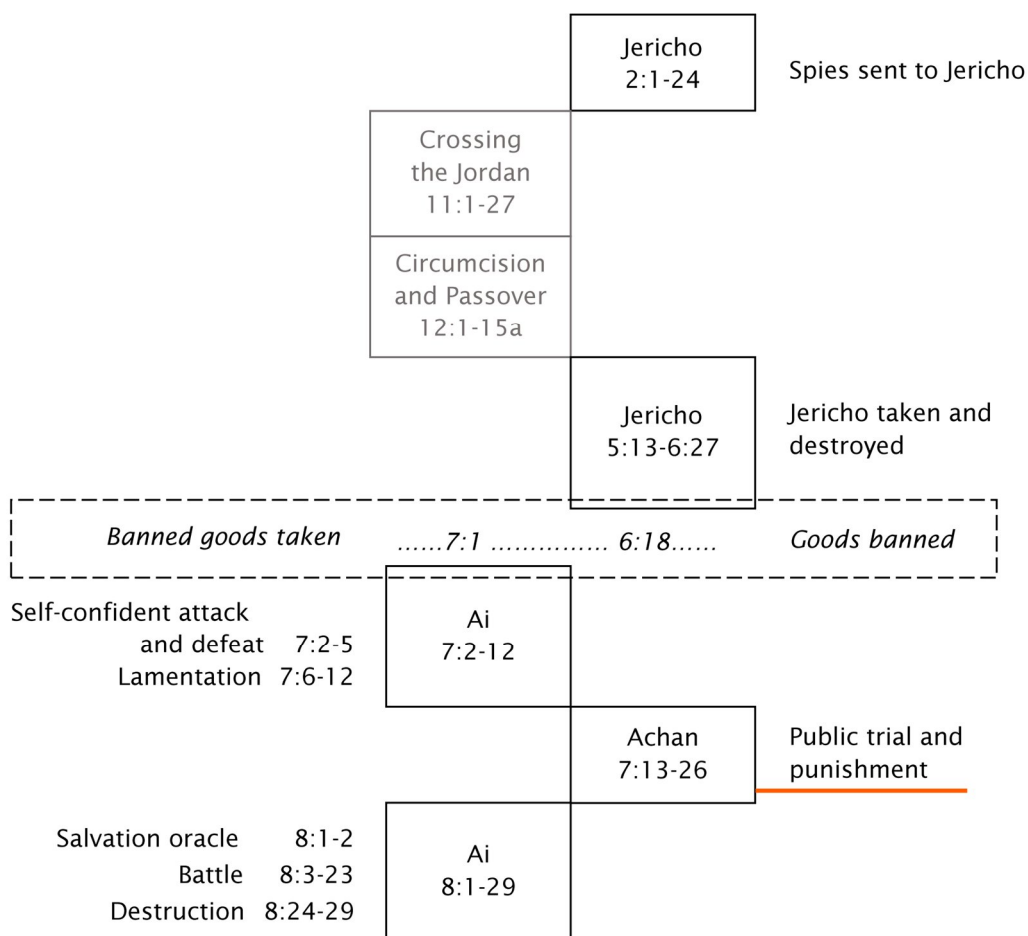
The narrative is introduced by the problem that caused the capture of Ai to fail (7:1a): The Israelites have been unfaithful to Yhwh's prohibition (6:18). What follows must thus be understood in the light of that stated problem. The second part of the introducing verse continues by setting down specific details of that problem and summarizes God's reaction. The unfaithfulness of Israel is then further addressed through six narrative scenes. The WBC (Butler

185

1998) subdivides the scenes as follows: 7:2-5 self-confident attack and defeat at Ai, 7:6-12 national lamentation, 7:13-26 public trial, 8:1-2 salvation oracle, 8:3-23 obedient battle against Ai, 8:24-29 destruction of Ai (see Figure 6.1-2 above). Butler (1998:79) points out that all of the scenes have their own form and tradition, and that they must be understood if the presented unit as a whole is to be fully appreciated. Because of the limitations set to the exegetical work in this chapter however, I will focus on the third scene, the public trial (vv.13-26) taking vv. 10-12 as its introductory explanation of what follows.

6.1.2.2 Nature of the 'sin' committed

Chapter 7 starts with stating the 'sin' committed that led to the defeat in Ai: The Israelites 'broke faith in regard to the devoted things in Jericho'. The use of the plural form stands out (lit.: '**they acted unfaithfully, the people of Israel**'). Although Israel's doing is immediately specified in terms of Achan's individual action, it is nonetheless noteworthy at this point because it implies important insights regarding the OT view of communal and individual accountability. This will be discussed in more detail in section 6.3.3, p.220 below.

The spoil of the battle in Jericho was declared 'sacred' (or banned, devoted to Yhwh); it must not be privately used but handed over to the sanctuary (6:19, 24). Yet Achan took what belonged to Yhwh, which was referred to as 'breaking faith'[13]. Israel's 'sin' lies foremost in transgressing God's covenant by taking into their possession what belonged to Yhwh. In v.15 the 'transgression of the covenant' is paralleled by 'doing an outrageous thing'. It is only in v.20 that Achan confesses the 'sin' as his doing; the previous verses refer to it as Israel's. The intertwining of personal and communal responsibility for committed 'sin' flashes up again at the

---

[13] According to Butler the term used here (*māʿal*) usually refers to the trust relationship between persons or with God and signifies a break in that relationship. In the passage here the unfaithfulness refers to a thing (the ban).Butler points out that Josh.7:1 is the only passage where the linguistic reference is to a thing rather than to persons. He also explains that the term is a typical exilic and postexilic expression, which he takes as a pointer to Deuteronomist redactors having worked on the text.

occasion of the punishment of Achan that includes his sons and daughters (v.24f) on which I will further comment in 6.1.2.4 below).

6.1.2.3 Reaction to 'sin'

Yhwh's reaction to Israel's 'sin' in Ex. 32 was 'burning with anger' which is also the case in Josh. 7:1. Another parallel is found in 7:12 where Yhwh says that he will be with the people no more. The key promise given to Joshua is God's presence (Josh. 1:5, 9; 3:7). In my understanding God's withdrawal implies that transgressing the covenant threatens to thoughtlessly squander all of Yhwh's life giving and sustaining promises to Israel, most importantly God's presence with his people.

The 'sin' committed in Josh. 7 does not seem to be as hopelessly devastating as it was in Ex. 32 however. Here a big 'if' is declared. If the people will destroy the banned spoil in their midst, they will again experience God's presence. The WBC (Butler 1998:85) puts it quite simply: Israel must choose between the presence of God (v.12) and the presence of the 'sacred things' set apart for Yhwh (v.13).

6.1.2.4 Consequences

The radical consequence for Achan is his capital punishment. It is not to be ignored however, that Achan's 'sin' has far more consequences than the death penalty for himself. Achan's theft has made the camp of Israel greatly vulnerable: They are 'unable to stand before their enemies; they turn their backs to their enemies' (7:8, 12).[14] For re-establishing their position (ability to stand before their enemies and conquer Ai) the taken devoted things must be destroyed.

---

[14] Side note regarding v.9: Joshua fears that Israel's fame and reputation will disappear from the land. As a reader of the story today I cannot but frown at the commander-in-chief's (Joshua's) lamentation. Is that all he is concerned with, the loss of fame because of thirty-six men killed out of 3.000? Maybe the sarcastic touch and ironic tone resonating in these verses are intentional, as Butler (1998:82) suggests.

Finding the offender is not left to human inquiry (v.14). Although it is not explicitly reported in the text, Butler suggests that the process involved the casting of the lot.[15] And Yhwh captures the thief.

The death sentence is carried out immediately (v.25): Achan and his livestock are stoned to death, his possessions and the stolen goods burned. Whether the family suffered the same fate is uncertain because the plural form in v.25 could refer to Achan's livestock and possessions only, but also to the 'sons and daughters'.[16] Blair (1992:291) points out that Deut. 24:16 prohibits the death penalty for family members of a malefactor unless they were accomplices in the offence committed.[17]

The vagueness of the Hebrew text was neither picked up by the students nor by me (also Hess 1996 [TOTC]) when I first read the narrative; only by reading it repeatedly did I notice. If Achan's family was stoned without having anything to do with the theft it would indeed be deeply shocking, as the students pointed out in unison (DOC-hw2#S02 – #S18). Exegetes take various perspectives. These verses could be interpreted as displaying the corporate nature of the individual (or 'corporate guilt' in Woudstra 1981:130 [NICOT]) which implies that the 'sin' of an individual is understood as involving the group.[18] Butler (1998:86) in the WBC takes a

---

[15] The language used here – 'you shall come forward tribe by tribe…they shall come near by clans' – is the same as for example in 1 Sam. 10:20: 'Then Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot. He brought the tribe of Benjamin near by its families, and the family of the Matrites was taken by lot…'

[16] Interesting to note that Achan's wife is never mentioned.

[17] The TOTC (Hess 1996) and the NICOT (Woudstra 1981) suggest that the family was stoned to death as well. The latter points out that the family shared in Achan's fate due to their common knowledge of the crime; the goods were hidden in the parental tent.

[18] The 'corporate nature of the individual' is part of what Knierim (1965) called *Ganzheitsdenken* (holistic thinking). Knierim lists other authors writing on that kind of thinking as well. There are among others Daube (2008:153ff) who called it 'communal responsibility', Scharbert (1957; 1958) who named it *Gemeinschaftshaftung* (joint liability or liability of the community), and Robinson (1981) who called it 'corporate personality'. Robinson, drawing from Pedersen (1926; 1940), suggested that the OT Israelites viewed themselves 'as one living whole… of which no member could be touched without all the members suffering.' He even goes that far to say that the individual persons of a group were so bound up together that they built a physical unity, 'that they could be treated as parts of one common life.' (Robinson 1981:28) That unity was not understood figuratively, but as ontological reality, based on blood-ties (real or fictitious by a blood-covenant or adoption). Robinson called that kind of unity

different view. According to him, a more likely explanation is to be seen in the conception of holiness.

> The spoils of war are devoted to God and are holy (cf. Josh. 6:19). As such they must be given over to God. Their holiness contaminates man. If they are brought into the camp they contaminate the entire camp, so that it must be sanctified, made holy (7:13). Anyone who had come into contact with the goods was contaminated and had to be removed from the community to protect the community.[19]

Holiness is also linked to the OT understanding of the community. Because the community aspect turned out to be decisive in the Kongo culture, I will further discuss the issue of communal and individual accountability in 6.3.3 below (p.220).

Because Israel rigorously removes the contaminating 'sin' from their midst, God turns from his burning anger (v.26). With the banned goods no longer in their possession, Yhwh can again move among them. The WBC points out that 'only as a holy people can Israel have the holy God with her' (Butler 1998:86).

Israel shall never forget the incident. In order to keep up the memory, the geographic site is named after Achan: The valley is called *Achor* – 'Trouble' – thereafter.[20]

6.1.2.5 Impact on the continuation of the narrative

Now that the problem that has caused the defeat in Ai is solved, Joshua and the Israelites turn their attention again towards the capture of the city: Chapter 8 begins where 7:10 left off. Ai is taken and the covenant broken by Achan's 'sin' gets renewed (8:30ff).

6.1.2.6 Terminology

Looking at the language describing the semantics used in connection with 'sin', the following vocabulary can be noted (see Table 6.1-2 below):

'corporate personality' and suggested that it affected the whole relation of Israelites to one another and to Yhwh (p.34).

[19] Butler refers to Porter (1965), 'The Legal Aspects of the Concept of "Corporate Personality" in the Old Testament,' in *Vetus Testamentum*.

[20] *Achor* is a word play on Achan's name. 'Trouble' is *ʿāḵôr*; the verb *ʿāḵar* is used in v.25: 'Why did you bring **trouble** on us? The Lord is bringing **trouble** on you today.' In 1Chr.2:7 his name is reported being *Achar* – 'the troubler of Israel' – (the LXX consistently reads *Achar* instead of Achan in all occurrences) which makes the pun even more exact (see Butler 1998 [WBC]; Mosis 1974-2006 [TDOT]).

Table 6.1-2: Vocabulary in Joshua 7

V.	English (NRSV)	Hebrew (translit.)	Comments
Vocabulary regarding the nature of 'sin'		
1	The Israelites *broke faith...*	*māʿal*	To act unfaithfully, treacherously. The act of *māʿal* can direct itself either toward human beings or toward God. (Ringgren 1974-2006)
	...in regard of the *devoted things*.	*ḥērem*	In context of Josh.7 the term is to be understood in the context of the sacred, in the sense of something removed from the sphere of the profane and set apart for Yhwh. (Lohfink 1974-2006)
	Achan *took* of the devoted things.	*lāqaḥ*	to take and carry away
11	Israel has *sinned*.	*ḥāṭāʾ*	Discussion of the term follows below in sub-section 6.2.2.1
11,15	They have *transgressed* Yhwh's covenant	*ʿābar*	To go on one's way, to pass through. The verb used here is the same as used to refer to Israel passing over the Jordan (Josh. 3-4; 7:7)
11	They have *stolen*.	*lāqaḥ*	see v.1
11	They have *acted deceitfully*	*kāḥaš*	In the religious realm, the group of words serves primarily to express denial or rejection of Yahweh (see Schunk 1974a-2006:134).
15	...having *done an outrageous thing* in Israel.	*nəbēlâ*	foolishness, folly
20	I am the one who *sinned* against Yhwh Lord God of Israel.	*ḥāṭāʾ*	see v.11
21	I *coveted* (the things) and took them.	*rʾh*	to see (with one's eyes)
25	Why did you bring *trouble* on us?	*ʿākôr*	Trouble. For the play on words see 6.1.2.4 above.
Vocabulary regarding the reaction to 'sin' (consequences)		
1	Reaction of Yhwh: He *burned with anger*	*ḥārâ ʾaph*	The verb 'to burn' (*ḥārâ*) used in combination with anger intensifies the described anger (*ʾaph*). On anger see also Table 6.1-1 (p.183)
25	Yhwh is *bringing trouble* on you today.	*ʿākôr*	see v.25 above
	All Israel *stoned* him (Achan) to death.	*rāgam*	To stone (to death). In Leviticus the verb denotes the means of execution provided for capital punishment. (Schunk 1974b-2006)
	They *burned* them *with fire*, cast stones on them, raised over him a	*śrp̄*	To burn. It describes destruction (fire) carried out regarding people and objects

	great heap of stones that remains to this day.		characterized by hostility, ritual taboo, or particular abominableness. It differs from *bʿr* that refers to the common verb 'to burn' (fire). (Rüterswörden 1974-2006)
Vocabulary regarding the restoration / forgiveness			
13	proceed to *sanctify* yourselves	*qdš*	In the verb form used here (*piel*) it means to bring something/someone into the condition of holiness/consecration according to the cultic regulations. (Kornfeld & Ringgren 1974-2006)
26	Yhwh *turned from* his burning anger.	*šûḇ*	to turn away from/to return (in combination with 'anger' it means someone's anger lets up)

6.1.2.7 Emerging theory

The most important things to learn from Josh.7 regarding the OT understanding of 'sin' are as follows:

- The text displays the intertwining of an individual's act and the community's accountability (Israel broke faith, not just Achan) which points towards the issue of the 'corporate nature of the individual' in Hebrew thought.

- Achan's 'sin' is understood as a transgression of the covenant to which God reacts with anger. Yhwh's presence is at stake.

- 'Sin' is understood as rendering the transgressor unholy, contaminating the whole community. Thus, the unholy must be radically removed so that God can again live among the people.

- The individual's 'sin' has consequences for the whole community and leaves Israel vulnerable to the enemies.

- Yhwh intervenes by withholding his blessing (thus the defeat at Aï) and by identifying the culprit.

- For describing 'sin' the Hebrew term *ḥāṭāʾ* is used. It is understood as rejecting or denying Yhwh and is paralleled with foolishness.

Parallels to the text in Ex. 32 can clearly be seen already. In order to be able to analyse the findings of the OT understanding of 'sin' more comprehensively, I will proceed with yet another text: 2 Sam. 11-12 (David's adultery).

6.1.3 2 Samuel 11-12:25 – David's adultery

In contrast to Josh. 7 the text of 2 Sam. 11-12:25 was studied by some students in the course of a term paper (DOC-ex1#S04; #S09; #S15; #S17). Since only four students chose this text for

their paper, the references to their exegetical insights given in the following section will not be as extensive as I originally anticipated.

The students' work discussed the whole narrative of David's adultery, covering almost two chapters. Because I consider the passage to be too extensive to be treated fully within the limits of this section however, my focus will be on the verdict given in 12:7-15a.

6.1.3.1 Context of the narrative

The background for David's adultery and its consequences is the war against the Ammonites (10:1-12:31). Context and structure of the narrative is straight forward (see Figure 6.1-3 below).

Figure 6.1-3: Context and structure 2 Samuel 11-12
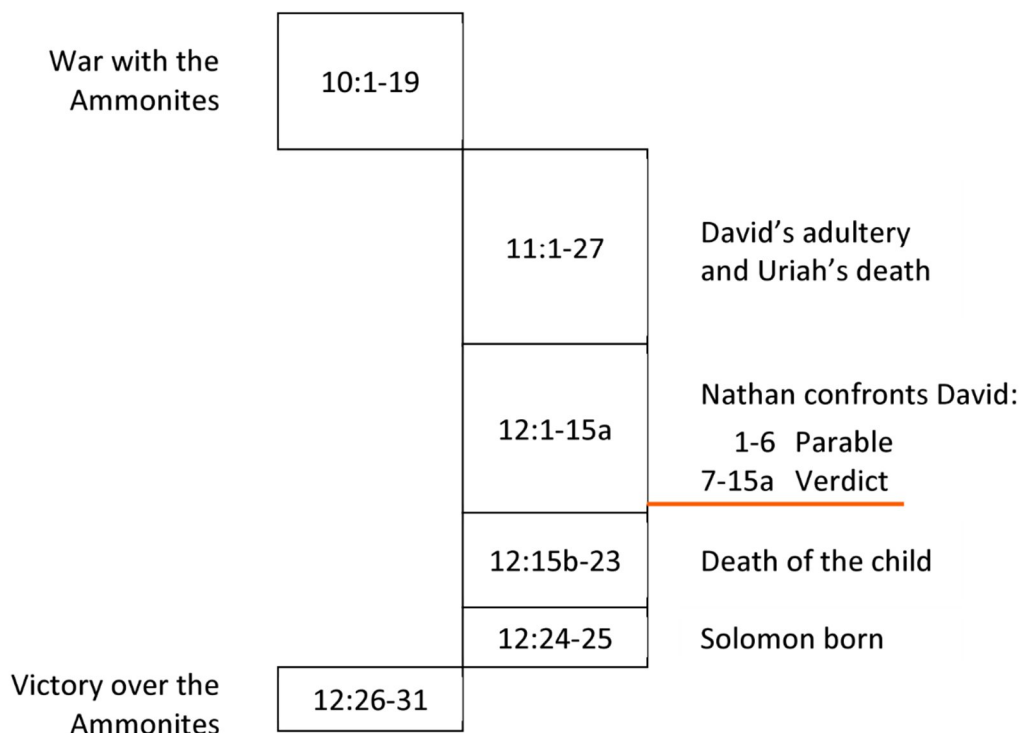
The text on which I concentrate in this section is God's 'verdict' on David's action (12:7-15a), delivered by the prophet Nathan; the wider biblical context is nonetheless important for the insights drawn from 12:7-15a. Underlying the account of 2 Sam. 11-12, unseen but nevertheless foundational, is Israel's covenant law, specifically the Decalogue, most prominently the seventh commandment (Ex. 20:14), 'You shall not commit adultery.' The TOTC Baldwin 2008 explains

192

that Israel 'hedged marriage about with safeguards, such as monetary payments which had to be returned in the event of divorce.' A man could have more than one wife, but he could not with impunity have a married woman; this was the law of Yhwh and thus part of the social structure, known to everybody in Israel.[21] According to Baldwin the main question to which the narrative had to respond was not whether adultery was wrong – this was abundantly clear to everybody – but how to deal justly with the circumstances to which adultery gave rise.

The narrative starts with the note that it happened during springtime, the time when kings usually go out to battle. This was however what David did not do (11:1); he was at home instead, sleeping with a married woman. Although the NAC suggests that this is not necessarily to be understood as dereliction of duty (Bergen 1996:350) I understand the undertone of 11:1 as ironic, maybe alluding to the understanding that idleness can help to draw someone into 'sin' (an issue repeatedly mentioned the Proverbs). A student noted:

> *Il est étonnant et frappant de voir un chef d'armée resté chez lui ... Il s'est fait séduire trop rapidement et violemment, jusqu'à coucher avec la femme sans penser à son honneur.* [22] (DOC-ex1#S15)

Another looked at David's behaviour from his cultural perspective and explained that it could only lead to destruction and deconsecration of the whole people and David himself:

> *Ce qui frappe et étonne c'est que un roi puisse commettre l'adultère... . Dans la culture Kongo en général, un roi... ou un chef de village, de tribu ou clan est sacré et incarne en lui des esprits des ancêtres pour le bien-être de la population ou du clan, etc. Commettre un tel acte, c'est attiré en soi [sic] et envers la population la malédiction, la désacralisation.* [23] (DOC-ex1#S17)

Quite in contrast to the King of Israel is Uriah[24], Bathsheba's husband: He dutifully serves in the military, abstaining from homely pleasures such as eating and drinking and lying with his

---

[21] One of the students studying the text explained a similar thing being valid in the Kongo tradition. The clan or village chief (or king) could have as many wives as he wanted, as long as he respected the marriage bonds. (DOC-ex1#S17)

[22] English: 'It is surprising and striking to see an army chief staying home ... He becomes seduced too quickly and violently, just to sleep with a woman without thinking of his honour.'

[23] English: 'What is striking and surprising why a king would commit adultery... In the Kongo culture in general, a king ... or a chief of a village, tribe or clan is sacred and embodies the spirits of the ancestors for the welfare of the people, clan, etc. Committing such an act attracts curses and deconsecration to himself and to the people.'

[24] Brueggemann (1990:275) points out that the whole narrative in 2 Sam. 11 portrays Uriah as a principled man. Uriah, the Hittite, a foreigner, not even a child of the Torah, acts faithfully, very much in contrast to David.

wife, although he gets invited to do just that (11:8-11). David however stays at home, sees Bathsheba, and sleeps with her which gets her pregnant. Because David's scheme to make it look as if Uriah was the father is not successful, he orders Joab, his commander-in-chief, to arrange Uriah's death in the war against the Ammonites.

A student noted that it is incomprehensible that the announcement of Bathsheba's pregnancy pushed King David to act like '*un homme vulgaire*' (vulgar/rude man), namely to kill the husband (DOC-ex1#S15). The biblical text does not say what the acceptance of responsibility for Bathsheba's pregnancy would have meant for Israel's King. With Uriah dead however, David was free to marry Bathsheba.

6.1.3.2 Nature of the 'sin' committed

Although David did not touch Uriah, he had engineered his death from a distance and was thus guilty of murder as if he had killed his servant with his own sword. David could have argued that he was not guilty of murder, because he did not kill Uriah himself. According to the letter of the Law, David could have been declared not guilty. He was however judged differently. For murder the death penalty was to be imposed (Ex. 21:12-14). How could David possibly escape such?

That David's actions were serious transgressions of the Law is shown in the message delivered by Nathan. The NAC suggests that by using the words 'Yhwh, the God of Israel' (12:7), Nathan was establishing the judgment of David in a covenantal context. From Nathan's perspective, David's adultery was a violation of God's covenant with Israel (Bergen 1996:356). What David did was evil in God's eyes, despising his word (12:9). King Saul once did the same: he rejected the word of Yhwh (1 Sam. 15:23). David had witnessed what had happened to Saul as the result; now he was under sentence himself. Would he suffer the same consequences as his predecessor?

194

In 12:10, despising Yhwh's word is equalled with despising God himself which implies that David's adultery was understood as directed towards God (12:19); it was 'sin' against Yhwh (12:13), and Yhwh intervened.

6.1.3.3 Reaction to 'sin'

What David did 'displeased the Lord', and God sends the prophet Nathan to confront David (12:1). The divine intervention surprised the students (DOC-ex1#S09). More surprisingly to me however is David who faces up to the fact that he is without excuse and deserves the verdict he has just passed on the rich man in Nathan's story (12:5): he deserves to die. David confesses his guilt openly before the prophet (12:13). From my perspective this is extraordinary. Baldwin (2008) points out that the king's confession was actually to be understood as a loss of face. Nathan was God's mouthpiece but still one of David's subjects. Nathan's response to David's confession sounds logical (12:14): 'The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die.' God's forgiveness however cannot be taken for granted. The law declared that all murderers and adulterers must die (Ex. 21:12; Lev. 20:10; etc.), yet Yhwh declares that that will not happen to David. According to the NAC (Bergen 1996:359) there can only be one reason: God's compassion and grace.

God's immediate forgiveness is also extraordinary because it was granted without requiring David first to make animal sacrifices or give gifts to Yhwh (Bergen 1996:358). It also points toward an important difference from the case of Saul who had 'rejected' God's word as well. According to Baldwin, David's confession and forgiveness is the clearest indication that in the most essential relationship of all – that of submission to Yhwh – David was different from Saul. David accepts his guilt and repents without looking for any excuse. In my view this incident in David's life shows why David was called 'a man after God's heart' (1 Sam. 13:14). Psalm 51

shows clearly that his repentance was not just lip service (as Saul's seemed to be in 1 Sam. 15:24f), but sincere regret and submission to Yhwh (for more details on Ps.51 see 6.1.4 below).[25]

David's repentance however does not mean that the judgments which Yhwh has announced through Nathan have been annulled; the consequences for having 'utterly scorned the Lord' (12:14) still need to be faced.

6.1.3.4 Consequences

In 12:10f Nathan explains that the repercussions of his 'sin' will affect his family for years to come. The punishment that Yhwh meted out reflects the crimes committed: Bloodshed ('the sword'[26]) will never depart from David's house (12:10) and Yhwh will raise up trouble against David from within his own family. As far as his wives are concerned, he will lose them to a companion, all Israel witnessing it (12:11). The continuing narrative will show that the consequences worked out during David's lifetime, bringing tragedy and loss to mark the later years of his reign (Baldwin 2008): Amnon's violent death, ordered by his half-brother Absalom revenging his sister's rape by Amnon (2 Sam.13); Absalom's rebellion and his appropriation of David's harem (2 Sam. 15:1-12; 16:21f)[27]; Absalom's murder by David's loyal commander-in-chief, Joab (2 Sam. 18); Adonijah's attempt at taking the throne (1 King 1-2).[28]

Verse 12:15b attributes the sickness of the child directly to Yhwh and thus associates the illness of the child with the 'sin' of his father David. The WBC suggests that David's 'sin' was transferred to the child who dies instead of David, and that therefore the offender could be

---

[25] It is to point out that not all commentators accept David as the author of Psalm 51.

[26] According to 2 Sam. 11:24 Uriah was not killed by the sword but shot by an archer. As suggested by Anderson (1998:163 [WBC]), the 'sword' might not to be taken in its very literal sense. I consider 'the sword' referring more generally to bloodshed or killing/murder.

[27] Anderson (1998 [WBC]) suggests that v.11 is a prophecy after the event in order to provide a theological interpretation of Absalom's rebellion and taking of David's wives. Anderson does not present any evidence for his interpretation however.

[28] These events were also noted by the students as consequences resulting from David's 'sin' (DOC-ex1#S04; #S15; #S17). Guthrie (1992:370) suggest the bloodshed (purge) ordered by Athaliah in 2 Kings 11 to be one of those consequences as well. The family members killed were indeed Davidic descendants.

regarded as forgiven. According to Anderson 'this must be understood in the light of the existing concept of the unitary nature of the family or its corporate responsibility'[29] (1998:163). He draws on the New English Bible (NEB) that paraphrases v.13b ('The Lord has put away your sin' [NRSV]) by 'the Lord has laid on another the consequence of your sin'.[30] Anderson refers to McCarter (1984) who notes on v.13 that 'sin cannot simply be forgiven: It must be atoned for', which implies that from his perspective the child's death is to be understood as atonement. I thought of Anderson's suggestion being provocative. I take a more cautious stance toward the understanding of 'sin' being 'transferred' to the child and its death being an 'atonement'. The text itself says that the child has to die because David 'utterly scorned the Lord'.

Bergen highlights that the child's death on the seventh day (v.18) is of great significance. The circumcision of male children, the physical sign of identification with Yhwh's covenant, was not done until the eighth day (Lev. 12:3).

> 'David's son was conceived as a result of David's contempt for the Lord's covenant … so it was painfully fitting that the child should be permanently excluded from Israel's covenant community' (Bergen 1996:359)

I acknowledge that the innocent child's death is rather disturbing. Two of the four students working on the text found the issue incomprehensible as well (DOC-ex1#S04; #S17); unfortunately they did not offer any further reflections on the issue. The two other students did not mention it as being startling or difficult to understand (DOC-ex1#S09; #S15), which I thought interesting. I interpreted their silence in this regard as further validation of the propositions presented in 5.5 on page 173 (see proposition #1-#3) stating that wrongdoing affects the whole family and opens a door for death, diseases and curses to enter the community. From a Kongo culture perspective, the death of David's child would thus not be surprising.

Although I cannot explain comprehensively the declaration of forgiveness and the child still dying because of that very 'sin' declared forgiven, I came to understand that David's 'sin'

---

[29] The idea of the corporate responsibility of the family to which Anderson refers, originates from the works by Rogerson (1978; 1985).

[30] The NEB (NT published 1961, OT in 1970) was revised in 1989. 2 Sam. 12:13 still reads as quoted above.

being put away (12:13) is to be interpreted as Baldwin suggests: Forgiveness does not mean that

Yhwh's judgment has been annulled; the consequences of the wrongdoing still have to be faced.

The story of David's adultery, a 'tale of alienation and judgment' (Brueggemann

1990:284), does not end with the painful and deadly consequences of David's 'sin' however. A

brief and stunning note of another son's birth is made (12:24f). And **this** birth is marked by

Yhwh's love, not judgment. What a gesture of God's grace.

6.1.3.5 Impact on the continuation of the narrative

The long-term consequences of David's 'sin' are described in 2 Sam. 12:10-12 (see previous

sub-section). The story line left off in 2 Sam. 11:1 – the report on the war with the Ammonites –

is picked up again in 12:26-31. The ensuing chapter 13 again ties into the solemn prophecy from

12:10f. It is the rape of David's daughter Tamar by her half-brother Amnon and the deadly

revenge taken by Absalom, Tamar's brother, leaving the reader in a rather depressed mood.

6.1.3.6 Terminology

This section will concentrate on the language describing the semantics of 'sin' found in 2 Sam.

12:7-15a (see following Table 6.1-3).

Table 6.1-3: Vocabulary in 2 Samuel 12:7-15a

V.	English (NRSV)	Hebrew (translit.)	Comments
Vocabulary regarding the nature of 'sin'			
9	Why have you *despised* the word of the Lord…	*bāzâ*	to despise, to show disdain. The term expresses ideas antithetical to respect (see Görg 1974-2006 [TDOT])
	…to *do what is evil* in his sight?	*ʿāśâ hāraʿ*	do (the) evil (on the term *rāʿ* see Table 6.1-1 (p.183)
10	You have *despised* me.	*bāzâ*	see v.9
13	I have *sinned* against the Lord.	*ḥāṭāʾ*	more details see 6.2.2.1 below

14	You have *utterly scorned* the Lord.	*nāʾaṣ*	Basic meaning: to disparage, to disrespect (Ruppert 1974-2006 [TDOT]). Here the verb is preceded by an Infinitive Absolute intensifying the meaning.
	Vocabulary regarding the reaction to 'sin' (consequences)		
11	Yhwh will raise up *trouble* against you.	*rāʿă*	evil, calamity (same term as used in v.9)
	Vocabulary regarding the restoration / forgiveness		
13	The Lord has *put away your sin...*	*ʿāḇar ḥaṭṭāʾt*	to pass by/over your 'sin'; in the *hiphil*-form: to remove, take away (Fuhs 1974-2006 [TDOT]). Same term used in Josh. 7:11, 15 (see Table 6.1.2-1), but different context.
	...you shall not die.	*môṭ*	to die (also v.14)

6.1.3.7 Emerging theory

The following insights on the OT understanding of 'sin' emerge from the above:

- 'Sin' is identified with despising God's word which means despising God himself.
- David's adultery and act of murder are clearly understood as being directed against God.
- Repentance and declaring the forgiveness of the 'sin' committed does not mean that the consequences all are annulled.
- 'Sin' affects the whole family immediately (in terms of sickness and death), but also over generations. Moreover it leaves a mark on David's life.
- For describing 'sin' the Hebrew term *ḥāṭāʾ* is used again. It is understood as deeply disrespecting Yhwh and having evil, calamity and death in tow.

Closely linked to the text of 2 Sam. 11-12 is Psalm 51 whose author is probably David himself. Although the authorship of David might be disputed (see Tate 1998), the psalm itself claims to be David's response to his own 'sin' of adultery; the introductory words of the text itself are unambiguous. Thus I consider it suitable to look at Ps. 51, which I will do in the following.

6.1.4 Psalm 51 – David's prayer for forgiveness and restoration

The exegesis of Ps. 51, focusing on vv.1-12, was done in class (with the theology students) for which I chose a different approach. In order to have a better overview of the text, we ordered the different parts (phrases) into a table, putting the Hebrew terms for 'sin' as well as the re-occurring

themes into different columns (see Table 6.1-4 below). The resulting overview turned out to be

a visual help to better understand David's view on 'sin'.

Table 6.1-4: Text of Psalm 51 re-ordered[31]

	Hebrew terms used for 'sin'					
	'transgression' *pešaʿ*	'iniquity' *ʿāwōn*	'sin' *ḥāṭāʾ*			
	Consequences					
	defilement			profundity	God's presence	other (worship)
To the leader. A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.						
[1] Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy…	…blot out my transgression (*pešaʿ*)!	[2] Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity (*ʿāwōn*)…	…and cleanse me from my sin (*ḥāṭāʾ*).			
	[3] For I know my transgres-sion (*pešaʿ*),…		…and my sin (*ḥāṭāʾ*) is ever before me.			
			[4] Against you, you alone, have I sinned (*ḥāṭāʾ*), and done what is evil in your sight, …			
…so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.				[5] Indeed, I was born…		
		…guilty (*ʿāwōn*), …	…a sinner (*ḥāṭāʾ*)…	…when my mother conceived me.		

---

[31] The verse numbers are according to the NRSV. In many other versions the verse numbers are different.

				6 You desire truth in the inward being, therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.		
	7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.				(hyssop → God's presence; cult/worship)	
						8 Let me hear joy and gladness, let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
			9 Hide your face from my sins (ḥāṭāʾ), …			
		…and blot out all my iniquities (ʿāwōn).				
10 O God, …	…create in me a clean…			…heart, and put a new and right spirit within me.	11 Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.	12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, …
				…and sustain in me a willing spirit.		

By looking at each column at a time we gained insights regarding the understanding of 'sin' that could be summarized as follows (see FN_Ms#09).

(1) The psalm uses three different Hebrew terms for 'sin' – *pešaʿ* ('transgression'), *ʿāwōn* ('iniquity'), *ḥāṭāʾ* ('sin') – that seemed to be parallel. These terms are completed by further description of wrongdoing as being 'what is **evil** in God's eyes' (v.4).

(2) The writer of the psalm experiences 'sin' as something from which he needs to be cleansed. 'Wash me, cleanse me, purge me,' he asks God (vv.1, 2, 7, 9, 10).[32]

(3) 'Sin' is understood as being committed against Yhwh (v.4). Kidner underlines that 'sin' can be against oneself and against one's neighbour, 'but the flouting of God is always the length and breadth of it' (1973:190)

(4) The description of the wrongdoer as being born a 'sinner' (v.5) seems to refer to the understanding that 'sin' is not only an act, but also a (human) condition that cannot be healed or mended by humans (v.6); only God is able to transform, to cleanse the heart and renew the spirit (vv.7, 10). God desiring truth in the 'inward being' and teaching wisdom in the 'secret heart' is like an alternative program needed deep within the human being.[33]

(5) The reference made to hyssop in v.7 suggests that the 'sinner' cannot stay in God's presence and is excluded from the congregation (because of defilement). The law prescribed that the hyssop plant was to be used in purification rituals of lepers (Lev.14) and of those who had touched a corpse (Num. 19:6, 18). During the sojourn in the wilderness, unclean persons were excluded from the camp and had to stay outside, away from 'where Yhwh dwelled among the Israelites' (Num. 5:3). Thus they were cut off from the cult and worship, even from God's presence; by the purification rituals they were cleansed and reintegrated into the congregation (see also Sprinkle 2000). According to Tate (1998) the connection to the purification rituals are only to be understood metaphorically in this psalm. The understanding of the writer that 'sin' cuts off from the presence of God however is still valid (v.11).

---

[32] The TOTC points out that the metaphor used in v.2 – 'wash me thoroughly' – is a verb connected with the laundering of clothes, as if David is comparing himself to a foul garment needing to be washed (Kidner 1973:190).

[33] Both Hebrew terms translated by the NRSV by 'inward being' and 'secret heart' are very uncertain and disputed. The only other occurrence of the first one is in Job 38:36 where the NRSV translates by 'inward parts'. According to the WBC (Tate 1998) traditional interpretations understand the term as 'heart' or 'kidneys', with reference to the innermost part of a human being.

(6) 'Sin' also affects the offender's emotions: joy and gladness are gone (v.8), having consequences for the person's well-being, (inner) strength and even health (v.8).[34]

Having summarized the findings emerging from Ps. 51 I consider the exegetical part as completed. What follows in the next section is the presentation of insights resulting from brief word studies that are meant to complement the exegetical work above.

6.2 Word studies

As the varied vocabulary used in the four passages above suggests, the OT Hebrew language offers a wide variety of terms for describing 'the breadth and depth of the failure of the people of God' (Goldingay 2006:257). What is today robustly translated by 'sin' is the result of a long process of transformation and systematization.[35] The texts in Ex. 32, Josh. 7 and 2 Sam. 12 all use ḥāṭāʾ designating the 'sin' committed. The language of the OT however does not know one exclusive term for 'sin', but we find a variety of terms which is displayed in Ps. 51 (see Table 6.1-4, p.200). Any attempt at encapsulating the notion of 'sin' in a single lexical entry must fail because of at least two reasons. First, the OT presents a whole series of images describing 'sin' that cannot be pressed into a definite, unambiguous term or phrase. Second, the Hebrew use of words is synthetic in character which can be discovered in the use of parallelisms[36]. In order to describe an issue properly, in parallelisms complementary words related in meaning are juxtaposed, rather than clearly differentiated and determined (von Rad 1972:53; Wolff 1974:8).[37]

---

[34] The 'crushed bones' (v.8) might refer to an illness, or to mental and spiritual distress caused by guilt. According to the WBC the term 'bones' occurs with ideas of health and well-being (e.g., Ps. 34:21; Job 20:11; Prov. 15:30; Isa. 66:14) as well as with ideas of sickness or woe (e.g., Ps. 6:3; 32:2; 38:4; Job 30:30; 38:4). The 'crushed bones' may be understood as referring to overpowering spiritual remorse. It could also involve psychosomatic elements (Tate 1998:22).

[35] An important step in the systematization process was made by the Greek translation of the OT. The Septuagint (LXX) simplified the variety of the Hebrew terms for 'sin' and translated them throughout by the semantic fields of ἁμαρτία (hamartia; sin), ἀνομία (anomia; lawlessness) and ἀδικία (adikia; injustice, unright-eousness), reducing 'sin' to the field of the law losing the complex, many-facetted features of the concept. See more statistic details in TDOT (Koch 1974b-2006:562) and other encyclopaedias.

[36] Parallelism is 'the repetition of the same or related semantic content and/or grammatical structure in consecutive lines or verses.' (Berlin 1992:155). The use of parallelisms is a typical text style in the wisdom literature and the Psalms (but not only there).

[37] The Semitic parallelism is also called 'stereometry of expression' (von Rad 1972:27 referring to Landsberger & von Soden 1965:17). Wolff used the term 'stereometric thinking' (1974:8). Janowski described

Egelkraut (2000) refers to the parallelism in Hebrew poetry as a window through which one gains an insight into Hebrew thinking. It can be observed in many biblical books that most authors attempt to say the same thing in complementary or contrasting ways. Egelkraut describes the Hebrew writers orbiting the object, circling it and by doing so capturing it in more depth (2000:367). For understanding the Hebrew notion of 'sin' this means that the different words for 'sin' in the OT are not to be separated and contrasted with each other with analytical sharpness, but together they build the whole of understanding; they are not to be seen as synonymous either, but as complementary.

The limitations of this chapter do not allow a comprehensive study of all the Hebrew renderings for 'sin' and their contexts, discussing the cultural background, the transformation and change that the concept underwent. Since my research is not exclusively focused on OT theology or Hebrew language study, I will only present an overview limited to the most important terms that are also found in the passages discussed above. I will start by briefly looking at the universality of 'sin' (6.2.1) and then further explore the nature of 'sin' (6.2.2), God's reaction and the consequences of 'sin' (6.2.3). Although the focus of this study is elsewhere, I consider it necessary to also say something about restoration and forgiveness (6.2.4). The findings will be complemented by further observations and reflections (6.3).

6.2.1 Universality and seriousness of 'sin'

Before examining the various Hebrew terms for 'sin' I consider it important to say a word about the OT understanding of 'sin' as a universal problem. It is apparent that the OT keeps the Israelite community in focus. One could conclude from this that the OT is not too much interested in universal faithlessness of humanity as suggested by Goldingay (2006:264f). Nevertheless there

---

stereometry as 'the overlay of images and motives that not only enhances the concreteness of special statements but also subjects them to a multiplicity of perspectives (thus, as it were, "exploding" [German *Aufsprengung*] their meaning). Words and texts are thus rendered semiotically transparent to one another, thus disclosing one another's meaning (by opening up semantic spaces).' (Dabrock 2010:153 translating Janowski 2005:159).

is the clear view that 'sin' affects all of creation. 'Sin' is humanity's basic problem (Gen. 3); every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart is continually evil (Gen. 6:5). God made the human race upright, but they have sought out many schemes (Eccl. 7:29). Wrongdoing in the world does not come from some other place than from human beings.

Goldingay (2006:276f) describes the twofold 'mystery' about the 'sin' of God's people. First there is Israel **turning away** from Yhwh who had repeatedly demonstrated his power and provision (see also Ex. 32 in 6.1.1 above). Instead they turn to 'resource-less' (*heḇel*) gods and become 'empty' (*hāḇal*) themselves (Jer. 2:5-8)[38]. It is puzzling why Israel deliberately abandoned the fountain of living water in order to rely on leaky cisterns that only collect rainwater, but cannot hold it for long (Jer. 2:13). Israel will most probably die of dehydration before the dry season is over. Second, Israel did not only turn away from Yhwh, but they **persisted** in their faithlessness. 'When people have fallen over, they do not just lie there, do they? When they have turned the wrong way, they turn back, don't they?' Why then, asks Jeremiah (8:4f), has Israel turned away in perpetual backsliding? Although the people of Judah have seen what happened to their kinsfolk in the North, they still refused to listen and to turn from their wickedness (Jer. 44:1-5).

God's people's persistence in wickedness demonstrates that 'sin' is not only a serious matter, but is also deeply ingrained. For Jeremiah the corruption of God's people is as inerasable as the spots on a leopard's skin (Jer. 13:23). 'Sin' is written with an iron pen; with a diamond point it is engraved on the tablet of the people's hearts (Jer. 17:1). This suggests that 'sin' is written in very human nature. And because of our solidarity with the human race going back to Adam (Gen. 1-11), we are all affected by 'sin' from the very beginning of our lives (Goldingay 2006:264).

---

[38] Jeremiah polemicizes against the idols and calls them 'nothings'. They are made by human hands, made of dead material, they do not see, they do not hear, they cannot help (Jer. 10:14f). The gods are weak and powerless and whoever follows them will become like them, 'empty'.

It is against the background of the universality of 'sin' that I understand the following word studies. What the OT describes in terms of 'sin' is relevant beyond the OT Hebrew culture and the people of Israel.

6.2.2 The nature of 'sin'

The passages discussed above revealed that 'sin' is understood as damaging behaviour, as turning aside from God's word, as rejecting Yhwh himself, as bringing harm and death to the community. 'Sin' is associated with defilement; it has to do with the human nature and is paralleled with foolishness. The following sections aim at further deepening the understanding of 'sin'. However, their brevity means they are not exhaustive.

6.2.2.1 Three main terms

As already stated above, the nature of 'sin' cannot be encapsulated in one expression or picture; the OT presents a wide variety of images. The texts discussed in 6.1 present three main terms – *ḥāṭāʾ*, *ʿāwōn* and *pāšaʿ* – which will be studied in more depth in the following.

1) *ḥāṭāʾ* – the image of missing a target

The term *ḥāṭāʾ* renders various actions that range from idolatry (Ex. 32), stealing devoted things (Josh. 7), adultery and murder (2 Sam. 11-12), offences against one's own brother (Gen. 42:22), or causing Pharaoh's anger (Gen. 40:1), to the drinking of blood (1 Sam. 14:33f), social misdeeds (Micah 6-7), etc. The diversity of actions designated by *ḥāṭāʾ* suggests that the term is extendable to every possible offence (Knierim 1965:57ff; von Soosten 1994). Used in a more everyday language, *ḥāṭāʾ* refers to shooting at a target and missing it.[39] This suggests that in a religious

---

[39] See Judg. 20:16, Prov. 8:35f; 19:2; Job 5:24. Certain OT scholars question whether that everyday meaning is the original (or basic) meaning: The TLOT (Knierim 1997a) indeed translates the basic meaning by 'to miss or pass by a goal'. Knierim (1965:56) suggests that the profane and religious use of the term existed parallel to each other; he claims that it is impossible to say which one was use initially. The TDOT (Koch 1974a-2006:311) however argues that the proof texts put forward supporting that meaning are too thin. Koch suspects that the metaphorical basic meaning never existed.

context, 'sin' implies falling short of Yhwh's expectations. This means that Israel is a people who misses the target. Goldingay (2006:257) underlines that 'missing a target'

> …does not imply that they do their best but do not quite make it. … It involves failing even to aim at the target, deliberately setting aside Yhwh's standards and expectations.

Knierim (1965:68) suggests that it is not the **motive** of an action that is qualified as *ḥāṭāʾ*, but the action itself; the **action** renders the perpetrator guilty, no matter if he transgressed consciously or unconsciously (e.g. Lev. 5:17). Moreover, the verb *ḥāṭāʾ* means not only to commit 'sin', but also 'experience misfortune' (Koch 1983:76) or even 'punishment'; it refers to both, the deed and its consequences. That 'double meaning' will be discussed in more detail in 6.3.1 below.

2) *ʿāwōn* – the image of deviation and crookedness

The noun *ʿāwōn* is the most common OT Hebrew rendering for 'sin'. Although the deriving verb *ʿāwâ* (to twist) is far less common, a few occurrences (e.g. Lam. 3:9) suggest the meaning of deviation or going astray.[40] 'Sin' in that sense means that Israel has deliberately diverged from the way (Jer. 3:21). More clearly expressing the meaning of straying or erring is *šāgag/šāgâ*. As sheep stray and planners err (Ezek. 34:6; Job 12:16), so do people in relation to God (e.g. Job 6:24; Ps. 119:67). Goldingay (2006:259) explains that 'whereas *šegāgâ* can imply unintended deviation from the path of rightness (e.g. Josh. 20:3, 9), *ʿāwōn* is more inclined to imply a deliberate choosing of the wrong way.'

The TWOT (Schultz 1999:651) suggests that *ʿāwōn* was initially used in everyday speech, designating numerous social violations.[41] According to the TLOT (Knierim 1997c:864) and the

---

[40] The (original) meaning of the root *ʿwh* translated by 'to bend, to twist', or 'to contort the course of things' is supported by Gesenius & Buhl 1962; Koehler et al. 1999 (HALOT); Jenni & Westermann 1997 (TLOT); Harris, Archer & Waltke 1999 (TWOT). The TDOT (Koch 1974b-2006:547) however questions *ʿāwōn* deriving from that root and doubts if any biblical writer was familiar with such 'original meaning'. The BDB (Brown, Driver & Briggs 1977:730) lists two distinct Hebrew roots, one meaning 'to bend' the other 'iniquity, guilt or punishment of iniquity'. After weighing up the different arguments I decided to assume only one Hebrew root. This allows me to understand the meaning of *ʿāwōn* as crookedness, perversion, and bending, an understanding that describes 'sin' quite accurately from the perspective of everyday life.

[41] For example 1 Sam. 20:1, 2 Sam. 3:8, Ps. 51:2 [BHS 3], Neh. 4:5.

NIDOTTE (Luc 1996:88), the term later becomes increasingly a theological term. The predominantly theological or religious use of ʿāwōn distinguishes it from the broader usage of ḥāṭāʾ. Yet similarly to ḥāṭāʾ the TDOT (Koch 1974b-2006) suggests that ʿāwōn also designates both the deed and its consequences. Thus the meaning ranges from 'offend' to 'become guilty' to 'be distraught, destroyed'.

The term ʿāwōn however designates more than an abstract value or meaning. The TDOT (Koch 1974b-2006:553) describes it as an almost 'thing-like substance'. This frequently finds expression in the Psalms. Here are a few examples: The ʿāwōn caused by the perpetrator surrounds (sābab) and injures the innocent (Ps. 49:5 [BHS 6]). The wicked find (māṣāʾ) the ʿāwōn and turn it into the driving force of their behaviour (Ps. 36:2 [BHS 3]). Their ʾăwônōṯ (plural ʿāwōn) however then grow over their heads and weigh them down (Ps. 38:4 [BHS 5]), overwhelming them (Ps. 65:3 [BHS 4]) and bringing about their ruin. The wicked are afflicted by their own ʿāwōn (Ps. 107:17), their strength fails (Ps. 31:10 [BHS 11]), and they are brought low through it (Ps. 106:43). Because the ʾăwônōṯ (plural ʿāwōn) can be more numerous even than the hairs on the head (Ps. 40:12 [BHS 13]), the 'sins' destroy the wicked.

As the above references already indicate, ʿāwōn seems to refer to some kind of power. ʿāwōn can be 'present in' (yeš be) the perpetrator (1 Sam. 20:8; 2 Sam. 14:32), and as a self-efficacious, combative power eventually 'finds' (māṣāʾ) the perpetrator (2 Kings 7:9) or 'happens' (qārâ) to him or her (2 Sam. 28:10), not resting until the offender is killed (1 Sam. 20:8; 2 Sam. 14:32; 1 Kings 17:18) or 'swept away' (sāpâ) in ʿāwōn (Gen. 19:15). These references demonstrate that the translation of ʿāwōn cannot be determined out of context.

The TDOT (Koch 1974b-2006:559f) points out that ʿāwōn does not only have its effect on the perpetrator, but also perniciously affects the surrounding community. Thus the community is obligated in the interest of its own self-preservation to 'cut off' (kārat) from its kinspeople every nepeš (person) carrying ʿāwōn (Lev. 19:8; 20:17; Num. 15:31).

3) *pāšaʿ* – the image of mutiny and rebellion

The prophet Isaiah (1:2) compares Israel with rebellious (*pāšaʿ*) children. Israel was a rebel (*pāšaʿ*) from birth (Isa.48:8) and has a stubborn and rebellious heart (*sārar*, *mārâ* Jer. 5:23). In a vision God describes Ezekiel's audience as a 'rebellious house' (*merî* Ezek. 2:6; also 3:9, 26) characterized by a defiant refractoriness (Goldingay 2006:260). In this image Yhwh is the head of the household whose members do not submit to his authority as expected. In a different image the verbs *mārad* and *pāšaʿ* are used to denote revolt against a king or mutiny against an emperor (e.g. Ezek. 17:15; 2 Kings 1:1). Goldingay explains that *mārad* is less common, but one more often used with its political connotation, reminding the hearers that their position is like that of the subjects of a king, while *pāšaʿ* and its derivatives are more common but more often used with its religious meaning. In this imagery

> Yhwh is the king, the head of the nation or the ruler of an empire, whose citizens or junior powers would be expected to submit to his authority. But they do not do so. They are nations of rebels 'hard-faced and tough-minded' (Ezek. 2:3-4), not amenable to correction. (Goldingay 2006:260)

The image of rebellion links with that of the covenant relationship between Yhwh and Israel. Because 'they have abandoned the covenant of the Lord their God, and worshipped other gods and served them' (Jer. 22:9) they are 'like the underling nations of a big power who have conspired to rebel' (Goldingay 2006:260).

The suggestion that *pāšaʿ* is best understood as the image of mutiny or rebellion is widely supported. The BDB (1977), TLOT (Knierim 1997d) and TWOT (Livingston 1999) translate *pešaʿ* (noun) by dispute, rebellion, revolt, defection, or disloyalty. Knierim (1965) however points out that it means more than rebellion. He makes a strong statement by demonstrating that 'rebellion' is too weak because the revolting party actually still remains under the authority against which it protests. Knierim thus suggests that the verb actually means 'to break (with), to

disengage from a social partner or his property'.[42] Goldingay (2006:260) agrees in the sense that he sees the term ʿāwōn being more radical than pāšaʿ.

> While rebellion is a forceful image, the image of going astray is finally more radical because it means a person ends up separated from God and lost.

Whatever meaning is attributed to pāšaʿ however, it is a serious matter that most definitely affects the relationship between Yhwh and his people.

The image of the rebellious humanity can already be detected in Gen. 3 when the first humans ignored God's instruction of not eating of 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil' although the term is not used there. Later in the biblical narrative the image of rebellion links with that of the covenant relationship between Yhwh and Israel (Goldingay 2006:260). The people of Israel 'sin' by ignoring the covenant relationship into which they entered with God, 'refusing to live by the terms of the relationship Yhwh established with them at Sinai (Jer. 11:1-10)'. To 'sin' (pāšaʿ) is to break with Yhwh. Thus the TLOT (Knierim 1997d) and HALOT (Koehler et al. 1999:170) describe pešaʿ (noun) as the most serious term for 'sin' in the OT.

In distinction from ḥāṭāʾ that describes an action that aims at a goal but passes it, pāšaʿ describes an action that leads away from the target (von Soosten 1994:100), hence the meaning of 'breaking away from'. According to the TDOT pešaʿ refers only to the offence itself unlike ḥāṭāʾ and ʿāwōn, which also refer to the sanctions (Ringgren & Seebass 1974-2006:136).

6.2.2.2 Pair of contrasts (good & evil)

In order to gain yet another perspective of the nature of 'sin', I found it worth briefly looking at a pair of contrasting concepts that is found throughout the OT: good and evil. The term raʿ (evil) plays an important role in OT passages that have to do with 'sin'. That's also the case in three of the above texts. In Ex. 32 the people are described as 'bent on evil' (v.22). Moses argues that

---

[42] Knierim argues that the translation of pešaʿ as revolt or rebellion is too weak since in 2 Chron. 21:8,10 pešaʿ describes a complete separation, a self-extrication from foreign dominion and is thus more than just rebel or revolt against a king (TLOT, Knierim 1997d:1034).

Israel's exodus from Egypt could be interpreted by the Egyptians as deriving from Yhwh's 'evil intent' to kill his own people in the wilderness (v.12). 2 Sam. 12:11 talks about 'evil' that Yhwh will raise up against David; and in Ps. 51:4 David repents that he has done 'what is evil' in God's sight. From these verses it can be seen that 'evil' can be both a committed 'sin' and also the consequence of such.

A closer look at *raʿ* described in encyclopaedias reveals more details. The TDOT (Dohmen & Rick 1974-2006:562) explains that the adjective describes bad water (2 Kings 2:19), bad figs (Jer. 24:2), or loathsome sores (Job 2:7), but also morally wicked or evil persons and actions (Gen. 6:5; Deut. 13:5). The noun *rāʿâ* denotes concrete evil or disaster (1 Kings 14:10; Am. 3:6) as well as morally religious evil (Gen. 6:5; Isa. 57:1).**[43]** The TDOT also points out (p.584) that 'deviant behaviour' and reluctance to repent are both qualified as *raʿ*. The NIDOTTE (van Dam 1996:1154) suggests that the basic meaning of *raʿ* (evil) 'concerns an action or state that is detrimental to life or its fullness'. The detriment can be physical, literal death or abnormality of the body, or moral injury to a relationship. *raʿ* concerns 'a departure from that which is ideal and desired for fullness and enjoyment of life.'

raʿ is often used in juxtaposition with its antonym *ṭôḇ* (Isa. 45:7 contrasts *raʿ* and *šālôm*). According to the TDOT (Dohmen & Rick 1974-2006:564, 583) the antithetic dyad *ṭôḇ wārāʿ* ('good and evil') is also the starting point of ethics in the OT (Gen. 2:9) and encompasses everything that benefits life (*ṭôḇ*) or diminishes and destroys life (*rāʿ*). Goldingay (2006:255) explains that *raʿ* can only be understood when it is set over against *ṭôb* (good) that pre-exists evil (Gen. 2:9; 17, 3:5; 22). In Genesis evil is what is evil 'to Yhwh' or in Yhwh's eyes (Gen. 13:13; 38:7) or what is evil in the eyes of human beings (Gen. 28:8). Evil consists in the absence of Yhwh (Ex. 33:3; see also 6.1.1.5, p.182) and thus the absence of what God is (Ex. 34:6-7): compassion (*raḥûm*), grace (*ḥanūn*), long-temperedness, commitment (abundant in *ḥesed*),

---

[43] Rick does not support the theory of a connection between the two Hebrew homonyms *rʿʿ* I and II, in the sense that *rʿʿ* I (to shatter, break) is the transitive instantiation of the intransitive *rʿʿ* II ('be bad, evil'). The BDB (Brown, Driver & Briggs 1977) and the HALOT (Koehler et al. 1999) separate *rʿʿ* into two homonymous entries as well.

faithfulness (*ʾĕmet*), forgiveness (*nāśāʾ* [carry away] *ʿāwōn*) and a willingness to 'punish' wrongdoing (*pāqad* [visit] *ʿāwōn*).

According to the TLOT (Stoebe 1997:1249) the two fundamentally different concepts of good and evil are usually held together; one does not seem to be thought of without the other. Stoebe supports the observation which I pointed out above: the term *raʿ* displays a double level of meaning; it denotes at the same time 'evil actions' as well as 'disaster' (e.g. 1 Kings 14:9f), similar to *ḥāṭāʾ* and *ʿāwōn*. Prov. 17:13 further illustrates this: 'Evil (*rāʿâ*) will not depart from the house of one who returns evil (*rāʿâ*) for good.' Moreover the OT describes *raʿ* as leading to death, *ṭôḇ* as leading to life. 'See, I have set before you today life and prosperity [*ṭôḇ*], death and adversity [*raʿ*]' (Deut. 30:15). To love *raʿ* and to hate *ṭôḇ* is to 'sin' (Mic. 3:2); and to call *raʿ* *ṭôḇ* calls Yhwh into action (e.g., Isa. 5:20).

Considering the above I came to understand 'sin' in the wider context of death and disaster (*raʿ*), contrasting life (*ṭôḇ*) and well-being (*šālôm*). 'Sin' contains hard-heartedness contrasting compassion, ruthlessness contrasting grace, impatience contrasting long-temperedness, disloyalty contrasting commitment, faithlessness contrasting faithfulness, resentfulness contrasting forgiveness, and letting evil spread contrasting the willingness to 'punish' or stop wrongdoing.

For a better overview, I put the findings into a summarizing table (see Table 6.2-1 below).

Table 6.2-1: Wider semantic field of 'good' and 'evil'

ṭôḇ - life and 'shalom'	*ra*ʿ - death and 'sin'
presence of God	absence of God
goodness	evil
life	death
prosperity	adversity
love	hate
compassion	hard-heartedness
grace	ruthlessness
long-temperedness	impatience
commitment	disloyalty
faithfulness	faithlessness
forgiveness	resentfulness
willingness to 'prosecute' sin	letting evil spread

The contrasting pair of good and evil helped me to better understand the wider context of the OT notion of 'sin'; its wider semantic field becomes more comprehensive.

6.2.3 God's reaction to 'sin' and its consequences

In the passages studied above it became apparent that Yhwh intervenes. His reaction to 'sin' is first that of anger (Ex. 32:10; Josh. 7:1) and of bringing 'evil' and trouble upon the transgressor (Ex. 32:12; Josh. 7:25; 2 Sam. 12:11). Further consequences follow suit in the form of a plague (Ex. 32:35) or, what is the case in all three narratives, even death. The most devastating result of 'sin' committed however is God's withdrawal (Ex. 32f). The following section will show that the findings resulting from the exegesis above represent what can be found throughout the whole OT.

6.2.3.1 God's reaction to 'sin'

In Hos. 2:1-3 for example Yhwh's reaction to 'sin' is that of rejection. He strips Israel naked, exposes it, makes it like a wilderness, turns it into a parched land and kills it with thirst. When Israel seeks Yhwh, they will not find him but will be rebuffed (Hos. 5:6-7); Yhwh withdraws for 'equipping himself for war' (*ḥālaṣ*) against Israel. Yhwh will drive them out of his house; he

213

will love them no more (Hos. 9:15). God's devastating declaration of **abandonment** is complete: God takes away his peace (*šālôm*), his steadfast love (*ḥesed*) and compassion (*raḥămîm*); he will show no more mercy or favour (Jer. 16:5, 13). Ezek. 39:23 talks about Yhwh **withdrawing** from Israel; he hides his face and gives his people into the hand of their adversaries. Israel will seek the word of God, but will not find it (Am.8:11-14).

Yhwh pours out his **wrath** like water (Isa. 26:20f; Hos. 5:10).[44] Its fieriness will be experienced when disaster strikes (Ezek. 30). The day of Yhwh will be **darkness** (Am. 5:18-20) and he thrusts those who consult spirits into anguish and gloom (Isa. 8:21f). God will 'visit' (*pāqad*) his people; he will bring Israel down, will search them out, command the sword to kill his people; he will fix his eyes on them for harm (Am. 9:2-4). According to Goldingay (2006:292) Yhwh does not merely abandon Israel, but he makes a commitment to **pursue** them relentlessly to destruction wherever they try to hide.

God's withdrawal from his people, pouring out his anger on them, can only mean one thing: death. As I have already pointed out in 6.1.1.5 above, the people of Israel knew how devastating the absence of God would be; they react with abysmal grief and outcry (Ex. 33).

6.2.3.2 Consequences and effects of 'sin'

Yhwh's withdrawal is not the only result of 'sin'. Wrongdoing leaves its mark on the transgressor as well. Besides the different punishments imposed, the consequences for the one committing 'sin' affect also the inner being. Psalm 51 most explicitly describes 'sin' as defiling, touching the transgressor deep inside, taking away joy and gladness, making him depressed and sick instead (see 6.1.4, p.199).

---

[44] Goldingay (2006:289) points out that 'wrath' is not only to be understood as the fiery nature of Yhwh's feelings, but as fieriness of what people experience when disaster comes. He explains that 'wrath stands in parallelism with terms such as *desolation, destruction, decimation, fire, anguish, breaking up, darkness, captivity* and *falling from power*.' (Emphasis in the original)

In order to describe the effects of sin, the OT uses a number of metaphors.[45] The two most predominant are a **weight** or burden[46] that rests upon the perpetrator's shoulder (Ps. 38:4 [BHS 5]) and **defilement** (Anderson 2009).[47] In Psalm 51 David asks to be cleansed from his 'sin', to be washed and become whiter than snow. The vocabulary used in Josh. 7 suggests the effect of defilement as well. Isaiah (64:6) describes the people's *ḥāṭāʾ* rendering them unclean and their righteousness being transformed into filthy cloth. Idolatry defiled Israel (Ezek. 20:7); Jerusalem is a **soiled** city because it has accepted no correction, has not drawn near to its God (Zeph. 3:1-2).

Beside the metaphors of weight and defilement, there are other terms describing the effects of 'sin', for example **'corruption'** (*ḥānēp*). Because of its 'sin', Israel is a 'corrupt nation' (Isa. 10:6). 'Corruption' is difficult to define. It has to do with pollution (Ps. 106:38f), it describes the human sacrifices to the idols of Canaan polluting or 'corrupting' the land); it has to do with perversion and crookedness[48], with 'godlessness' (Isa. 9:17), but also with words or what is said (Prov. 11:9)[49]. Job 8:13 describes a 'corrupt' person as somebody who forgets God.

The 'sin' committed by Israel is also described as 'affecting' God: The idolatry and the bloodshed in Jerusalem disgust Yhwh (Ezek. 22:2). Israel have defiled Yhwh's land and made it

---

[45] Anderson (2009) argues that 'sin' has a history. Heavily influenced by the Aramaic language (the official language of law and commerce of the Persian rulers) the metaphor of 'sin' as a burden was replaced by that of 'sin' as a debt during the Second Temple period (520/15 B.C. – 70 A.C.). There is little evidence in the Hebrew texts of the First Temple period (mid-tenth century B.C. – 587 B.C.)

[46] The concept of 'sin' as a burden is by far the most productive in the OT. This can be seen by the frequency of the idiom 'to bear [the weight of] a sin' that predominates over its nearest competitor by more than six to one (Anderson 2009:17). It occurs 108 times.

[47] The crucial determinant of those two metaphorical units is not the noun for sin, but the verb: *nāśāʾ*, 'carry away' (Lev. 16:22) and *kābas* 'wash away' (Ps. 51:2 [BHS 4]). See also section 6.2.4 on 'restoration'.

[48] The TWOT (Goldberg 1999:304) translates *ḥānēp* 'to be defiled, polluted, profaned, corrupt' and one of the derivatives by 'hypocrite'. The HALOT (Koehler et al. 1999:335f) translates by 'be godless' (priest and prophet) or 'defiled' and 'ruined'. The TLOT translates the same term by 'to be perverted, twisted, crooked' and explains that in all occurrences, 'the word more or less signifies a theological judgment. Whether perversion occurs in the legal …, social (Prov. 11:9), cultic (Isa. 24:5), moral, or political (Job 34:30) realms, whether it consists of deeds (Isa. 9:16; 32:6) or words (Ps. 35:16; Prov. 11:9), it always distorts given orders of existence. This ontological dimension of the straight, healthy, and true that perversion implies lends it the heavy weight of the basic distortion of the world order.' (Knierim 1997b:448).

[49] The KJV uses the word 'hypocrite' to render the 'corrupt person'.

an abomination (Jer. 2:7). Different forms of idolatry and idols put in the sanctuary are abhorrent to Yhwh (Jer.4:1; 7:30; 16:18; Ezek.5:11). And the offerings to other gods have 'estranged' (*nākar*) Jerusalem so that Yhwh is no longer at home there (Jer. 19:4f).

The OT paints an image of 'sin' leading to disaster and death. Concluding however that the OT is without hope, offering no way out from human sinfulness, would not do justice to the OT understanding of 'sin'. Although it goes beyond the scope of my research, there is yet something to be said about restoration, to which I turn in the following section.

6.2.4 Restoration

In section 6.1.1.4 (p.180) I pointed out that Yhwh refused Moses' offer of atonement. I consider it important however to say that God's reaction reported in Ex. 32 was not the last word spoken on the issue. The OT understanding of 'sin' is not complete without God's willingness for restoration. The psalms underscore God's help in freeing people from 'sin'. Yhwh himself 'atones' (*kāpar*) for their 'transgressions' (*pešaʿ*), 'carries away' (*nāśā*) human *ʿāwōn*, washing (*kābas*), cleansing (*ṭāhēr*) or wiping (*māḥâ*) it away (Ps. 65:3 [BHS 4]; 32:5; 51:2 [BHS 4], 9 [BHS 11]), redeeming (*pādâ*) Israel in this way (Ps. 130:8). By asking God to create (*bārāʾ*) a clean heart, David prays for something only God can do (Ps. 51:10 [BHS 11]).

God's restoration however is not only witnessed in the psalms. Whoever reads the OT prophets' gloomy announcements of Yhwh's horrifying judgment is surprised again and again by God's unshaken determination to save, to redeem, to heal and to restore. 'Sin' and its devastating consequences cannot be really understood without God's foremost intention to forgive and to reconcile. Although speaking of reconciliation goes beyond the scope of my research, I nevertheless want to make some brief remarks.

The pinnacle of the NT, Christ's sacrificial death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead, is foreshadowed in the OT. John the Baptist's declaration of Christ as the Lamb of God

taking away (*airō*)[50] the 'sin' of the world (Jn. 1:29) echoes the ritual of atonement (*kāpar*)[51] in Lev. 16 during which the ʿ*āwōn* of Israel was 'loaded' onto a living animal who then literally carried it away into the desert destined to die. The high priest transferred the whole people's ʿ*āwōn* to the 'scapegoat' (functioning as a representative) through confession and leaning his hand on the animal's head that was now to bear the 'sin' (Lev. 16:21f). By chasing the goat into the desert and thus sending it to its certain death the fateful ʿ*āwōn* was removed from the people.

The language in Leviticus 16 corresponds to the image of 'sin' (ʿ*āwōn*) being a burden weighing on the perpetrator (see 6.2.3.2, p.214). 'To bear' (*nāśāʾ*) ʿ*āwōn* is an often used combination to express the taking of the consequences (Lev. 5:17), pointing to the perception of ʿ*āwōn* being a weight on the perpetrator's back or shoulder (Koch 1974b-2006:555 [TDOT]). Whoever bears ʿ*āwōn* is destined to perish, to 'languish', to 'rot' and 'die' in their 'sphere of guilt' (Ex. 28:43; Lev. 26:39). By confessing ʿ*āwōn* to God however and by changing his way of life one could escape 'sin' and its consequences. 'Sin' has lost its power by being submitted to the control of Yhwh (Knierim 1965:82). God taking away ʿ*āwōn* was promised, declared and (ritually) experienced (Schultz 1999:651 [TWOT]). Part of the task of the priests and Levites was to remove ʿ*āwōn* from Israel and even from the sanctuary itself, to *nāśāʾ* (carry away) ʿ*āwōn* representatively to render it harmless (Ex. 28:38; Lev.10:17; Num. 18:1, 23); whenever *kāpar* (to atone) was done, ʿ*āwōn* was removed (e.g. Lev. 5:1-6, 17-19; 10:17).

6.3 Further reflections

From the presented word studies above in 6.2 there is still an issue worth being further reflected upon; it concerns the 'double level of meaning' of the terms *ḥāṭāʾ* and ʿ*āwōn* (see 6.2.2.1) that is closely connected with the view of 'sin' generating an influencing sphere. Another issue that still awaits to be addressed results from the exegesis in 6.1; it is the question about the individual and communal accountability which was raised in the passage of Josh. 7, but was also touched

---

[50] The Greek verb *airō* is best translated by 'lift up and carry away/carry along', which means 'remove'.

[51] The Hebrew phrase *yôm hakippūrîm* is the 'day of atonement' (e.g. Lev. 23:27).

upon by 2 Sam. 12 and the wider context of Ex. 32. These three issues – the double level of meaning, 'sin' as a sphere, and communal and individual accountability – will be addressed in the following sections.

6.3.1 Double level of meaning

As I have already pointed out above (6.2.2.1), *ḥāṭāʾ* and *ʿāwōn* designate both the evil action and the consequences thereof. Koch (1991b), supported by Ringgren & Seebass (1974-2006), suggests that both meanings are simultaneously present. He describes this linguistic peculiarity as having a 'double level of meaning' that plays a role not only in the renderings for 'sin' but in other terms too. Although Koch's suggestion of both meanings being **simultaneously** present can certainly be disputed, the double meaning found with the terms *ḥāṭāʾ* and *ʿāwōn* still sheds a puzzling light on the OT notion of 'sin'. Besides painting the images of missing a target and deviation or crookedness respectively, the terms *ḥāṭāʾ* and *ʿāwōn* can mean to 'sin', to be guilty, or to bring calamity (upon oneself), the latter often translated by 'punishment'.[52] I do not know any other language that applies one and the same term for expressing these quite distinct meanings. I think the linguistic ambivalence of the two terms can only be solved by carefully examining the context which will reveal what meaning is to be applied. Yet, by assuming the Hebrew language to be of synthetic character I allow myself to think that – as the TWOT (Schultz 1999:651) actually suggests – the ambivalence in meaning might demonstrate that 'sin' and its consequences are not radically separate notions, but could be understood as a 'process'. The

---

[52] The built-in cause-and-effect was famously coined by Koch as *Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang*. In regards to the term 'punishment' Koch points out that there is a lexicographical gap. There is 'striking evidence that the OT *does not have a single word for "punishment"*. If one looks in the appendices of the Hebrew dictionaries … for the Hebrew equivalent of such a word, one will find that the closest one can come is in the word *ḥaṭṭaʾt* … which just happens to be the most specific word for "sin"! Here the Action-Consequences-Construct is plain as day. … It is even less satisfying to look for a word which would translate the verb for "punish"'. (Koch 1991b:77; emphasis in the original). The same can be applied for *ʿāwâ*. Lev.5:17 is translated by the NRSV 'If anyone sin without knowing it … you have incurred guilt, and are subject to **punishment**.' The Hebrew however reads: If anyone *ḥāṭāʾ* without knowing it … you have incurred guilt and will **bear** your *ʿāwōn*. The translation 'subject to punishment' is problematic and maybe even misleading. The active role of Yhwh as the one 'punishing' children for the 'sins' of their forefathers (for example Ex .20:5) is highly disputed. It is beyond the scope of my research however to discuss the dogma of retribution at this point.

passages discussed in 6.1 certainly demonstrate the interrelatedness of 'sin', guilt and punishment; the interpretation of a 'process' being at work however cannot be clearly substantiated by those passages. In order to establish in what way 'sin', guilt and punishment interrelate, further investigations would be required that go beyond the limits of this research.

6.3.2 'Sin' as a sphere

Another issue closely related to the 'double level of meaning' is Koch's suggestion (1974a-2006 [TDOT]; 1983) to interpret 'sin' in the OT not as an isolated (bad) action but as something that creates a sphere that sticks to the wrongdoer, a sphere that influences the surroundings, individuals, family, community, even a whole people.[53] This 'sin-sphere' makes humans inwardly 'sick' and affects them also physically. Koch refers to verses whose imagery is interesting, for example Prov. 5:22: 'The iniquities [ʿawônôṯ] of the wicked ensnare them, and they are caught in the toils of their sin [ḥāṭāʾ]'; 'sin' is lurking at the door to catch the human being (Gen. 4:7)[54]. According to Koch 'sin' has fatal effect on the perpetrator and remains invisibly associated with the offender, being 'pregnant with disaster' (Koch 1974a-2006:312).

Although Koch's suggestion is not directly supported by the passages discussed above, I still found it an interesting thought because it resonates with a number of findings presented in chapter 5. An interesting thought however is not validated by simply resonating with the contextualizing culture. For further evaluating Koch's suggestion, it must certainly be discussed by taking into consideration that God actively and unmistakably intervenes in various ways. I will present some additional reflections on the issue in 7.3.2.2, p.248.

---

[53] The original German article 'Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?' describing this sphere of influence was first published in 1955. I read the German version from 1991 and the abbreviated English translated version from 1983 (translated by Thomas H. Trapp). Koch picked the idea up from Fahlgren who had called the type of thinking displayed in the double level of meaning of ḥāṭāʾ and ʿāwōn 'synthetic view of life' ('Synthetic' because 'sin' as an act and the consequences of 'sin' (penalty) are not separated (see Fahlgren 1932:50ff referred to by Koch 1991b; see also von Rad 1962:265). Koch developed Fahlgren's idea further and described the two Hebrew terms as designating not just an action but a *schicksalswirkende Tatsphäre* (Koch 1991a:88) or 'the action's powerful sphere of influence' (Koch 1983:73).

[54] In Gen. 4:7 it is Cain who is in danger to be caught by the 'sin' lurking at the door.

On a more day-to-day experience level Koch's sphere of 'sin' ties into the cause-and-effect relationships believed to be at work in life by many people and their cultures around the world. Many believe 'that people who live sensible, good, godly lives do well and people who live stupid, evil, godless lives do badly' (Goldingay 2006:596). The biblical wisdom literature seems to support it on the one hand. Prov. 1:31 for example says that 'people shall eat the fruit of their way and be sated with their own devices.'[55] On the other hand Job is the most famous example in the OT demonstrating that the cause-and-effect does not always work the way we might think it does. According to Knierim, the whole OT assumes that the consequences of 'sin' are subject to a 'dynamic, almost magic-like deed-disaster-logic' (the vocabulary used by Knierim 1965)[56]. In critical response to Knierim's suggested magic-like disaster-logic it is appropriate to point out that God **actively** intervenes.

> The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation. (Ex. 34:6f)

Yhwh intervenes in human life by punishing 'sin' but also – and even to a greater extent – by blessing us, by showing his mercy, love and forgiveness.

6.3.3 Communal and individual accountability

There is another question emerging from the passages in 6.1 that needs to be addressed. It is the issue of communal and individual accountability for committed 'sin'. The question specifically arises from Josh. 7 and 2 Sam. 12. As noted above the narrative in Josh. 7 displays a puzzling intertwining of Achan's individual 'sin' and the community's accountability; **Israel** broke faith, not just Achan. In 2 Sam. 12 it is striking how severely David's adultery and act of murder affects

---

[55] See also examples in Prov. 1:10-19; 13:2; Job 5:13; Ps. 7:15f [BHS 16f]; 9:15 [BHS 16]; 10:2; 35:8; 57:6 [BHS 7].

[56] German original terms: *'der magische oder dynamistisch-eigengesetzliche Charakter'* of 'sin', and *'Tat-sphärendenken'* (Knierim 1965:82) More on the built-in consequences of an action and the repeal thereof see Koch 1991b.

the whole family, immediately but also over generations. In the aftermath of Israel's idolatry in Ex. 32 God also declares that he will 'visit the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation' (Ex. 34:7). These findings point toward an issue that I find hard to understand; it is the issue of the 'corporate nature of the individual' as it is often referred to in the literature.[57]

6.3.3.1 Accountability of the individual

Considering the finding that 'sin' affects family, community and nation, it is to be expected that the OT puts emphasis on the community and communal responsibility. According to Goldingay (2006:564) however, it is a myth to say that OT Israel 'believed so strongly in the communal nature of human experience that it did not really allow for the responsibility of the individual'; the OT recognizes individual responsibility from the beginning.

Goldingay points to evidence found for example in Exodus. In Ex. 19:3-9 Yhwh addresses his people as a corporate entity ('the house of Jacob') and as individuals ('Israelites'); and the people (corporate, singular) all answered (plural); and Yhwh will come in a cloud in order that the people may hear (corporate, singular) and trust (plural). The peculiar intertwining of corporate and plural terms seems to play as well in Ex. 20. The Ten Commandments seem to be addressed to the people corporately (I am Yhwh your God who brought you [corporate] out of Egypt), but later transition imperceptibly to addressing individuals (honour your father and your mother; you shall not murder; etc.). The Laws in Ex. 21 address the indivreidual Israelite and treat the individual as responsible for his/her actions. And the Proverbs leave no doubt that every individual Israelite is responsible for his/her own 'good life', independently from being a member of the community. Prov. 4:20-27 calls the individual to take up responsibility for what he listens to, for how he thinks about it, for what he says, where he looks, where he goes (Clifford

---

[57] See footnote 18 on p.190.

1999:20f; Goldingay 2006:568). 'Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil' (*raʿ*) (v.27).

All those instructions given recognize multiple realities:

> The people *are* a collection of individuals who can be addressed in the plural. The people *is* also a body; this corporate body exists as a reality. And individuals are responsible for their own lives, independently of their membership of this body. (Goldingay 2006:565)

These multiple realities are held together and are not played off against each other.

6.3.3.2 Accountability of the community

At the same time as recognizing the individual's responsibility, the OT still emphasizes the reality of communal accountability. An illustration of this is found in the story of Achan's theft. Achan breaks the ban on the spoil of Jericho, involves the whole of Israel in defeat and, on discovery, as it is often interpreted (e.g. Robinson 1981:26; the students above), drags his whole family to death. Although it was an act performed by an individual the text says in Josh. 7:11: '**Israel** *ḥāṭāʾ* '. The whole people is held accountable for an individual perpetrator's act.[58]

'Sin' affecting the whole nation is accentuated in prophets. Hosea for example understands *ʿāwōn* as an entirely collective matter as the TDOT points out (Koch 1974b-2006:555). Similarly Ezekiel, who certainly emphasizes the individual and each individual's fate like no other prophet but who stresses the fact that Israel as a whole is a rebellious household (Ezek. 4f), although there were always 'righteous' individuals found among them (for example Jeremiah, his scribe Baruch, Hosea, Ezekiel and other prophets or priests). The disaster after the fall of Jerusalem was recognized as the result of the whole nation's *ʿāwōn* (e.g. Lam. 4:22; Ezek. 39:23; Dan. 9:13, 16).

Texts such as Gen. 18:22-33 (judgment on Sodom), Jer. 5:1 (the search for one faithful person who might secure God's pardon of the whole city), or Ezek. 22:23-30 (the search for an

---

[58] Another instance is Deut. 13:12ff and 21:1ff where the whole city is made responsible for idol worship or murder within its area.

individual who could stand in the breach on behalf of the people) imply that one individual could deliver the whole community. However God declares in Ezek. 14:12-20 that not even 'righteous' people such as Noah, Daniel or Job could save the whole community, but only their own individual lives. Goldingay (2006:567) interprets this as a warning against the idea that the community can shelter behind a number of faithful people as if they could save the entire community.

6.3.3.3 Accountability across generations

The understanding that 'sin' has consequences not only for the individual perpetrator but also for his family (or even the whole of Israel) over generations is accentuated in the belief that Yhwh 'visits' the iniquities of the fathers upon the children (Ex. 20:5; 34:7). It demonstrates that the responsibility of the community and its individual members of the present is extended into the past and into the future (Robinson 1981:27).[59]

There was a saying in Israel supporting it: 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge [Hebrew: blunt].' (Ezek. 18:2; cf. Jer. 31:29).[60] The saying speaks about the way one generation affects the next; the parents enjoy the delicacy but the children are the ones getting the rough taste. In both instances (Ezekiel and Jeremiah) the validity of the saying and the belief behind it are rejected. 'This proverb shall no more be used …' but all shall die for their own ʿāwōn (Jer. 31:30); only the person who does ḥāṭāʾ shall die (Ezek. 18:4), the righteous (ṣadîq) person however will live, and not bear the consequences of the ancestors anymore. The people can ask God not to make their ancestors' ʿāwōn the basis for God's judgment (Ps. 79:8). One generation is not punished for an earlier generation's 'sin' if they turn from their wicked (raʿ) ways, Yhwh will forgive their ḥāṭāʾ and heal the land (2 Chr. 7:14). The

---

[59] Robinson gives other examples. A similar extension of the living group into the future as part of its unity is illustrated by the male children perpetuating the name (2 Sam. 14:7). The extension of the ancestors to include the living members of the family is expressed by the phrase in Gen. 40:29: 'I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave of ...'

[60] According to Goldingay (2006:570) unripe grapes were a delicacy despite the acidity leaving a rough taste in the mouth.

righteousness ($ṣ^eḏāqâ$) of the righteous ($ṣaḏîq$) will rest on that person and the wickedness ($riš ʿâ$) of the wicked ($rāšā ʿ$), will rest on that person (Ezek. 18:20).

Yhwh's announcement in Exodus that he will 'punish' children for the iniquity of parents and his promise in Ezek. 18:2 and Jer. 31:29 that nobody will die because of somebody else's evil reveal a tension. The communal responsibility runs parallel to the individual accountability; they are set alongside and against each other (Knierim 1965:100). As it is impossible for the individual to hide behind the responsibility of the community, so the community cannot shelter behind faithful individuals.

6.3.3.4 Emerging theory

I came to agree with Goldingay that the OT understanding of the community does not value the community over the individual or vice versa[61], and that human experience is 'intrinsically communal as well as intrinsically individual' (2006:527). Although the OT does not seem to **value** community over the individual, it still emphasizes the communal aspect of human existence and experience. This does not imply though that the individual does not count or that the individual is not accountable for his actions.

Similar to the Kongo view of the community and the individual, the OT understanding contrasts with my Swiss understanding. I bring it up again here (for the other instance see 5.1.4.1, p.122), because my cultural background makes me wear blinders, which is not to be under-estimated in the contextualization process. When I hear the term 'community' a certain image is triggered in my mind, an image that most probably does not correspond with the 'community' found in OT Israel.

---

[61] Not all OT theologians agree. Examples: Erhard Gerstenberger sees the OT putting emphasis on the family (*Theologies in the Old Testament*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark / Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002), pp.85-86, referred to by Goldingay, p.528.

In my culture the 'community' is often set over against the individual. Descriptions of the individual person like the following resonate deeply with me: Every individual person is understood as

> …a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background. (Geertz 1983:59 [ed. 2000], quoted by Goldingay 2006:528)

Although that description is a rough generalization that is over thirty years old (and not taking into consideration the fast change of the different cultures present in Europe), it still contrasts with the OT view (and of course the Kongo view; see 5.1). The OT is inclined to 'sociality and group orientation rather than autonomy and individualism'. Goldingay (2006:528f) calls it the 'Mediterranean' view that emphasizes

> …sociality and group orientation rather than autonomy and individualism; duty and loyalty to group belonging and group decision rather than rights and duties to experiment and change individually and socially; consensual decision making rather than majority voting; respect for hierarchy, seniority and family rather than efficiency, ability and success; family/group success, achievement and respect by others for the group rather than individual success, achievement, self-actualization and self-respect; … encouraging children to think in terms of 'we' rather than 'I.'

According to Plaskow (1990:76f) the OT assumes that personhood is shaped, nourished and sustained in community; Israel is understood as a community, not a collection of individual selves. The individual Israelite is not an isolated unit who attains humanity through independence from others, but to be a person is to find oneself from the beginning in community. In this regard, the OT understanding of community resonates with the Kongo view.

The whole community could be held accountable for the misdeed of an individual (e.g. Josh.7), because the community in OT Israel was not only represented by the whole of the community but also by the individual.[62] The kind of consequences for a whole people (defeat at Aï) or for a whole family (death by stoning) carrying the responsibility of an individual's doing is as unthinkable and shocking for me coming from Western Europe as it is for the Kongo

---

[62] Conversely, an individual could most probably bear the blame for the misdeed of the whole of community which is indicated by the ritual of the scape goat (see 6.2.4). For supporting this at least theoretical conversion I did not find a concrete instance where it actually happened, except in the NT, where Christ 'carries away the sin of the world' (Jn. 1:29).

students (see 5.2.2.1, p.136). At this point I discovered an important difference. While the OT as well as the Kongo acknowledges that the destiny of the individual is tied up with that of the community, the Kongo seem to vehemently reject the idea of the whole community being held accountable for the misdeed of an individual. While the Kongo people agree that the individual's deed **affects** other individuals and/or the community, it is of decisive importance for them that the person responsible for the resulting evil is found out and dealt with in order to re-establish 'harmony'.

Considering the OT perspective of 'sin' often affecting others (family, community, even nation), I came to conclude that 'sin' is not exclusively to be understood as breaking God's covenant (albeit the passages above emphasizing 'sin' being committed foremost against God), but also as an action that 'endangers the community' (Koch 1991c:115)[63]. 'Sin' is not just a 'private matter' affecting myself and jeopardizing my relationship with God, but it is also a *gemeinschaftswidriges Verhalten*[64] as Koch described it (1970-; 1991c).

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the research findings resulting from the step 'exegesis of Scripture', concentrating on the OT notion of 'sin'. In the first section 6.1 I discussed four biblical passages that deal with the problem of 'sin' (Ex. 32; Josh. 7; 2 Sam 12; Ps. 51) and summarized the resulting exegetical findings at the end of each sub-section. In order to complement the findings of 6.1, section 6.2 offered additional insights on the nature of 'sin', God's reaction to it and the consequences. I presented a word study on the three main Hebrew terms *ḥāṭāʾ* (missing a target) *ʿāwōn* (bending, making crooked, or deviation) and *pāšāʿ* (rebellion, mutiny or breaking with a

---

[63] Original German expression: *Gemeinschaftsgefährdung*.

[64] The original German term *gemeinschaftswidriges Verhalten* (Koch 1970-:859 [ThWAT]; very strongly in Koch 1991c) is translated in the TDOT (Koch 1974a-2006:311) by 'antisocial conduct', a translation that I find inaccurate. A more accurate (literal) translation is 'conduct adverse to the community', or 'anti-community conduct'. Unfortunately these sound rather awkward in English, thus I prefer to use the German phrase.

social partner) and on the term *raʿ* (evil). Additional reflections on the double meaning of *ḥāṭāʾ* and *ʿāwōn* and on the question about the communal and individual accountability completed the chapter.

'Sin' in the OT is understood as breaking the covenant with Yhwh and as endangering the community. 'Sin' is equated with despising God's word and God himself and is thus seen as directed against him. 'Sin' is evil and brings about calamity affecting not only the individual; it can have serious consequences for family, community and nation. 'Sin' has impacts on the transgressor, defiling him, weighing him down, and taking away joy, strength and even health. God reacts with anger and disgust to 'sin' which makes him withdraw; to lose his presence means death. Because 'sin' is not only a wicked action but also ingrained in human nature, 'sin' can only be forgiven, the human heart only recover and be transformed by God's intervention.

The following chapter will turn to the 'critical response' or the third step of the contextualization model, taking up the propositions made in the previous chapter five (see 5.5, p.173).

7.   'CRITICAL RESPONSE' AND IMPLICATIONS

By way of reminder, the critical contextualization model by Hiebert suggests four steps that guided me through the research process. After having presented the findings resulting from step 1 (exegesis of culture) in chapter 5 and the findings resulting from step 2 (exegesis of Scripture) in chapter 6, this chapter presents the findings resulting from step 3 (critical response). More specifically it will discuss the Kongo understanding of wrongdoing in view of the OT understanding of 'sin' and critically reflect on the similarities and differences of both. This chapter aims at giving answers to the question about what the findings and reflections of the previous chapters mean and imply. Because the presented study is twofold – it is about 'sin' and it is about doing research in Congo as a practical theologian and missionary (see 1.2) – this chapter will also present the evaluation and implications regarding the contextualization process and the work across cultures.

I will first explain some details regarding the practicalities of step 3 on the ground in Brazzaville (section 7.0). It will be followed by the students' evaluation of the seven propositions presented in section 5.5. Their evaluation will be supplemented by reflections of my own and the implications thereof (sections 7.1 – 7.3). I will finish the chapter by evaluating the contextualization process and by reflecting on its implications (section 7.4).

7.0   Introduction

Applied to my research project, Hiebert's suggestions for the 'critical response' would have meant leading the Kongo group participants to critically evaluate their beliefs and customs of wrongdoing (step 1) in the light of the insights and understandings resulting from studying the Scripture passages (step 2). In order to summarize the main findings of the 'exegesis of culture' I formulated seven propositions (see 5.5, p.173). Because of time constraints contingent upon the classes available throughout the academic year as well as upon my health condition and the March explosions, I had to modify the anticipated process of giving a 'critical response'. Talking about 'sin' in the classroom full of ethnic tensions and animosities would have been an

insensitive thing to do, even dangerous; I had to find forms that suited the situation better. Hence, the students gave their 'critical response' in written form only. The students' evaluation for each proposition was to correspond to either of the following three categories: 1) retaining practices that are not unbiblical and that reaffirm cultural identity and heritage; 2) explicitly rejecting customs which are 'unbecoming for Christians'; 3) modifying old practices by giving them explicit Christian meanings.[1]

The rather superficial results could unfortunately not be further discussed and refined in the plenary although some of the responses called for further clarification. Moreover, giving a 'critical response' to the research results by simply deciding whether the old practices and beliefs are to be rejected, retained or modified is neither satisfactory nor appropriate in qualitative research. Such a reduced response needs to be supplemented by reflecting on the implications of these decisions. It is important to point out that these reflections (presented below) following the students' responses are made by me as a cultural outsider without having discussed them with cultural insiders. They will point at Kongo cultural elements that need to be transformed, or beliefs which need to be replaced in the light of the exegetical work presented in 6.1. This might be viewed by the reader as presumptuous, but this would be a misunderstanding. The Kongo group participants and many others along the way trustingly granted me a glimpse of the cultural challenges Kongo Christians face to which I cannot remain indifferent. Rather than betray their trust by either ignoring or judging them, I mean to assist my Kongo brothers and sisters in detecting blind spots that restrain their growth in their faith and 'good life' as followers of Christ. While doing this I know only too well that I wear my own pair of cultural blinders.

---

[1] These categories correspond to Hiebert's suggestion.

7.1 Evaluation of the propositions #1-4: Community issues and 'sin'

The first four propositions are grouped together because they concern 'sin' in connection with the Kongo view of the community.

7.1.1 'Critical response'

7.1.1.1 Destroyed harmony

o **Proposition #1:** *Anything that threatens or destroys the harmony of the family is a 'bad thing'.*

Because the students perceived the OT as saying the same thing as their culture, their suggestion for proposition #1 was unanimous: It is to be retained.

> *Ainsi, au regard de l'élément de la culture et du contenu de la Bible, l'on constate que sur ce point, les deux parlent de la même chose.* [2] (DOC-hw3#S16; similar DOC-hw3#S02, DOC-hw3#S11, etc.)

Considering the finding that the OT understands 'sin' as a notion potentially affecting family and community I agree that the understanding of (doing) evil expressed in proposition #1 corresponds, at least in part, to the OT view and can thus be retained, with qualifications however. The OT understands 'sin' foremost as a break of the covenant with Yhwh, with consequences for the family as a secondary effect. Moreover, the OT understanding of 'family' or community is wider than the traditional Kongo concept of *kanda*. 'Communal relationships' consist of relationships within the family, but also with non-family/clan members, members of the whole nation and the whole human race. Thus, I suggest proposition #1 needs to be supplemented by further critical reflections on the Kongo view of the community and its implications for the Church communities where Christians from different family backgrounds and ethnic groups meet. Such reflections are not to be taken lightly as the experience after the March explosions demonstrated.

7.1.1.2 Affected others

o **Proposition #2:** *Doing a 'bad thing' is never private but affects the whole family (the whole community).*

---

[2] English: 'Consequently, regarding the cultural element and the content of the Bible, it can be said that at this point the two talk about [mean] the same thing.'

The students' suggestion is to retain because it is according to Scriptures.

Nous maintenons cette conception du fait qu'elle est conforme à la parole de Dieu. (DOC-hw3#S02).[3]

According to the following statement, there is yet another reason:

Tout homme a intérêt à bien se comporter, il doit éviter de commettre les péchés afin de ne pas mettre en difficulté ou causer la mort, ou sacrifier des générations ou encore sa descendance, la famille.[4] (DOC-hw3#S11)

According to that student it can only be in every individual's interest not to 'sin' deliberately because of the continuance of the descendants, which is part of the 'good life'. Although the majority of the Kongo students thought of the punishment in Josh. 7 as being unfair because it was not applied to the actual thief (Achan) alone, they maintained that 'sin' always affects the *kanda* in some way (5.1.3). In that sense proposition #2 is congruent with the OT view. As the Hebrew terms for 'sin' demonstrate however, the OT talks about far more far-reaching consequences. The OT describes Yhwh as being affected by 'sin' as well; as the initiator of Israel's community, he is also part thereof although clearly distinct from it. Yet God is not just 'affected', but doing evil calls God into action, not only by pursuing 'sin', but also by forgiving and healing. Moreover, doing evil has impacts on the individual perpetrator that go beyond feelings of guilt, shame, being polluted or weighed down.[5] The OT leaves no doubt: the last consequence of 'sin' is death (for every individual). I thus conclude that proposition #2 is certainly to be retained, but is also in need of significant extensions.

---

[3] English: 'We maintain this understanding because it agrees with God's word.'

[4] English: 'Everybody is interested in good behaviour. For not getting into trouble, or causing death, or sacrificing generations or his descendants, the family, it is necessary to avoid committing sins.'

[5] This aspect of the (inner) human reaction to 'sin' was pushed to the background during the research. I did not consider it to be a focus. Comprehensive studies on this issue already exist, see for example *Shame and guilt as a Key to Cross-cultural Christian Ministry* (Wiher 2003b; abridged French version see Wiher 2003a); *Scham- und Schuldorientierung in der Diskussion : Kulturanthropologische, missiologishe und theologische Einsichten* (Schirrmacher & Müller 2006); *Restoring Relationships: theological Reflections on Shame and Honor amogn the Daba and Bana of Cameroon* (Lienhard 2000) or *"Good Conscience": Differences between Honor and Justice Orientation* (Lienhard 2001), etc. Reasons for why I do not see fit the differentiation between shame & guilt in the Kongo context see my thoughts on p.147f.

7.1.1.3 Evil entering the community

o **Proposition #3:** *When the harmony of the family is threatened, death, diseases and curses enter the community and protection is no longer assured.*

Retain, as some of the students suggested. The consequences of evil in King David's family life became only too obvious:

> *Les années après l'adultère comis par David ont révélé que le péché prenait corps dans la famille royale. La révolte d'Adonija, l'inceste d'Ammon, les femmes du roi exposées en plein jour sont autant d'exemples de cette influence du péché. De même, les aspects du point (3) montrent la même chose.*[6](DOC-hw3#S12; similar DOC-hw3#S16, DOC-hw3#S04, DOC-hw3#S02, etc.).

> *Lors que [la] bonne relation n'existe plus entre Dieu et la famille, cette dernière est exposé à la mort, à des maladies et à des malédictions.*[7] (DOC-hw3#S11)

A student recommended modifying the proposition because God protects against death, illnesses and other calamities (DOC-hw3#S17). Yet another participant saw two important elements at work here.

> *Là où il n'y a pas la paix, l'amour, l'entente … les divisions, les querelles, disant quand il n'y a pas d'harmonie. Toutes ces choses donnent l'occasion au diable. C'est pourquoi il y a des maladies… Mais aussi, la puissance du pardon, la présence de Dieu peuvent chasser la maladie, la mort. Dieu peut éloigner tout ces fléaux.*[8] (DOC-hw3#S18)

On the one hand 'sin' leads to all kinds of evil things (discord, divisions, illnesses, etc.), but on the other hand God protects against these very things, a tension that is difficult to understand and to bear. Proposition #3 is problematic because both statements are true: 'Sin' affects others (family) who are not directly involved, but God has the power to protect against what is perceived as the consequences of 'sin'. At times however, God's protection does not seem to 'work' and illness strikes and makes the innocent suffer. The best biblical example for this is Job. His protest shows that the cause-and-effect is not the reason for the calamities in his

---

[6] English: 'During the years following David's adultery it was revealed that sin took hold of the royal family. Adonijah's revolt, Amnon's incest, the king's wives exposed in broad daylight, are examples of the influence of sin. The aspects in point (3) show the same thing.'

[7] English: 'As soon as [the] good relationship between God and the family does not exist any more, the latter is exposed to death, to illnesses and curses.'

[8] English: 'Where there is no peace, no love, no agreement … divisions, quarrelling, in short where there is no harmony. All these things give the devil a chance. That's why there are illnesses… But also, the power of forgiveness, God's presence can drive out sickness, death. God can take away all these plagues.'

life (see 6.3.2). There is the possibility that calamity does not strike because of somebody committing 'sin', but because of reasons hidden to humankind. The world we live in is a fallen world. The Kongo tendency to find the very source of calamity at all costs, usually sought in an individual member of the *kanda* (there **must** be a culprit or witchcraft; see 5.1.4.3), turns out to be enormously problematic as well at this point. According to the Kongo rationality it stands to reason that the source must be found, because only in the event that the wrongdoing is corrected can harmony be re-established. The OT agrees with the necessity to deal with the individual's 'sin', however in very different forms from the Kongo ones. Moreover, from the OT perspective the power of 'sin' can only be broken by God's divine intervention: his forgiveness and restoration.

7.1.1.4 Evil as an outside matter

o **Proposition #4:** *In the [Kongo] traditional view evil is something that is not innate but something that comes from the outside. In order to avoid 'bad things' being committed, the people must be 'educated'.*

Proposition #4 was a controversial subject. The majority suggested modifying it. Most students agreed that it is necessary to 'educate' in order to avoid or at least diminish wrongdoing, as the traditional view insists. They also agreed however that Ps. 51 was clear on the fact that 'sin' is something innate that only God can heal. One student pointed out that although 'sin' is innate, it remains at the same time something coming from the outside (for example from the parents):

> *Les mauvaises pensées et mauvais agissements peuvent se transmettre des parents aux enfants, l'orgueil, le mensonge, etc.*[9] (DOC-hw3#S15).

Another suggestion was to retain the proposition because for the continuance of life in harmony it is essential to preserve and maintain the values established in the past.

> *Dans chaque famille, clan ou communauté, il existe un certain nombre de chose autorisée et interdite. Il faut donc éduquer les gens pour que les valeurs soient connues et conservées afin que la famille ou*

---

[9] English: 'Evil thoughts and evil doing can be transferred from the parents to the children, pride [arrogance], lying, etc.'

234

la communauté soit préservée de tout ce qui peut menacer ou détruire l'harmonie.[10] (DOC-hw3#S17).

Another student disagreed and insisted that 'education' is not enough; transformation needs to happen inside:

Il ne suffit pas seulement d'éduquer les gens mais il faut que les gens aient la crainte de Dieu... Les gens doivent recevoir Christ dans leur vie afin que le salut produise en eux une nouvelle vie.[11] (DOC-hw3#S18)

Thus, the student advocated rejecting proposition #4.

From my point of view proposition #4 is problematic indeed. The OT understanding of 'sin' as an almost 'thing-like substance' is an aspect that supports the Kongo view that evil can be an outside matter. I can be greatly affected by somebody else's evil, by the evil done by a whole community of which I am a member, although I might not have participated in doing evil. I might suffer 'innocently', like Job. At the same time however, the OT sees humankind as deeply corrupted, a condition that cannot be corrected by 'education' but that can only be healed by God's forgiveness and transformation. Moreover, everybody is called to responsibility as an individual, not hiding behind the community. The element of 'education' however is also not to be overlooked in the OT. I understand Proverbs, Ecclesiastes as well as extensive parts of the Pentateuch and prophets as texts intended to teach, instruct and 'educate' audience and readers. Thus I suggest modifying proposition #4.

7.1.2 Implications

The implications of the 'critical response' given to propositions #1-4 are manifold. In the following I will address four issues. They regard the compulsory search for the source of evil, the fear of *kindoki* and the *nkisi*-practices as its remedy which influences the Kongo understanding of 'Church' (the Christian community) and 'sin'. In the following I will present

---

[10] English: 'A certain number of obligations and taboos exist in every family, clan or community. It is necessary to teach the people in order for the values to be known and upheld so that the family or the community will be protected from everything that threatens and destroys the harmony.'

[11] English: 'It is not enough to educate [teach] the people, but the people need to fear God… The people need to receive Christ in their life so that the salvation can bring about a new life in them.'

my reasons for considering these issues problematic and will offer points for further reflection as a way towards transformation.

7.1.2.1 Search for the source of evil breaking the harmony

Wrongdoing in the Kongo context is understood as opening the door for evil to break into the community. In order to re-establish safety and harmony the original perpetrator must be found out and called to account. In order to do so, divination rituals of different kinds are performed by *nkisi*-specialists (and others). On the surface, the casting of the lot in Josh. 7 might look very similar to Kongo divination. At its core however, the practice described in the OT is fundamentally different. Josh.7 does not leave the shadow of a doubt that the revealing of Achan as the culprit is God's doing, and not any kind of 'magic': The tribe… the clan… the household that **Yhwh** takes (v.14).

As described in 5.1.3.1, the finding that in the Kongo culture the individual is called to account, not the community or the perpetrator's family as a whole, came as a surprise to me. It uncovered a misunderstanding on my part: In a culture where the community takes central stage I thought of the individual fading out of sight and the community being held in corporate responsibility for the wrongdoing of an individual. The Kongo people however are keen to find the original source of the evil being perpetrated. Somebody must be responsible for the broken harmony that opens the door for curses and all sorts of evil to enter the community. It is essential to find the leak, because in the end it is a matter of life or death. In the Kongo culture the individual cannot really hide, at least not when the responsible party is searched for; all solidarity ends when evil enters the *kanda*. That vital search often means mortal terror for the individual. Once one is (unjustly) accused of being at the source of the evil happening, there is no turning back; there is only a slim chance of being excused or getting impartial, fair judgment. The only way out of being accused is often simply to confess being the culprit even if one is not aware of any wrongdoing.

Forgiveness, foreshadowed in the OT and firmly established through Christ in the NT, seems to be no real option in a Christian *kanda*. Moreover, the ethnic animosities in the class room and the tensions, the lack of compassion and unwillingness to forgive among future church leaders (see the introductory grassroots story) were shocking and saddening. And this raises serious questions for the Church in Congo to answer. I see an immediate need for the Church to address these issues at congregational level but also on a national scale, offering courageous and honest dialogue that aims at reconciliation.

7.1.2.2 Fear of *kindoki* and practice of *nkisi*

Assuming that what I found in the literature regarding *kindoki* and *nkisi* applies to the Kongo context as well, the belief in 'witchcraft', especially the fear of being attacked by *kindoki*, needs to be openly addressed in the Church. To simply ban the practice (which the EEC and other evangelical churches seem to be trying)[12] is no solution because it touches not only on ethical behaviour, but on the social structure, safety of the community and even on economics.

The practice and belief in *kindoki* produces an atmosphere of fear that is deeply rooted in the social structure. *Kindoki* makes the Kongo people behave ethically because of fear. I suspect that this fear is transported into the Christian faith, leaving its marks on what is supposed to be 'Christian behaviour'. My experience was that many Kongo Christians are still driven by the fear of getting 'punished' by calamity striking if one does not do what is preached on Sundays or what the Bible or the leading pastor commands. The main features of ethical behaviour that is perceived as 'Christian' look very similar to the Kongo traditional understanding of wrongdoing, yet the motivation to behave ethically is fundamentally different. While ethical conduct in the Kongo culture is driven by fear, Christian ethical conduct is meant to be motivated by love. The possibility of unconsciously being *ndoki* aggravates the Kongo people's fear of being accused.

---

[12] Sundberg (2000:73) points out that article no. 30 *'Les coutumes sociales'* (social customs) of the official document *'Étique et discipline de L'Église Évangélique du Congo'* states that the EEC fights every kind of superstition and custom in contradiction with the Gospel. Among other things it particularly **forbidden** to 'support beliefs in sorcery or to accuse somebody of sorcery' or to 'practice fetishism'.

It places a burden upon many to meet the family obligations even if they constitute severe intrusions into the household economy. Everybody looks at everybody else in the family with suspicion; trust is often a foreign word. The suspicion paralyzes honest, supporting relationships that foster trust and confidence. In the Christian communities the call to exercise love in terms of 1 Cor. 13 is often only paid lip service because of fear.

The fear of *kindoki* generates yet another difficulty often underestimated by cultural outsiders. While one of the European ideals of a mature Christian is being economically self-sufficient, the fear of *kindoki* leads to the opposite: the economic incentive to make a profit is almost non-existent because the community expects returns to be shared rather than being further invested. There is little encouragement for economic development. Prosperous lives are intensely sought but only approved when the community profits. Individual development or non-shared profit is doomed to be smashed by *kindoki*.

Simply banning the belief and practices of *kindoki* and *nkisi* is short sighted and makes the practices go underground. I suspect that the 'sources of influence and power' are rarely under-stood by the cultural outsiders, the missionaries. The Churches influenced by West-European culture banned the use of *nkisi*-powers without offering an alternative. Because practices of *nkisi* are more than religious habits or beliefs however, it is not surprising that many Christians still call on traditional powers. As I have pointed out in 5.1.4 these sources of influence and power are part of the Kongo social and political fabric that cannot be banned without developing an alternative reliable system that takes into consideration the Kongo daily fears and affairs of evil, the basic questions that drive the Kongo search for 'good life'. A meaningful theological teaching about 'sin' needs to comprehensively reflect on the issue of *kindoki* and *nkisi* developing an alternative that builds up trustworthy community.

In order to find such an alternative, any further research undertaken needs to consider Pentecostal responses to the challenges and problems described in this sub-section. Kalu (2008)

claims that Pentecostals root their message of the Gospel into the African map of the universe and thus its fruits serve more adequately the challenges and problems arising from indigenous worldviews than the earlier missionary fruits did. 'The major contribution of the Pentecostal movement is how it addresses the continued reality of the forces expressed in African cultural forms' (2008:178). Although I found Pentecostal churches in Africa generally display great hostility to African traditional religions, their theology functions within a worldview that deeply resonates with indigenous religiosity (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:23). By referring to Kofi Appiah-Kubi[13], Cox describes African Independent Churches (that he qualifies as Pentecostal) as giving a 'Christian answer' to the specific religious needs of the African soul that 'provide their followers with the weapons of the Spirit they need to fight back against the forces of evil as they manifest themselves in disease and discord' (Cox 1995:247). Local Pentecostal theology might be able to respond more aptly to *kindoki* and *nkisi*-practices and the resulting problems discussed. At the same time however I consider it appropriate to point out that by offering 'treatment' against 'witchcraft' – divine healing services, ceremonies of exorcism, etc. – the Pentecostal churches are in danger of reinforcing the very practices and beliefs they fight, as a UNICEF study points out. 'The more God's servants fight against witchcraft, the more they get involved in treating witches, and at the end of the day, the more they extend the resources of witchcraft.' (Cimpric 2010:3 referring to Tonda 2002). Because 'witchcraft' is complex, not only in the Church, Agang (2009) suggests that its solution will be multidimensional, including the religious, political, social and personal dimensions.

7.1.2.3 Kongo Christian life-style and Church model

Despite the problematic issues regarding the community described above – mind you, noted by a Swiss researcher – the community as the Kongo centre of 'good life' needs to be maintained. From my point of view however this implies an ethical life-style for Kongo Christians that looks

---

[13] Kofi Appiah-Kubi is an author and theologian from Ghana.

different from my own in some regards; it also has implications for the Church model in the Kongo context.

As I pointed out in the previous sub-section, and as MacGaffey once pointedly stated, 'the missionary ideal of a Christian – individually saved, economically self-sufficient and socially autonomous – is the Kongo ideal of complete anarchy' (MacGaffey 1970a:254). Therefore, the Kongo ideal Christian life will look different. This conclusion drawn from the presented study questions many basics of the Christian life and behaviour I grew up with.

To become a follower of Christ implies an ontological shift because of the following. One of Christ's most radical words regarding the life of a disciple is found in Lk.14:25: 'Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.' Considering the findings regarding the community in 5.1 and 5.2 Jesus' call would mean for Kongo Christians to break with their ancestry, to leave their *kanda* which amounts to losing 'life', security, and prosperity; it meant to die to their ontological selves, a call from life to death (see 5.1.4.2). It stands to reason that questions arise as to whether such an interpretation of Lk. 14:25 is too radical or whether someone can become a member of God's family while still being tied into the former family, the former commitments, obligations, rights and privileges. I came to understand these issues as problematic.

The courage to break one's cultural and familial ties and 'abandon the gods of his ancestors (Joshua 24:2) out of allegiance to a God of all families and all cultures' is what Volf describes as 'Abrahamic revolution' (Volf 1996:39). Abraham's call to 'go from his kindred and his father's house' (Gen. 12:1) meant to step out of 'enmeshment in the network of inherited cultural relations', and it was a…

> …correlate of faith in the one God … To be a child of Abraham and Sarah and to respond to the call of their God means to make an exodus, to start a journey, to become a stranger. It is a mistake, I believe, to complain too much about Christianity being 'alien' in a given culture. (Volf 1996:39)

If 'becoming a stranger' and 'leaving one's family' is really what a follower of Christ must do, it would be of fundamental and existential importance that there is a new community into

240

which the Kongo Christian would be 'born', new ties, new ancestry, new line of blessing, protection, prosperity, etc. It would be of decisive importance that they understood themselves as being adopted children of God and God's heirs[14] (Rom. 8:15ff), an idea that, from the Kongo perspective, must go beyond a simple image and become ontological reality. Or by using a different image, they would be like 'wild shoots' grafted into God's olive tree, Israel, still originating from the **wild** olive and thus being different in character from the cultivated one (Walls 1982:104).[15]

A solution to the problem of leaving the old community ties is hinted at by Ott (2015:52). He suggests developing a 'kingdom culture', an idea worth considering. According to Ott no Christian or church can exist free from a specific culture; Christianity however cannot be identified with that culture either. The development of such a 'kingdom culture' would not only imply a change of behaviour (surface level) and beliefs (structural level), but it would also imply change on the deeper foundational level: the transformation of worldview (see Figure 1.5-2, p.25). Hiebert was convinced that…

> If behavioral [sic] change was the focus of early Protestantism, and changed beliefs the focus of the twentieth century, transforming worldviews must be central to church and mission in the twenty-first century. (Hiebert 2008:315)

It must be asked what a 'kingdom culture' would look like as it takes shape in the local context. Whatever changes and transformation may be implied, the church of the local 'kingdom culture' is thought to be 'seasoned with grace, truth, and righteousness of the gospel of Jesus Christ' and 'will be a faithful sign, instrument, and foretaste' of Christ's kingdom (Ott 2015:52).

From my perspective, the development of a truly New Testament Church model in the sense of a local 'kingdom culture' presents an alternative worth heading for. The Kongo version of the 'kingdom culture' would take over the role of that new *kanda*, meet the needs of its

---

[14] See for example Romans 8:15ff.

[15] See Romans 11:17ff. The image of wild olive shoots being grafted was vehemently rejected by the students in one of the first classes of which I do not have written reference. I still remember it because it was the first time that the students became loud and very articulated. The idea of leaving one's ancestry was an absolute no-go for the students.

individual members and address the problematic issues described in this study; it would take over the responsibilities, tasks and necessary roles of the Kongo community allowing 'good life' to be lived. [16]

7.1.2.4 'Sin' – a communal issue

The findings in 6.1 and 6.2 emphasize that 'sin' in the OT is foremost understood as breaking God's covenant. It is not to be overlooked however that 'sin' can also be a communal matter (Josh. 7). A remaining question to which I have not found an answer is whether the importance of the Kongo community means that in their view 'sin' always concerns the community in one way or another (and never just the individual perpetrator alone). If that question is answered positively from the Kongo perspective this means that forgiveness, salvation and redemption are also to be treated as community matters; the practical dealing with 'sin' would not be private and individual. Such a conclusion would be at odds with 2 Sam. 12. This passage shows that although David's 'sin' deeply affected his family and his reign (and as such being a community/*kanda* issue), God dealt with him individually through his prophet Nathan.

7.2 Evaluation of propositions #5-6: Concerning God and his involvement in human affairs

After the evaluation of the 'critical response' to propositions #1-4 and the discussion of the implications thereof I will turn in this section to the propositions #5-6. The two are grouped together because they both concern God and his involvement in human life.

---

[16] Another interesting thought about the creation of a completely new community derives from the Gospel of Mark. In chapter 3 the Apostle wrote that Jesus 'brought into being' his twelve disciples. The Greek word used in Mark 3:14 is *poieō* (to create, to make) that can be understood as an act of creation (BDAG ποιέω p.839). Thus, according to Mark, Jesus' choosing his disciples is more than simply 'calling' them to follow him or 'appointing' them; Jesus 'made' them.

7.2.1 'Critical response'

7.2.1.1 *Nzambi* not affected

o **Proposition #5**: *In the [Kongo] traditional view God is not affected by the 'bad things' committed by human beings because he is far away from the living.*

One student did not agree that *Nzambi* was traditionally a faraway God.

> *La tradition n'a jamais éloigné Dieu, mais à chercher à le matérialiser.*[17] (DOC-hw3#S15)

For most participants however it was clear that proposition #5 was to be rejected.

> *Dieu est toujours proche.* (DOC-hw3#S02; similar DOC-hw3#S04; DOC-hw3#S05; DOC-hw3#S14). … *Dieu est très proche des personnes vivantes car il a dit qu'il marche avec son peuple. Si bien que Dieu est affecté par le mal de son peuple par lequel il est rattaché par une alliance.*[18] (DOC-hw3#S13; similar DOC-hw3#S11)

Although the majority of the students agreed that the traditional view contradicts the OT view, two students suggested the proposition not to 'reject' but to 'transform':

> *Mat.28.20 « Je suis avec vous tous les jours... » Donc l'élément de la culture ne concorde pas avec la pensée biblique. D'où nous l'insistance sur la transformation de cet élément.* (DOC-hw3#S16; similar DOC-hw3#S17) … *c'est une erreur de croire que Dieu n'est pas concerné et qu'il vit loin de nous. Non ! C'est faux. Ce point est à rejeté ou à modifier.*[19] (DOC-hw3#S18)

That the transformation is not just to be made intellectually was suggested by yet another participant:

> *[Le] cinquième élément culturel... doit être transformé en vue de changer la mentalité traditionnelle de l'africain.*[20] (DOC-hw3#S03)

The suggestion for transforming rather than rejecting came at first as a surprise. I had expected a different response. By reflecting on the point that God is at the same time absolute Lord, but also seeking 'togetherness' with humankind, welcoming them into relationship, I came to understand however that the Kongo perspective of *Nzambi* being far away (5.3) is still to be

---

[17] English: 'The tradition never made God distant, but sought to materialize him.'

[18] English: 'God is always close… God is very close to the living because he said that he walks with his people. Although God is affected by the evil of his people to whom he is attached by a covenant.'

[19] English: 'Mt.28:20 "I am with you always..." So the cultural element is not consistent with the biblical thought. Hence we stress the transformation of this element. ... It is a mistake to believe that God is not affected, and that he lives far away from us. No! That's wrong. This element is to be rejected or modified.'

[20] English: '[The] fifth cultural element… must be transformed in order to change the African's traditional mentality.'

kept in view; God is both, the utterly other, unsusceptible to human manipulation, but also close, intimately relating to humankind. As one student expressed it, God is mystery indeed.

7.2.1.2 Yhwh truly touched

o **Proposition #6:** *Contrary to the traditional cultures in Congo, the God of the Bible is truly touched by the sin of his people (or by the sin of an individual) because he is near, because he is committed to his people by a covenant.*

All students without exception agreed that this is to be retained.[21]

> *Dieu dont nous parle la Bible n'est pas un Dieu distant d'où la nécessité de transformer cette conception culturelle qui enseigne que Dieu n'est pas touché par le péché de son peuple.*[22] (DOC-hw3#S03)

The Kongo tradition and the Bible are definitively opposite at this point. The students had nothing to add. Accepting proposition #6 also means that 'sin', *les mauvaises choses* (evil things) as we kept referring to wrongdoing in class, is to be viewed as being committed 'before God', and not only 'before the community' (5.3.3). Considering the findings in 6.1 it would be worth reflecting further on the question whether the OT does support the view of 'sin' being committed 'before the community' or whether it is exclusively understood as 'before God'. The OT radically displays a God-centeredness which seems to put the community at the periphery. This implies that the Kongo (Christian) people must understand that whoever does wrong is not only accountable to the family/community (*kanda*), but even more so to God.

7.2.2 Implications

The implications of the propositions #5-6 regarding the traditional Kongo understanding of *Nzambi* being distant and thus wrongdoing not being 'sin' before God, are evident. The inquiries presented in chapter 6 showed that Yhwh takes central stage in the OT understanding of 'sin'; it cannot be thought of or discussed detached from the concept of God. This is not only true for the

---

[21] See all the students' documents DOC-hw3#S02; #S04; #S05; #S09; #S11; #S13; #S15; #S16; #S17; #S14; #S18.

[22] English: 'The Bible does not talk about a distant God, hence the need to transform this cultural view that teaches that God is not affected by the sin of his people.'

Kongo context, but also for my own culture. Whatever is thought about God influences the understanding of 'sin'. This implies that if the Church is not able to comprehensively talk about God, the Church is unable to intelligibly talk about 'sin'. This applies for the Kongo context as well as anybody else's context.

God is deeply involved in human affairs (chapter 6), but not solely as a punitive God; that would be a most unfortunate reduction if not a disastrous misunderstanding. From the beginning God is a blessing God, and his goal has been to give and sustain life. In section 5.3 I argued that the traditional image of *Nzambi* contrasts strongly with the image of Yhwh in the OT. I still remember one class during which the students opposed the idea that *Nzambi* was different from Yhwh. It seemed however that after working through the step of 'critical response' the majority of the students revised their first reaction. Before I had understood the importance of the image of God regarding 'sin', the students' view of *Nzambi* being identical with Yhwh just saddened me and I dismissed the topic (5.3.1). Today however I am convinced that if the Kongo Christians firmly hold onto their image of God based solely on the view of the traditional *Nzambi* figure, ignoring or even refusing what is revealed about the covenant God in the OT, they will not find the 'good life' they are yearning for. They will be like Israel, who abandoned the fountain of living water, digging out their own cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that cannot hold any water (Jer. 2:13). Understanding God in terms of the portrait given in the OT is not an optional extra, but an essential part of the Christian life.

7.3   Evaluation of proposition #7: Discourse on 'sin'

7.3.1 'Critical response'

o **Proposition #7**: *In the Church the term 'bad things' or '(commit) evil' is generally translated by 'masumu'.*

The responses to proposition #7 turned out to be diverse. I anticipated a vivid wish to modify and develop the Kongo vocabulary for 'sin'. I was disappointed. Many participants saw no necessity for change as the following contribution states.

Par rapport à ce que nous dit la bible sur le péché, le concept masumu dans notre culture a gardé son sens. Car masumu c'est tout ce qui est mal devant Dieu ; tout ce qui est contre sa volonté ; ce qui brise notre relation avec le créateur ; ce qui est impur ; ce qui détruit l'harmonie familiale c'est-à-dire commettre l'adultère, tuer, voler, mentir, ne pas respecter les interdictions, le non respect aux anciens... Nous pensons bien de ne pas rejeter, ni transformer ce concept mais plutôt maintenir car il cadre mieux avec ce que la bible nous enseigne sur le péché.[23] (DOC-hw3#S02; similar DOC-hw3#S05; DOC-hw3#S09; DOC-hw3#S11; DOC-hw3#S17; DOC-hw3#S14; DOC-hw3#S18)

It was however acknowledged that the Bible offers a much wider semantic field than the term *masumu* could possibly cover (DOC-hw3#S13). Thus, one participant suggested, 'modification' should be the agenda.

Le terme « masumu » est à modifier, car, il traduit tout ce que l'on déteste. Les termes comme פֶּשַׁע (rébellion), עָוֹן (perversion), חַטָא (péché), רַע (le mal) n'ont pas d'équivalence dans nos cultures surtout après le passage des missionnaires.[24] (DOC-hw3#S12)

One student formulated the need for modification more resolutely:

Nous constatons que plusieurs termes utilises dans les versions françaises et hébraïques se résument de façon générale en un seul terme dans nos cultures. Ceci peut s'expliquer par la pauvreté de nos langues. Cette conception d'une seule expression qui désigne le péché est à notre avis à jeter.[25] (DOC-hw3#S03)

The perceived problem of the Kongo languages being too poor to express the concept of 'sin' more accurately was made most explicit in the following contribution:

Le fait de traduire le terme « mauvaise chose » ou « faire le mal » par masumu, montre le vide vocable qui existerait dans la culture. A ce titre, l'on peut dire que la traduction ne donne pas toujours des éléments ou expression appropriée. Nous pensons que cette expression n'est ni à garder, à transformer ou à rejeter, mais à adapter selon les expressions. En effet, le problème fondamental réside en la carence ou la pauvreté de la langue qui n'arrive pas à traduire les faits, le vrai sens des mots.[26] (DOC-hw3#S16)

---

[23] English: 'Compared to what the Bible says about sin, the concept *masumu* in our culture has kept its meaning. Because *masumu* is all that is evil before God; all that is against his will; what breaks our relationship with the Creator; what is unclean; what destroys the harmony of the family, which is committing adultery, killing, stealing, lying, disregarding the prohibitions, disrespecting the elders ... We would do well to neither reject nor transform this concept but rather to retain it because it fits better with what the Bible teaches about sin.'

[24] English: 'The term *masumu* is to be modified because it translates everything that is detested. The terms פֶּשַׁע (rebellion), עָוֹן (perversion), חַטָא (sin), רַע (evil) have no equivalences in our cultures, especially after the missionaries have passed through.'

[25] English: 'We note that several terms used in the French and Hebrew versions are generally summarized in our cultures by one single term. This can be explained by the poverty of our languages. In our opinion the concept of one single term referring to sin is to be rejected.'

[26] English: 'Translating "bad thing" or "doing evil" by *masumu* shows the emptiness of words that exists in the [our] culture. In the light of this it is to say that the [Bible?] translation does not always render the elements or expressions appropriately. We think that this phrase is neither to be kept, nor transformed nor rejected, but it needs

During my work as Bible translation consultant I learnt that no language is too poor for rendering the Word of God accurately. I regard the assertion that the Kongo languages were inadequate to express the diverse Hebrew terms for 'sin' as made too hastily. Moreover, the attempt at putting the blame for the vernacular one-word-concept on the first passing missionaries (see the above quote DOC-hw3#S12) annoyed me greatly. Because we could not discuss the responses in class, it was impossible to verify at first hand what was behind the students' view of their languages being poor: a feeling of the Kongo culture being inferior, or an unwillingness to dig deeper, a reluctance to go for the hard work of contextualizing rather challenging theological terms.

Convinced that the OT imagery for 'sin' can be accurately expressed in the Kongo vernacular I recommend modifying proposition #7. It is a highly challenging choice; the Kikongo version of Psalm 51 demonstrates however, that a variety of terms can be found (see Table 5.4-2, p.170). Establishing a richer vocabulary and imagery than the word *masumu* portrays, will most definitely help to understand the OT concept of 'sin' more comprehensively.

7.3.2 Implications

The finding that the Kongo term *masumu* is not a comprehensive fit for expressing the full spectrum of meaning of the OT notion of 'sin' does not only imply further linguistic work; it also implies a theological challenge which I will explain in the following.

7.3.2.1 Vernacular terms

In contrast to the OT which uses many metaphors in order to explain the idea of what today is theologically named 'sin', the vernacular term *masumu* levels out the vividness of 'sin' and forces the concept into one rather abstract term. In view of the influence of the LXX's translation (see details below sub-section 7.3.2.2, specifically p.249), this is not surprising. I consider it essential for the Kongo vernacular vocabulary to be further developed. The lingua franca

---

to be adapted corresponding to the [individual Hebrew] expressions. In fact, the fundamental problem lies in the lack or poverty of language that is not able to render the facts, the real meaning of the words.'

Munukutuba might be perceived as too 'poor', but its original source, the Kikongo language, from which it can be drawn, is very suitable for rendering the richness of the Hebrew terms and imagery.

For developing a richer vocabulary and as a result a more comprehensive discourse of 'sin', it might be a suitable way forward to adopt the Hebrew way of circling an object; by doing so the Hebrew writers capture the meaning of an issue more fully.[27] Another way forward for further developing the vernacular semantic domain for 'sin' could be contrasting terms, also analogous to the Hebrew. Tables 6.1-1 (p.183), 6.1-2 (p.190), 6.1-3 (p.198) and 6.2.-1 (p.213) present sources from which suitable notions can be drawn.

7.3.2.2 Sphere of 'sin'

Beside the linguistic challenge, proposition #7 also implies further reflections in the area of theology. In sub-section 6.3.2 I presented Koch's suggestion that the OT notion of 'sin' can be understood as something that generates a 'sphere' influencing the surroundings, making humans inwardly sick and affecting them physically. Koch substantiates his suggestion by the finding that the terms *ḥāṭāʾ* and *ʿāwōn* have double meanings (they can mean 'sin', 'guilt', or punishment; see 6.3.1). The understanding of 'sin' not just as an isolated action but as a 'sphere' implies a nuance in the discourse that I assume to be potentially significant for the contextualization of 'sin', provided that it could be further substantiated by additional research. 'Sin' as an **action** can be atoned for (and forgiven); a 'sin-sphere' however cannot be 'forgiven', but it must be broken, and the humans influenced and affected by that sphere need healing and restoration by God's powerful intervention. This would also imply that whenever we deal with 'sin' and offence – as offender or offended, as pastor, mediator, missionary, etc. – it is not only the one having

---

[27] See Egelkraut (2000:367) in section 6.2, on p.206.

committed 'sin' who must be addressed, but also the people who are influenced by the 'sin-sphere' and might greatly suffer the consequences.

The dimension of 'sin' as a sphere neither finds expression linguistically nor is taught in most Churches; teachings about the **power** of 'sin' or about being delivered from the 'domain of darkness' (Col. 1:13) is heard only too rarely. One of the reasons for this might be found in the complexity of the Hebrew language and the Greek translation of the OT. By translating the many-faceted features of 'sin' in the OT by *hamartia* (error, sin)[28], *anomia* (lawlessness) and *adikia* (injustice, unrighteousness), the LXX reduced the understanding of 'sin' mostly to the semantic field of law. In view of the findings presented in chapter 6, the understanding of 'sin' in legal terms is not wrong; it presents however only one of many views. To understand 'sin' **exclusively** in juridical or forensic terms is at best an abridged version, at worst it is seriously misleading. I think the metaphor of a 'sin-sphere' is an important complement to the legal metaphor to which fewer and fewer West-Europeans can relate (Ott 2014)[29]; and I suspect this is also true for many others, including the Kongo people.

The reception of the imagery of 'sin' as a sphere is expected to be diverse. For the 'Greek'-thinking and 'enlightened' West-European, 'sphere of sin' sounds like a rather uncomfortable, maybe too superstitious thought; something uncontrollable is probably perceived as a disconcerting idea. For the 'magic-religious' Kongo people the idea of 'sin' as a sphere might come too close to their traditional view to be accepted as profoundly 'Christian'. In any case the suggestion

---

[28] The concrete meaning of the verb *hamartanein* in classical Greek is 'not to hit' or 'to miss'; metaphorically *hamartano* designates an intellectual shortcoming and hence the abstract sense of 'error', and it later denotes an 'erroneous action'. According to the TDNT (Grundmann 1976) *hamartanein* came to be a purely negative term for doing something which is not *orthon* (upright, correct, true), a term used in the sense of morality, of formal law or of that which is intellectually or technically correct. The LXX uses *hamartanein* mostly for *ḥāṭāʾ*, rendering the meaning of 'missing', 'going astray' or 'not finding'. It becomes however increasingly a moral and religious term with the meaning of 'guilt', removing the 'double level of meaning' of *ḥāṭāʾ* (see 6.3.1, p.220). By the use in the LXX, *hamartia* comes to have the predominant religious sense of 'aberration' or 'sinning'. The NT follows the LXX. Thus *hamartia* in the NT 'is almost always a matter of 'offence in relation to God with emphasis on guilt' (Grundmann 1976:295 [TDNT]).

[29] Ott's article 'The power of biblical metaphors' presents a selection of biblical metaphors for salvation and comments on their usefulness in different cultures.

of 'sin' creating a sphere invites further reflection and research that has the potential of looking at 'sin' from yet another angle.

7.4 Evaluation and implications of the contextualization process and the work across cultures

After having presented the evaluation and implications regarding the understanding of 'sin' in the Kongo context, in this section I will focus on the contextualization undertaking. Doing research **with** people cross-culturally rather than doing it **on** people meant for me to leave my comfort zone and experience my assumptions being scrutinized to which I have given account in passing throughout my work. In this section I will first turn my attention to the initial assumption regarding my understanding of 'culture' underlying the research. I will then further evaluate the contextualization process and its practicalities, and present the implications thereof.

7.4.1 Understanding of culture

When it comes to writing down the implications of my research regarding the task of contextualization, the first thing on which I need to comment is my initial assumption on 'culture'. When I first started the field work in Brazzaville, I could not find the research setting I had anticipated. I had imagined sitting down and working with group participants who came from one distinctive culture, who spoke the same language and shared in the same (one) identity. I could not find any such group with which I could take what I thought was the 'right' way forward for proper data collection. It was only during the final writing process, that led me to deeper reflections on my field research experience, that I realized how much I had been a captive to the definition of 'culture' which Ott calls an 'essentialist understanding of culture'.

> The essentialist understanding of culture claims that cultures are well-defined entities, more or less self-contained, bounded social systems, clearly differentiated from one another. The culture defined a person's identity, values, and behavior [sic]. (Ott 2015:49)

While acknowledging that there was no 'single Kongo universe' (Hersak 2001:616; see also 1.5.3), I had assumed two distinct and relatively 'pure' cultures, the Kongo culture and my

own Swiss culture. I thought of the issue being to communicate from one culture to the other, building a bicultural bridge and myself becoming a bicultural person who was able 'to see the world through the eyes of two cultures' (Hiebert 1991:276 quoted by Rynkiewich 2002:303). Being aware of the OT context being a third culture element to be considered, I had mentally adopted the three-culture model developed by Hesselgrave (1978) with which I thought of being able to communicate well across cultures. In my missionary training I had learnt that each culture was 'made up of parts that function to maintain a harmonious, balanced whole' (Hiebert 1996:73).[30] While it never occurred to me that this 'standard anthropological model' (Rynkiewich 2002) could be outdated, I kept feeling uneasy because the cultural setting I experienced in Congo was mixed and increasingly blurred (see 1.5.3 and 1.5.4).

By reading more recent literature on anthropological and missiological research (Lavenda & Schultz 2010; Rynkiewich 2011a; 2011b; Ott 2015) I came to recognize that my assumed culture model and its research methods, by Rynkiewich disparagingly called 'jungle anthropology' (2011b:xiii), was no longer a helpful paradigm to conduct cultural research in a globalizing world; this had a sobering effect on me. I remembered that at one point I instinctively felt that Hiebert's model of critical contextualization, a product of an 'essentialist understanding' of culture (Ott 2015), had to be adapted to the culture situation in Congo. The model called for interpreting **past** beliefs. I could not lose the impression that this was not suitable for collecting and analysing the data of a changing culture increasingly characterized by urbanization and the younger generation's 'trend to blend' (Nederveen Pieterse 2009:viii), in the literature also called 'hybridization'[31] which describes the creation of something new from fusing elements of an

---

[30] Besides Paul Hiebert and David Hesselgrave, other representatives of this view culture model are among others: Charles Kraft, Sherwood Lingenfelter, Louis Luzbetak, Marvin Mayers and Darell L. Whiteman.

[31] 'Hybridity has become a regular, almost ordinary fixture in popular and mainstream culture – widely recognized as the 'trend to blend.' (Nederveen Pieterse 2009:viii quoted by Ott 2015:48). In distinction to 'hybridity', the term 'syncretism' is used by outside observers, describing the reshaping of a borrowed item (from an outside culture) to make it fit into pre-existing cultural arrangements. 'Syncretism' has a negative connotation. In anthropologists' terms, syncretism is usually linked to a power divide and unequal relationships between the cultures. Hybridization can also be experienced as negative. It must not be ignored that those with power – who are able to pick and choose as they please – and those without power (e.g. marginal groups) upon whom hybridity is thrust, perceive it very differently. (See Lavenda & Schultz 2010:81, 192ff).

outside culture and the home culture (Lavenda & Schultz 2010).[32]

The cultural context of the Kongo has been changing rapidly. The majority of the Congolese participate in different realities at the same time and experience what Schreiter called 'multiple belonging' (1997:26). Hints were there, mostly seen in what I thought to be 'contradictions' (that needed solving) displayed in the group participants' talk and in the students' written work. However I did not pay attention. The reason, I suspect, might be found in my unrecognized assumption about culture that tacitly influenced my interpretation of the data in front of me.

The fact of culture change is not new. Yet, as Ott (2015:50) points out, 'globalization, and with it hybridization, has dramatically increased the rate and depth of change.' And if culture-change is considered as something normal and neutral, there is no need to pit the 'traditional culture' or the 'past beliefs and customs' against outside influences. That leaves the uncomfortable question however, as to whether and to what extent 'culture' is to be protected or preserved. This question is uncomfortable because it brings me into confrontation with my employing institution that advocates the preservation of languages and with it the respective cultures.[33]

With the cultural contexts being more and more hybridized, I agree with Schreiter (1997:27) that the concept of 'pure' cultures becomes increasingly untenable. Van Binsbergen

---

[32] Globalization theorists talk about 'glocalization' instead of hybridization, for example Robertson (1995) in his contribution 'Glocalization: time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity' in *Global Modernities*. See also Robertson 1992 and 2000. Ott (2015:48) defines hybridization as follows: 'Hybridization refers to the process whereby the local is fused with the global. We are not all becoming the same, and the local retains a certain priority People do not entirely surrender their cultural identities in the face of global influence but they do adapt and adopt some of them, assimilating elements from other cultures and rejecting others.' Lavenda & Schultz (2010:194) explain that the 'emphasis in discussions of cultural hybridization is on forms of cultural borrowing that produce something completely new from the fusing of elements of donor and recipient cultures. … [the] discourse emphasizes creativity and cultural gain. It acknowledges the agency of those who borrow and helps discredit the notion that "authentic" cultural traditions never change.'

[33] 'Through language research, documentation and promotion of language development, SIL contributes to the preservation of languages and cultures in danger of disappearing.' SIL International 2015. Available at: <http://www.sil.org/about/discover> [Accessed 17 December 2015].

(2003:521) goes one step further and argues that 'cultures do not exist *any more* in our time characterised by globalisation and the multicultural society' and suggest that 'we are much better off as nomads between a plurality of cultures, than as self-imposed prisoners of a smug Euro-centrism (or Afrocentrism, for that matter)'. 'Culture' is no longer bounded, tied to a place, impossible to combine, blend and transgress (2003:508). Van Binsbergen adopts the term 'cultural orientation' reminding the (anthropological) researcher of the situationality, multiplicity and performativity of 'culture'. According to him every human being is found at the intersection of *a number* of different cultural orientations (2003:476f).

Accordingly, today's globalization and the hybridization of cultures implies two things. First, it is necessary for me to adopt another paradigm regarding culture. Based on the reflections above and influenced by Lavenda & Schultz (2010) I came to understand culture as dynamic and open to change. I tend to acknowledge that the mixing and reconfiguring of elements from different cultural traditions by insiders actually has the strong potential to enrich rather than destroy cultures. I increasingly understand the deliberately choosing and selectively adopting of elements from outside cultures not as rejecting one's own tradition, but as affirming and strengthening one's own evolving cultural identity.

Second, it also implies that 'a more robust model of contextualization' is needed (Ott 2015:51). While older contextualization models aimed at social transformation by evaluating and transforming cultural practices and identities of the past, new models will need to focus on how the phenomenon of hybridization and the forces of globalization 'can be channelled and processed to produce a more just and verdant society of the present and future' (Ott 2015:51). To call for new contextualization models however is one thing, but how to actually accomplish it yet another. To find answers to the myriad of questions raised in this regard will be the task of future research and cannot be addressed here.

In retrospect I suspect that if I had recognized the problems of my essentialist understanding of culture earlier on in the research process, I might have engaged with the group participants and their everyday realities differently.

7.4.2 Contextualization

7.4.2.1 Initiator's role

One of the categories Moreau uses to characterize contextualization models is the role taken by the initiator (see 2.2). According to Moreau, Hiebert's model – which underlies my study – assumes the initiator's role being that of a 'guide' whose primary job is to steer or direct people in the contextualization process (2012:225). Hiebert assigns to the initiator a leading role indeed. For example, step 2 ('exegesis of Scripture') is for the missionary to lead the church in a study of Scripture passages, and 'the leader [that is, the pastor or missionary] uses the occasion to teach the Christian beliefs' about the subject at hand (Hiebert 1994:89). Although I was not a church leader but a researcher setting up a situation for the sake of research, from the beginning I encountered difficulties with my role as a guide or teacher; and my role underwent a change (see 4.2.2 and 4.2.3).

The problem became increasingly personal because I saw it in connection with being a cultural outsider; and the question whether I was fit to do contextualization in the Congo because of my origin kept nagging. Julian (2010:68) wrote that 'the task of contextualizing theology must be done by cultural insiders. For too long theology has been done by cultural outsiders.' Her statement resounded with the general call for missionaries to step back when it comes to theologizing in the host culture. Although many authors writing about contextualization ascribe to the outsiders an important role because of their ability to see aspects of culture to which insiders may be blinded, the message that filtered through to me was simply 'you should not be doing what you are doing and how you are doing it': that is, contextualizing theology in a foreign culture. This increasingly brought into question even my employment in Congo.

7.4.2.2 Who does contextualization?

The questions of the roles taken in the contextualization process touch on yet another assumption of Hiebert's contextualization model. In step 3 ('critical response'), by referring to the 'priest-hood of all believers' the model underlines that it is not only church leaders and pastors who are involved in contextualization but all people in the church (Hiebert 1994:90). The decision to continue the research with a group whose participants were future pastors and church leaders seemed to go counter to the principle of the 'priesthood of all believers'. This discrepancy between the theoretical and the practical set up of the field study led to reflections that I present in the following.

A first superficial response to the question about my understanding of the issue is that I comprehend the principle of the 'priesthood of all believers' in the sense that every believer has access to God (through Christ) without the mediation of a 'priest', and that every believer is called to 'serve God'. Accordingly, priesthood is not only a call for a professional theological elite (priests, prophets, pastors, preachers, missionaries, etc.), but for every Christian, regardless of age, gender, education, social status, etc. Therefore, theology is not only something for a theologian but is intended for everybody and for a whole community to do. By dealing with the issue in more depth I realized that I had quietly maintained a rather critical, almost polemical attitude towards the authority of clergy. I had assumed that the principle of the 'priesthood of all believers' meant equal responsibility, competence and authority by laity and clergy in terms of exegesis and doing theology; theology is not a property of a theologian class.

By doing theology cross-culturally however I began to realize that there are limits to the community of all believers doing theology. Support came from a Catholic perspective. Fittingly Schreiter (1985:17) points out: 'Not everything any community says or does can be called theology; otherwise theology itself becomes an empty concept.' Schreiter further suggests making a distinction between the role of the whole community and the role of a smaller group of leadership people (poets, prophets and teachers) within that community. It is that group of leaders who shape into words the response in faith to the questions and struggles raised by the

whole community; but it is the community's experience that serves as the source of doing theology. It is also the community, Schreiter continues, 'whose acceptance of a theology is an important guarantor of its authenticity'.

Schreiter's suggestion of a group of leadership people shaping the response stands in contrast to Hiebert's model that understands the 'critical response' being given by the congregation, the (local) community of believers. In the practical research situation I encountered in Brazzaville, Schreiter's suggestions seemed more suitable. Applied in practice it meant that the group of theology students at FTPB was the 'smaller group of leadership people', and that they were to shape a theological answer to the questions and struggles raised by the catechumens and the women of the Bible study group (understood as the 'wider community'). Taking into consideration my status and role as a teacher (assigned by cultural insiders), I belonged to the 'small group of leadership people' rather than to the 'wider community'.

The problems encountered regarding the assumption of the 'priesthood of all believers' demonstrate that in practice the local and cultural situation might call for re-thinking one's theological positions and convictions. I learnt that the challenge of doing theology cross-culturally is not to be seen as problematical in a negative sense, but is to be understood as having the creative potential for transforming participants as well as the contextualization initiator's perspectives. Doing theology cross-culturally moves and broadens one's (theological) horizon.

7.4.2.3 Complexity of contextualization

In section 5.1 I accounted for my initial incomprehension regarding the importance of the community in the Kongo context. The discovery that community is central to understanding wrongdoing however unearths yet another point of special significance: it shows that 'sin' cannot be discussed as an isolated issue. The problem of 'sin' interrelates with the whole fabric of relations within the community and its sources of power: *kanda*, *kitaata*, *nganga* and *kindoki* (see Figure 5.1-1, p.126).

'Sin' is not an isolated theological, anthropological, sociological or religious problem; all these areas are involved and even more areas (for example peace-building and reconciliation, urban studies, globalization, etc.) could be taken into consideration as well, which makes the study of the topic of 'sin' very complex. The complexity meant that for me as a cultural outsider it was rather challenging if not even impossible to comprehend all the issues involved that were founded on assumptions deeply rooted in a worldview very different from mine. My initial blindness to the vital importance of the community demonstrated how completely differently the concept of the family/community is understood by the Kongo people. I came to accept it as neither better nor worse than my understanding of community. My concept of community that is inclined towards autonomy and individualism is simply different from the ontological communal outlook of the Kongo people that makes it unthinkable for an independent individual to stay healthy or even alive.

My continuing failure to thoroughly empathize with the Kongo ontological community concept with all its complexities reminds me on the one hand to operate with great caution when giving meaning to the research results. The attributed meaning can only be fragmentary, needing correction and completion by the Kongo people themselves and by further research. My continued puzzlement and incomprehension of the Kongo community character on the other hand is a chance for transformation of both views because it raises continued questions. Continued questions asked by the cultural outsider in turn invite the insider to unearth roots of naturally lived out concepts that originate from their own worldview which is usually never challenged or reflected on. Once unearthed these roots, beliefs and practices can be critically looked at in the light of Scripture which allows continued contextualization.

The experiences in my research project demonstrate that it is not advisable for the process of contextualization to be done either by cultural outsiders or by cultural insiders alone. The former leads most probably to incomprehension and misunderstandings. Without the insiders' challenging voice, there is a great danger of becoming a prey to the assumption that the cultural

outsider's view, ecclesial forms and theology are 'superior, universal, and culture-free', despite all good intention. It would be arrogant on my part to ignore Ott's observation that….

> Western churches may acknowledge in theory that they have much to learn from Majority World brothers and sisters, but in practice a spirit of superiority generally prevails.' (Ott 2015:54)

Doing contextualization in local or regional isolation however might lead to a reduced understanding of the topic in question. Without the cultural outsider's challenging voice, there is a great danger of thinking that there is 'little to learn from hegemonic Western theology, creeds, or traditions' and thus ending up with a highly fragmented theology (Ott 2015:53).

Theological misunderstandings across cultures will most certainly remain, leading however not to the adverse effects of irreconcilable theological conflicts, but hopefully to the advantages of developing a deeper understanding. Recognizing and working through my misunderstanding of the importance of the Kongo community eventually led me to new insights that could be made fruitful for the Kongo context, but also for my own cultural context. In this sense, contextualization always works both ways.

7.5   Conclusion

As expected, the Kongo understanding of wrongdoing has similarities as well as differences to the OT understanding of 'sin'. From my cultural outsider's perspective I conclude more particularly from the above however, that the Kongo view of wrongdoing has surprisingly more to offer for the deeper understanding of 'sin' than I thought when I first started the research. The discovery about God not being involved in the Kongo traditional perception of wrongdoing – a view that Kongo Christians need to reject – was as startling as the insight that the Kongo communal outlook of the issue ties right into the OT understanding of the community's accountability; 'sin' affects many more people (and even creation) than just the perpetrator. Brought into perspective with the OT understanding of community the Kongo view offers points for reflection that positively challenge the individualistic conception of 'sin' that is characteristic of my cultural background.

258

The given 'critical response' to the seven propositions and the implications thereof (sections 7.1 – 7.3) touch on complex issues and can be summarized as followed.

1) Many Congolese experience that the cultural/traditional obligation for finding the original source of evil often leads to unjust accusations which blocks the way to sincere forgiveness and reconciliation.

2) Ethical conduct in the Kongo culture seems to be driven by fear while Christian ethical conduct is meant to be motivated by love. Suspicion of having *ndoki* in one's ranks paralyzes supporting relationships that foster trust. To simply condemn and ban *kindoki* and *nkisi* practices is no solution. Reflection is needed by closely looking at the social and political fabric underlying those practices in order to find alternatives.

3) Becoming a follower of Christ means an ontological shift, leaving one's family and being 'born' into another ancestry. Further reflecting on developing a local 'kingdom culture' is promising and a passable way for the Church being transformed into a wholesome foretaste of Christ's coming kingdom.

4) God is deeply involved in human affairs, not only as a God of justice and righteousness, but as the one giving and sustaining life. Not understanding Yhwh (God) as a relational God leads to not understanding 'sin'.

5) A transformed view of 'sin' includes comprehending it not only as an isolated act, but also as generating a sphere surrounding the 'sinner' affecting him and others negatively. To understand 'sin' as a sphere however calls for further research. It also calls for the development of vocabulary that is able to express the understanding of a 'sin-sphere' accordingly.

The evaluation and implications of the contextualization process (section 7.4) can be summarized as follows. 1) In order to conduct cultural research in a globalizing world it is necessary to adopt a model of culture that is able to deal with the 'trend to blend' (hybridization). This implies the development of new contextualization models that help the Church to process

the forces of globalization in order to become verdant communities. 2) The task of contextualization remains a must. Both cultural insiders and outsiders are needed; both can learn from each other. Because of unexpected local situations, cultural givens and the complexities of the issues inquired, contextualization is a continued undertaking that requires a scrutinizing look at one's own assumptions and the willingness to let one's beliefs, assumptions and practices be changed and transformed.

8. CONCLUSIONS

In the introduction (1.2) the research problem for this study was formulated as follows. *What dynamics come into play in a process of theological contextualization facilitated by a West-European researcher: Contextualizing the Old Testament notion of 'sin' in the cultural context of the Kongo people in Congo-Brazzaville?* The leading questions for collecting the data were put into the categories 'cultural context', 'discourse on sin' and 'contextualization'. In the following I will give brief responses to these questions, summarizing the basic points resulting from the research. Recommendations, suggestions for further research and some closing thoughts will complete the chapter.

8.1 Summing up

For summarizing the research findings I follow the three categories into which I put the leading questions for the data collection (see 1.2.1). Every one of these questions is rehearsed and followed by a brief summary of the corresponding findings.

8.1.1 Cultural context

Leading question: *What is the Kongo concept of 'wrongdoing'?* The Kongo culture understands 'wrongdoing' as anything that breaks the harmony of the community and consequently gives opportunity for evil to enter the community. In traditional understanding, 'wrongdoing' has nothing to do with God.

What are the cultural key elements to be addressed for communicating the notion of 'sin' to the Kongo people? The cultural key elements to be addressed that I came across in the research are the community (or *kanda*), the issues of *kindoki* and *nkisi*, the understanding of evil being an outside as well as an inside matter (the corruption of the human heart), the image of *Nzambi*, and the Kongo vocabulary using *masumu* as the main term for 'sin'. I consider this list as not exhaustive; further research will have to address yet other issues (e.g. forgiveness, restoration, reconciliation).

What difficulties of understanding for the cultural outsider arise from the research? How do they influence the research process and how can they be made fruitful? Three main difficulties stand out. 1) The (mis)understanding of the Kongo *kanda* (or community) was a critical 'breakdown'. In order to understand 'sin' in the Kongo context in more depth, that key element had to be included, something I had not anticipated. 2) Another difficulty arose in terms of the Kongo society's hierarchical structure that did not allow me to freely choose my position; it was assigned to me. Coming to terms with my given authority position led me to revise my hidden assumption about the premise of the 'priesthood of all believers'. It also led to the revision of methods and of procedures for conducting the research. 3) Another unexpected issue was the traditional understanding of *Nzambi*. With the perception of *Nzambi* being distant, the notion of 'sin' can hardly be understood in terms of the biblical findings. Hence, inquiries into the image of God (in cultural and in biblical terms), needed to be included in the study.

8.1.2 Discourse on 'sin'

Leading question: *What does the Kongo discourse on 'sin' look like? What are the semantics used?* The term 'sin' (French *péché*, Munukutuba/Kikongo *disumu*) is hardly used in the traditional vocabulary. The most frequent vernacular renderings for 'wrongdoing' (before missionary times) are all variations of the word *(yi)mbi* (evil, bad). Although the verb *sumuna* (from which *masumu* probably derives) comes up on lists of semantics used for 'sin', the origin of the term is unclear. Depending on the informants the verb designates either 'uprooting a plant' or 'defiling oneself' by violating a taboo. For designating the different actions that are understood as *(yi)mbi*, a wide range of terms is used (see the word list in Appendix 3).

How useful or misleading is the Munukutuba term 'disumu'? The term *disumu* (usually used in the plural form *masumu*) is mostly understood as the Christian religious term for 'sin'. It is not suitable however for rendering the diverse metaphors and meanings and the wide Hebrew

semantic field of 'sin'. An alternative would be to adopt the imagery of the OT and to develop a new, more comprehensive vocabulary.

What does the OT Hebrew discourse on 'sin' look like? The OT notion of 'sin' is primarily understood as rebelling against Yhwh, breaking the covenant he made with his people. God takes centre stage; 'sin' is always committed 'before God' and is seen as directed against him. When 'sin' is committed, God actively intervenes. The OT does not know one exclusive term for 'sin'; there is a wide variety. Three main terms stand out: *ḥāṭāʾ*, *ʿāwōn* and *pāšaʿ*, each presenting a different image. The terms *ḥāṭāʾ* and *ʿāwōn* display an ambivalence in meaning ('sin', guilt and punishment) indicating that 'sin' and its consequences are not radically separate notions, but could be understood as a 'process'. The OT views 'sin' not just as an action but also as a power from which human beings cannot escape by their own efforts; it is deeply ingrained in the human heart. To 'sin' also means to endanger the community in so far as 'sin' has negative consequences (generally in the form of God's punishment) affecting family and community as well as the individual transgressor. 'Sin' is connected to death and contrasts with the good or life; it is often paralleled with evil, and consists in the absence of what God is. 'Sin' has impacts on the transgressor, defiling him, weighing him down, and taking away joy, strength and health. 'Sin' can only be forgiven and the human heart only be transformed by God's intervention.

Where does it differ from the Kongo discourse on wrongdoing? The OT view that the covenant God takes up a decisive and active intervening role when 'sin' is committed stands in stark contrast to the Kongo discourse. The Kongo people also regard differently the OT perception that doing evil affects God; in the Kongo tradition, *Nzambi* is not involved in human daily affairs. The finding that 'sin' in the OT puts the community in danger corresponds with the Kongo understanding of 'wrongdoing' letting evil enter the community. Another view in common is the understanding that 'sin' affects others (also physically), even generations. The deed-consequence or the cause-and-effect operating in human experience is found in the OT but also in the Kongo culture: The Kongo people generally believe that calamity striking is a

263

consequence of someone's evil deed. There is a difference however. While in the OT it is God who actively intervenes, in the Kongo tradition it is a mechanical, magic-like operation at work.

What critical response can be given to the Kongo discourse in the light of the OT understanding of 'sin'? The 'critical response' given (in the contextualization model's terms of 'retain' – 'modify' – 'reject') can be summarized in seven main points: 1) The importance of the community in the Kongo culture is uncontested. The Kongo view that anything that threatens or destroys the harmony of the *kanda* (community) is a 'bad thing' is also to be 'retained'. The OT understanding of community is however different from the *kanda*-concept in the Kongo culture. Because it is Yhwh who takes centre stage in the OT understanding of 'sin' and not the community (as it does in the Kongo culture), therefore further critical reflections on the *kanda* are needed in order to make it fruitful for the contextualization of 'sin'.

2) The Kongo view that 'wrongdoing' affects others is to be 'retained'. It however needs to be complemented with the understanding that God is also 'affected' when it comes to 'sin'; to 'sin' means always to 'sin' against God who is the founder and sustainer of humanity and deeply involved in human affairs.

3) When the harmony of the community is destroyed, calamities and death enter. This view is to be 'retained'. Yet, the members of the community are not doomed to helplessly surrender to the cause-and-effect connection. God alone has the authority to break the power of 'sin'. The search for the responsible party for the breach is vital in the Kongo understanding. It often means, however, mortal terror for the (wrongly) accused. A design for forgiveness and reconciliation is hardly to be found in the Kongo culture, which runs counter to the OT and NT. Similarly, the practice and firm belief in *kindoki* produces an atmosphere of fear; ethical behaviour is maintained because of fear being targeted by 'evil'. A trustworthy and supporting community cannot be built on such weak ground. The Christian faith calls us to exercise love in terms of 1 Cor. 13. The Kongo obligation to find the source of evil in order to restore harmony and the practice of

kindoki as a measure to keep the community members in line, are to be strongly 'rejected'. Simply banning *kindoki* however is not the solution. Under the aspect of the community it is also important to point out, that becoming a Christian might imply an ontological shift, leaving the old ancestry which is radically counter-cultural. In order still to be able to live a 'good life', a community or Church model is required that can truly offer an alternative *kanda* that is tied into a new ancestry.

4) The Kongo traditional view that 'sin' and evil are not innate but come from the outside of the person needs 'modification'. On the one hand evil does come from the outside and one can suffer by someone else's fault. On the other hand however, 'bad actions' cannot be avoided by simply 'educating' the members of the community, because the corruption of the heart is also a fact. The heart can only be healed by God who alone is able to touch and transform the inmost being (Ps. 51).

5) In the Kongo tradition *Nzambi* is not affected by human 'wrongdoing'. This view is incompatible with the OT understanding of God and is to be 'rejected'.

6) The Bible presents Yhwh as truly concerned by human 'sin'. Thus, in order to understand the concept of 'sin' and God's intervention and reaction thereto, the Kongo Christians need to embrace the understanding of God as covenant God who is deeply involved in the daily affairs of their lives.

7) The common translation of 'sin' by *masumu* only – designating the breaking of a law – is too one-sided and thus inadequate and needs 'modification'. 'Sin' exclusively understood in juridical terms is misleading. No doubt, 'sin' has a morality component, but the view of the OT is much wider than 'sin' being wrong behaviour breaking (moral) laws. In order to communicate the notion of 'sin' comprehensively, new vocabulary is to be developed drawing from the imagery presented in the OT.

8.1.3 Contextualization

Leading question: *What tensions arise in a contextualization project initiated by a Swiss researcher?* My initial aspiration to be a 'learner' doing research collaboratively created an inner tension. The tension arose a) from the experience that the role assigned to me fitting the local hierarchy system did not match that aspiration, and b) from the point that that aspiration largely contradicted the initiator's role as a guide and teacher, suggested by the chosen contextualization model. By accepting the teacher's role however I felt that the contextualization process was hindered significantly; no development of mutual reflection and thinking process happened. Additionally, I perceived my position as cultural outsider for a long time as awkward, counterproductive and even negative. It was only after the March explosions that I began to better understand in practice the positive aspects of being a cultural outsider doing contextualization.

What happens when culturally shaped (Swiss/West-European and Kongo) assumptions about theological topics are challenged by each other and by biblical texts? My reflections that led to choosing the biblical texts to be studied with the theology students (Ex. 32; Jos. 7; 2 Sam 11; Ps. 51) turned out to be decisively different from the students' reflections. What I assumed to be important was not addressed by the students' exegetical work; they set different priorities. What I thought to be a hindrance however opened a door for me to better understand the Kongo culture in general and the topic of 'sin' more specifically; it widened my horizon of understanding considerably. The different assumptions and understandings (of both cultural and theological nature) by the participants and myself creatively challenged and transformed my view about various issues, for example: 'Life' is more than a philosophical subject; 'sin' is never just private; understanding God is essential for understanding 'sin'; there is an ontological aspect of being a member of the Christian community. Regarding the transformation of understanding I can unfortunately only speak for myself, not for the participants because I did not have the opportunity to ask them about it.

266

What conclusions might be drawn of relevance to the contextualization process in general? What lessons can be learnt from working cross-culturally? The conclusions regarding contextualization and working across cultures can be summarized in four main points. 1) New models of contextualization are needed. In a globalizing world the view of cultures being distinct and relatively 'pure' that underlie many contextualization models are increasingly untenable. The rapidly developing hybridization makes it necessary to revise the paradigm within which cultural research and contextualization projects are undertaken. Because cultures are increasingly dynamic and open to change, models of contextualization need to be developed that focus on how hybridization can be creatively used for shaping thriving communities.

2) The principle of the 'priesthood of all believers' has its (cultural) limits; it is not transferable to other cultures or to the work across cultures without reflection. It is not only the content of contextualization arising from the local context that needs adapting, but assumptions about the 'who' as well.

3) 'Sin' – and I assume other theological/religious topics – cannot be discussed as an isolated issue. The interplay between the Kongo understanding of 'wrongdoing', the community, *kindoki* and *nkisi*-practices (with their social and political function), the image of *Nzambi*, and Mission History (missionaries' influence) gives a good example. Because of the complexity of the subject too narrow a focus is unsuitable. I consider an interdisciplinary view indispensable for grasping the problems in more depth. The fabric of human life into which practical theology or contextualization inquires must not be segmented.

4) The cultural outsider has an important role in the contextualization process. It is not advisable for contextualization to be done either by cultural outsiders or by cultural insiders alone. I consider it also applicable for doing theology at home in my changing 'West-European' and Swiss culture. The process of learning from each other's understanding is vital.

8.2   Recommendations

In the introduction chapter I expressed my intention for the research to be a 'form of mission in reverse' (quote by Whiteman 1997:5 in 1.2.2 p.11), that is for the West-European researcher, missionary or theologian to understand the notion of 'sin' in a new way, learning from the Kongo perspective and the work across cultures. Accordingly, the recommendations presented in this section focus on issues that I learnt to be important for a cultural outsider. While these recommendations specifically address West-European researchers who seek to undertake the task of contextualization in a host culture or in their own culture, I hope that the following issues will resonate with researchers from other cultural contexts as well.

The order into which the recommendations are put follow the same categories as the previous summary. The recommendations are each expressed in short statements followed by some explanatory thoughts.

8.2.1 Cultural context

Recommendation: *Listen well to the local narrative and be ready to become disconcerted.* One of the most defining lessons I learnt in conducting the research was that it is for the researcher, missionary or theologian to listen well. For too long I was too deaf to the possibilities of the community to truly engage with it. It is essential however to allow the local narrative to come on stage. It is indispensable for the researcher to know how the local people use and understand words and phrases without judging them pejoratively in advance as outdated, backward, or as primitive, underdeveloped, heathen, etc. This is particularly true if one enquires into one's own culture assuming that one already knows the local narrative well. It is equally indispensable for the researcher to know how she personally interprets the issues in question. This requires a readiness to become disconcerted and most probably includes the challenge of leaving the beaten (theological) tracks marked by the West-European worldview and understanding of things. It also requires a readiness to let go the thinking that there is only one right theology and

interpretation, and that the one right view is one's own. I suspect the early missionaries – and the kind of Christian faith they believed in – did not listen well to the Kongo narrative and were thus not able to give answers to the real questions asked by the Kongo people. In order to talk intelligibly about 'sin' in whatever culture, including the home culture, the local narrative must be heard and understood. I am convinced that the question about what 'good life' means in my home culture would also be a suitable opening for research. Accordingly, for research conducted in my home culture this would ask about the Swiss society's questions, fears, desires, problems, aspirations, etc. In that sense, every researcher inquiring into theological topics in cultural perspective needs to become a 'practical theologian' (in the sense of PT as presented in 3.1.1).

Recommendation: *Be on the lookout for (to the researcher) seemingly random topics being involved.* My field work demonstrated that the notion of 'sin' could not be studied in isolation from other topics. The interconnectedness of typical theological and typical social areas soon became evident. The seemingly 'random' subjects coming up were the Kongo understanding of community (including a whole string of other topics such as the hierarchical society system, *kindoki*, *nkisi*, etc.) or the image of *Nzambi*. I learnt that the researcher needs to be ready to include subjects first considered unimportant or secondary; these might become decisive for understanding and transformation. The likelihood is that other issues will be subtly merged in, dissolved, and blended into the main topic. What I have learnt about the interconnectedness of the different theological and social areas is valid for all cultural contexts.

8.2.2 Discourse on 'sin'

Recommendation: *If you want to talk plausibly about 'sin', get ready to talk about God and vice versa.* During the research in Congo I learnt that the mental image people have of God is decisive for understanding the notion of 'sin'; not being able to talk about God makes it impossible to talk about 'sin' comprehensibly, in whatever cultural context. Very recently a pastor of the Swiss

Reformed Church suggested in a newspaper column of the commuter magazine *Blick am Abend*[1] that it is outdated to believe that God wanted an innocent man dead so that justice between him and the guilty, sinful human could be restored; this belief thus should be abandoned. The connection between the understanding of God and that of 'sin' is evident in that suggestion. 'Sin' does not make sense without a covenant-God who seeks prosperous life for the human race and the whole cosmos, who offers redemption and reconciliation in a world that is marked by the dynamics of the reality of brokenness, by distortion and destruction of bonds between human beings, creation and God.

Recommendation: *For communicating Christ's death and resurrection, consider the issue of 'sin' as substantial.* As I assumed throughout the whole study, the topic of 'sin' is not peripheral to the Christian faith, but foundational. It affects the understanding of salvation, repentance, forgiveness, justification, reconciliation, sanctification and the final judgment. Not understanding 'sin' means not understanding anything else. Without understanding 'sin', Christ's death and resurrection do not make sense.

Recommendation: *Do not fall prey to silent Marcionism.* In order to understand 'sin' comprehensively the OT is a theological requirement, not just a 'nice to have' or even a part to be ignored. What the OT presents regarding the image of God and the view of 'sin', is foundational. The OT reminds us that a) 'sin' is a serious matter and runs through the whole fabric of human life, and b) human efforts cannot ultimately either maintain or restore the fragile bonds and relationships between human beings, creation and the founder and sustainer of life – restoration needs to come from higher, divine authority. Therefore, I recommend to the Church at home (or to anybody involved in preaching the Gospel), that if it wants to communicate the 'good news' of Christ intelligibly today, its theology needs to revisit and contextualize afresh the notion of

---

[1] *Blick am Abend* is published daily online and in an edition of 284'771 paper copies with a readership of 696'000 (German language), distributed in six main cities and their agglomeration. See their homepage at <http://www.blick.ch/services/impressum-blick-am-abend-id45020.html> [last accessed 24.01.2016].

'sin' – a term perceived as belonging to the 'poison cabinet' as one of the pastors in my home church noted – taking into consideration not only the NT but the heavy-going OT as well.

8.2.3 Contextualization

Recommendation: *Consider academic interdisciplinary exchange.* I already mentioned above the interconnectedness between the theological and the social (8.2.1) which calls for a research approach that keeps multiple academic disciplines in view and which makes PT an appropriate framework. Moreover, as I pointed out in the previous chapter section 7.4.1, in increasingly hybrid cultures and socieies it is necessary to adopt and develop suitable models for contextualization as well as for understanding culture. Before starting a contextualization project I recommend investigating postmodern culture models and their implications for conducting research. It is not to reinvent the wheel though. The academic disciplines of anthropology and the social sciences offer in-depth studies and insights from which (intercultural) theology and missiology can profit.

Recommendation: *Adopt Walls' understanding of worldview as 'mental maps'.* It is necessary to scrutinize not only the culture models, but also the understanding of worldview and how it operates. In retrospect I could have dealt with the occasional puzzling discrepancies in the participants' explanations (for example the conflicting explanations about *Nzambi*) in more effective ways if I had worked with Walls' understanding of worldviews (see 5.3.3, p.161). I consider his contribution significantly helpful.

Recommendation: *Seek the (cultural) outsider's voice actively.* In the previous chapter I discussed the importance of the cultural outsider's voice in the contextualization process. This also applies to contextualization done in my own culture. For gaining a transformative understanding of 'sin' we need to be challenged by each other's perspectives: West-European and African, Swiss and Kongo, specialist and lay-person, outsider and insider, teacher and student. As much as contextualization done in local or regional isolation in Africa probably leads to a reduced understanding of the topic in question, this is also true in reverse. Paraphrasing Ott (2015) I think

that there is a great danger of thinking that for West-European theology there is little to learn from Majority world theological insights, or traditions. Doing theology at home in isolation from other cultures might end up with a highly shortsighted theology. I thus recommend to actively seek the cultural outsider's input; contextualization is to be done across-cultures.

Recommendation: *The subject to be contextualized is to be linked with the day-to-day reality.* When the explosions happened in March 2012 everything we had previously discussed in class – good life and bad life, 'sin' and evil, etc. – lay bare at our feet, stripped of all theory. To establish the link between the work in class and the stark reality 'out there' and in our hearts and minds (see the story from the grassroots at the very beginning) was a hazardous but at the same time a powerful and transforming moment.

Recommendation: *In the case of a substantial interruption of the research process, consider it an opportunity for the research to be transformed.* Throughout the study I repeatedly referred to my research being interrupted. An interruption of the research process for more than a year might be generally seen as a disadvantage; if embraced however it can be transformed into the reverse. The interruption experienced offered me the opportunity to take a second look at the data which turned out to be surprisingly fruitful. It eventually led me to transform the role I took in the research process, my understanding of suitable contextualization models and my chosen research approach. The interruption was a chance for new clarity, determination and commitment.

8.3 Areas for further research

Hiebert's critical contextualization model suggests four steps of which this study covered only three. The last step 'contextual practices' has not been taken and offers multiple possibilities for further research that are listed in the following.

- The development (and rediscovering) of vernacular vocabulary for expressing comprehensively the OT understanding of 'sin' presented in chapter 6.

- The study of subjects such as forgiveness, reconciliation, atonement, expiation, etc., an area that I left aside in my research.

- The development of alternative Christian practices dealing with the problematic areas of the ancestor cult, *kindoki* and *nkisi*, the Kongo community's sources of influence and power.

- Practical inquiries regarding academic (and non-academic) curricula in theological institutions that give room to consider and discuss topics relevant to the cultural context(s) in Congo, for example the importance of the community, its ontological understanding and the implications thereof for conversion, but also the problematic issue of *kindoki* and others.

- Studies into ecclesial areas, for example finding answers to the question about what a 'kingdom culture' could look like in Congo and the implications for suitable church models.

- The finding that the leader (village chief, head of the family) bears the responsibility for the wellbeing of the community or the group invites further studies in the area of leadership (including the role of church pastors), social responsibility and (national) politics.

The last point touches on the question of rapid culture change and hybridization happening in Congo (often bemoaned by elders of the community) and the implications thereof for the Kongo society. If I was offered another opportunity to conduct cultural research in Congo-Brazzaville I would find it intriguing to inquire into the area of culture change and hybridization: What elements are adopted from other cultures? Which ones adapted and assimilated? What do they look like after being integrated? What are the elements retained, which ones rejected?

A last area for further research is the development of new 'robust' contextualization models as suggested by Ott (2015) to which I pointed in section 7.4.1. Such models will need to focus on how hybridization and the forces of globalization can be used for developing Christian communities marked by God's love, grace and reconciliation, in the present and the future.

8.4 Closing thoughts

In the introduction chapter I noted the suspected misunderstanding between the missionaries and the Kongo people regarding the understanding of 'sin' and conversion. Having got a feel for today's Kongo cultural context through the field work in Brazzaville I suggest that the misunderstanding had to do with the different narratives or questions asked by missionaries and

by Kongo people respectively. From the findings of my research I boldly claim that the mis-understanding still remains today. To caricature, many evangelical missionaries put emphasis on answering the supposed all-important question about how to get eternal life (or go to heaven). The essential points of their answer are seemingly simple: In order to get eternal life you need to get 'saved' which means your 'sins' need to be forgiven, therefore repent and you will become 'right' before God. That answer however does not fit the question asked by the Kongo people because their question is different. They ask how they can live a prosperous and long life in harmony, protected from evil, in the here and now. From the perspective of the Kongo tradition, this question has nothing to do with God. In both narratives the problem of human 'sin' or 'wrongdoing' needs solving. In the missionary narrative God is involved because 'sin' – mainly understood as breaking a law given by God – is unrighteousness which breaks the covenant relationship with God. In the Kongo narrative God does not play any decisive role. The community is the central topic in terms of how it can be protected and how 'wrongdoing', understood as the gateway for evil that destroys life, can be avoided. As I presented in more detail in chapter 5, evil breaking into the community can be avoided by a) 'educating' the members of the community and b) taking different measures for protecting the community (e.g. *nganga* medicines, *kindoki* for protection). If despite all effort the harmony is broken and evil enters the community, it is essential to find out the origin and to correct the fault by sometimes drastic measures. Admittedly, the presentation of the two narratives is grossly simplified, yet it shows the discrepancy between the two more clearly.

Intriguingly, during my field work in Congo I noticed that in my home culture the questions asked today increasingly resonate with those of the Kongo people. In times of great uncertainty, unpredictable disaster striking, terrorism attacks, stock market crashes, tides of refugees, etc., the felt need for protection and security grows rapidly. That raises the serious question whether the churches back home as well as the churches (and missionaries) in Congo are really fit to

respond to the grassroots narrative, fears and questions. Surprisingly, I might find the results from this study conducted in faraway Africa most insightful for dealing with the fears and questions asked back home.

Having reached the end of my study, one thing keeps going around in my head. It is what John Calvin wrote at the very beginning of his Institutes:

> Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. (*Institutes*, Book I, chapter 1, §1)

If we want to live 'good lives'– a desire which I assume can be generalized for all human beings irrespective of culture – we need to know God, the founder and sustainer of life as well as human beings with their proneness to forsake God, the fountain of living water, digging out cisterns for themselves that cannot hold water (Jer. 2:13).

Still emotionally marked by the March explosions in Brazzaville (see the introductory grassroots story) I left Congo in summer 2012 in a rather desperate mood thinking that 'good life' in harmony is not possible in Congo when even the Christians leave the fountain of living water not being ready to tread the difficult way of reconciliation. Remembering one student's tears and trembling, and the gripping atmosphere in the classroom during my preaching my hope is sparked again. 'Sin' and its consequences can be healed and its powerful grip broken – God's restoration is also offered to the Kongo people and to Congo as a whole nation.

APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY OF VERNACULAR TERMS

The Glossary presents only the most important terms used in the thesis. Additional terms as well as further explanations about meaning and usage are given in the text.

bakulu	ancestors (the dead persons of whom one still remembers the names)	*mbi*	bad, evil
		mbongi	traditional institution for meetings of the elders
bandoki	pl. of *ndoki*	*mbote*	good
banganga	pl. of *nganga*	*mfumu*	chief
bantima	pl. of *ntima*	*minkisi*	pl. of *nkisi*
buzitu	respect	*ndoki*	specialist exercising *kindoki*
dikanda	family / community	*nganga*	traditional (herbal) doctor, healer
disumu	'sin'		
kifuma	fault, deformity	*ngunza*	'prophet'
kindoki	traditional power, 'witchcraft'	*nkisi*	objects with concentrated supernatural powers, 'fetish'
kintwadi	togetherness, being united	*nkombo*	fault, goat
lufuma	see *kifuma*	*nsoki*	fault, iniquity
luzingu	life	*ntima*	heart
luzolo nsalasani	mutual love, support	*Nzambi*	God
		nzambi	human being or kind of *nkisi*
masumu	pl. of *disumu*	*yimbi*	bad, evil

277

APPENDIX 2: LIST OF PRIMARY RESOURCES

Referencing system applied

COR   Correspondence (letters, e-mails, etc.)

DOC-ex   Documents (exams) by students

DOC-hw   Documents (homework)

FN-AC   Field Note *Alliance chrétienne* (EACMC, women's Bible study focus group)

FN-EEC   Field EEC (catechumens focus group)

FN-Ms   Field Note Mansmimou (FTPB, theology students focus group)

IVW   Interview

NB   Note book

RDIS   Reality disjuncture ('breakdown')

TRSC   Transcriptions

#01   Item number

#S05   Code for student who provided the information

Primary resources referred to in the thesis

Code	Date	Occasion
COR-RMA#02	23.04.2016	Skype by RMA
COR-NDA#01	27.04.2011	E-Mails by NDA
COR-NDA#02	10.10.2014	
COR-NDA#03	24.06.2015	
COR-NGUI#01	10.05.2010	E-Mail by NGUI
COR-RAHA#01	09.02.2015	E-Mail by RAHA
DOC-ex1#S04	16.02.2011	Exam paper (2 Sam. 11-12) by students
DOC-ex1#S09	16.02.2011	
DOC-ex1#S15	16.02.2011	
DOC-ex1#S17	18.02.2011	
DOC-ex2#S02	16.02.2011	Exam paper (Ex. 32) by students
DOC-ex2#S03	15.02.2011	
DOC-ex2#S06a	21.04.2011	
DOC-ex2#S06b	21.04.2011	
DOC-ex2#S07	15.02.2011	
DOC-ex2#S11	16.02.2011	
DOC-ex2#S12	16.02.2011	

DOC-ex2#S14	16.02.2011	
DOC-ex2#S16	16.02.2011	
DOC-ex2#S18	16.02.2011	
DOC-hw1#S01	28.12.2010	Homework 'life' by students
DOC-hw1#S02	04.01.2011	
DOC-hw1#S03	04.02.2011	
DOC-hw1#S05	04.01.2011	
DOC-hw1#S06	04.01.2011	
DOC-hw1#S09	28.12.2010	
DOC-hw1#S11	28.12.2010	
DOC-hw1#S12	03.01.2011	
DOC-hw1#S14	03.01.2011	
DOC-hw1#S15	04.01.2011	
DOC-hw1#S16	03.01.2011	
DOC-hw1#S18	03.01.2011	
DOC-hw2#S02	05.01.2011	Homework exegesis (Josh. 7) by students
DOC-hw2#S03	15.05.2011	
DOC-hw2#S04	15.05.2011	
DOC-hw2#S06	15.05.2011	
DOC-hw2#S07	15.05.2011	
DOC-hw2#S08	15.05.2011	
DOC-hw2#S09	15.05.2011	
DOC-hw2#S11	15.05.2011	
DOC-hw2#S12	15.05.2011	
DOC-hw2#S14	15.05.2011	
DOC-hw2#S15	15.05.2011	
DOC-hw2#S16	15.05.2011	
DOC-hw2#S17	15.05.2011	
DOC-hw2#S18	15.05.2011	
DOC-hw3#S02	29.03.2012	Homework 'critical response' by students
DOC-hw3#S03	29.03.2012	
DOC-hw3#S04	29.03.2012	
DOC-hw3#S05	29.03.2012	
DOC-hw3#S09	29.03.2012	
DOC-hw3#S11	29.03.2012	
DOC-hw3#S12	29.03.2012	
DOC-hw3#S13	29.03.2012	
DOC-hw3#S14	29.03.2012	
DOC-hw3#S15	29.03.2012	
DOC-hw3#S16	29.03.2012	
DOC-hw3#S17	29.03.2012	
DOC-hw3#S18	29.03.2012	

FN_AC#02	04.03.2009	Word list ('life and death' Dt. 30)
FN_AC#05	17.03.2009	Talk on 'sins' listed/categorized; notes taken by RSJ.
FN_EEC#01	24.01.2009	Setting up the meeting with catechumens
FN_EEC#02	24.01.2009	First meeting with catechumens; I stay an observer; getting to know catechumens
FN_EEC#03	25.01.2009	Impressions of first meeting witch catechumens
FN_EEC#04	30.01.2009	Meeting with catechumens; what is 'life'?
FN_EEC#09	06.03.2009	Evaluation with catechists
FN_EEC#10	06.03.2009	Catechism class on forgiveness
FN_Ms#01	26.01.2012	Summary of the lessons academic year 2010/2011; presented in class for correction in academic year 2011/2012 (2nd semester, 2012); CL3
FN_Ms#03	12.03.2012	Lk. 13:1-9 presented in class (preached) after confrontation (explosions March 2012); Mansimou academic year 2011/12 (2nd semester, 2012); CL3
FN_Ms#04	18.04.2011	Notes taken in lesson (Mansimou academic year 2010/11; 2nd semester, CL2)
FN_Ms#05	30.11.2010	Note on community (*mbongi* and villages)
FN_Ms#07	21.03.2012	Note on emotions/feelings of a culprit
FN_Ms#08	21.03.2012	Words used in Bible translation for 'sin'
FN_Ms#09	21.03.2012	Text of Psalm 51 re-ordered
IVW-BIT#01	18.01.2007	Interview BIT
IVW-MIA#01a	27.04.2012	Interview MIA (part I + II)
IVW-MIA#01b	27.04.2012	
RDIS#10	04.03.2009	Evaluation reality disjuncture 'you are our teacher'
TRSC_EEC#01	07.02.2009	Group discussion on harmony - catechumens
TRSC_Ms#01	30.11.2010	Plenary presentation (group Kongo) on community - Mansimou
TRSC_Ms#02	30.11.2010	Plenary presentation (group Beembe) on community - Mansimou
TRSC_Ms#05	30.11.2010	Story told by student during short break - Mansimou
TRSC_Ms#06	07.12.2010	Plenary presentation + discussion (group Kongo) on respect - Mansimou
TRSC_Ms#07	07.12.2010	Plenary presentation (group Beembe) on respect - Mansimou
TRSC_Ms#08	07.12.2010	Plenary discussion (class) on *ndoki* (part I) - Mansimou
TRSC_Ms#09	14.12.2010	Plenary discussion (class) on *ndoki* (part II) - Mansimou

TRSC_Ms#11	21.12.2010	Student's testimony on *ndoki*
TRSC_Ms#13	04.01.2011	Plenary discussion on *Nzambi* + 'sin' (part II) - Mansimou
TRSC_Ms#14	22.03.2012	Plenary discussion on sin + emotions - Mansimou

APPENDIX 3: SEMANTICS AND VOCABULARY

The following tables give an overview of the most important terms used and discussed by the participants of the focus groups.

Table A: Vocabulary of 'good life' and 'bad life'

'good life' *luzingu ya mbote*	French explanations by participants	'bad life' *luzingu ya yimbi*	Notes	
Vocabulary resulting from research group I (catechumens)				
mbongo (money)				
dikanda (family/ clan)			The French term 'harmonie' was never used in Munukutuba by the participants. It seems that the principle of harmony can only be expressed in describing terms, but not as thing (or word) itself.	*describing harmony*
kintwadi (being unified, brotherhood)				
luzolo salasani (mutual love or determination)	confrérie			
buzitu (respect)				
mbongi (trad. community gatherings; straw gazebo)				
Vocabulary resulting from research group II (women's bible study group)				
luzingu (life)		*lufwa* (death)		
(bu)mbote (goodness)		*mpasi* (pain, suffering, evil)		
		yimbi (bad, evil)		
lusakumunu (blessing)		*ndoko* (curse)		
nsilulu (promise)				
dikanda (family/ clan)				
kimvwama (wealth)				
mbongo (richness, property, posterity, money)				

'good life'	French	'bad life'	Notes	
		Research group II (cont.)		
	sorcellerie	*makundu* ('witchcraft')	Laari word	separate category[1]
	jalousie	*kimbanda* (jealousy)	jealousy btw husband and wife	
	haine	*ntima ya yimbi* (evil heart)		
	complexes	*kuzinina mpangi* (longing for what sb's neighbour/ friend is/has)		
	maudire/mots de malédiction	*kuloka* (to curse)		
	quereller	*kuswana* (to quarrel)		separate category
	injurier	*kufinga* (to insult)		
	médisance	*kutonga* (?) (to slander)		
	mensonge	*luvunu* (lie)		
	se mettre en colère	*kudasuka* (to get angry)		
	tics (mauvaises habitudes)	*kifu ya yimbi* (bad habit)		separate category
	être égoïste	*kele na munimi* (to be selfish)		
	ingratitude	*kele na tonda ve* (not being thankful)		
	orgueil	*lunangu mayama* (fiery pride/arrogance)		
	adultère	*kinsuza* (adultery)		separate category
	prostitution	*kindumba* (prostitution)		
	obsession sexuelle	*kindumba mingi* (lots of prostitution)		
	homosexualité	*kulala nya kento na kento / bakala na bakala* (sleep woman with woman / man with man → spoken language); *kuvukisa mfulu kento na kento / bakala na bakala* (unite the bed woman with woman / man with man → written language)		separate category

---

[1] The women were asked to group the terms together. What I present here are the women's categories.

'good life'	French	'bad life'	Notes
			Research group II (cont.)

'good life'	French	'bad life'	Notes	
	voler	*kuyiba* (to steal)		separate category
	crimes	*kutalisa mpangi mpasi* (to cause a friend suffer); *kusala mpangi yimbi* (to do evil to neighbour/ friend)		
	banditisme	*yintu ngolo* (resistant/violent head)		
	injustice	*kuswasikisa* (to treat differently)	for example between rich and poor	separate category
	corruption	*madeso ya bana* lit. (white) beans of children (= food eaten easily)	('ça glisse' → slang, meaning to grease sb's palm)	
	ivrogne	*kunwa malafu mingi* (to drink lots of alcohol)		separate category
	excès de table	*kudya mingi* (to eat a lot)		
Vocabulary resulting from research group III (theology students' brainstorming) see following table				

Table B: List resulting from brainstorming (theology students)[2]

What is 'good' (original French in brackets)		What is 'bad / evil' (original French in brackets)		Notes
Marriage (*mariage*)	6x	Not marrying, celibacy (*ne pas se marier, célibat*)	2x	Marriage / sexual relationships
Brave woman (*femme courageuse*)				
Polygamy (*avoir beaucoup de femmes*)	3x	Polygamy (*polygamie*)		
		Monogamy (*monogamie*)		
		Adultery (*adultère*)	9x	
		Incest brother/sister (*mariage/rapport sexuel entre frère/sœur*)		
		Marrying prior to older sibling (*se marier avant l'ainé*)		
		Not keeping one's virginity		
		Adultery (*adultère*)	9x	
		Prostitution (*prostitution*)		
		Rape (*violation*)		

---

[2] For the brainstorming the students met in four different groups. After the brainstorming I grouped the resulting terms together and presented the list to the students. The numbers in column two and four stand for the occurrences. If a term was only mentioned once, no number is applied.

Having many children (*avoir beaucoup d'enfants*)	5x	Lack of children (*manque d'enfants*)	
Progeny (*descendance*)		Abortion (*avorter*)	3x
Being responsible (*être responsable dans le mariage*)			
Birth (*naissance*)		Sterility (*stérilité*)	
Respect: spouse (*respecter le conjoint*)			
Respect: parents (*respect des parents*)		No respect: parents (*pas respecter les parents*)	
Respect: the other (*respect de l'autre*)	2x	No respect: others (*manque du respect des autres*)	
Respect: hierarchy, older siblings (*respect de l'hiérarchie, des ainés*)	3x	No respect: older siblings (*manque du respect des ainés*)	
Respect: elders (*respect des anciens*)	2x	No respect: elders (*non respect des ancêtres*)	
		Discovering the father's / mother's nakedness (*découvrir la nudité du père, de la mère*)	
Family (*famille*)		Forgetting the family (*oublier la famille*)	
		Forgetting the village (*oublier le village*)	
Relationships between clans (*relations entre clans*)			
Listening to others - *écouter les autres*			
Be together - *être ensemble*		Division (*division*)	2x
Sing for child (*chanter pour enfant*)			
Eating in community - *manger en communauté*			
Sharing (*partager*)		Selfishness (*égoïsme*)	2x
		Greed (*cupidité*)	2x
Life in community (*vivre dans la famille*)		Solitude (*solitude*)	
Obedience (*obéissance*)		Disobedience to the parents, to all of the family (*désobéissance aux parents, famille entière*)	2x
Honouring the parents (*honorer les parents – comportement*)		Not often being with mom (*ne pas être souvent avec maman*)	
Social assistance (*assistance sociale*)			
Visiting others (*visiter les autres*)		Visit early morning (*visite tôt le matin*)	
Not calling the other a stranger (*ne pas appeler autrui étranger*)			
Hospitality (*hospitalité*)	6x	Not welcoming a foreigner (*ne pas recevoir l'étranger*)	
Community [mbongi-gatherings] (*communauté [mbongi]*)	5x	Never participate in the village meetings (*jamais participer dans les rencontres du village*)	

Right margin labels (rotated): Progeny; Respect; Family / community (kanda) aspects

Wisdom / understanding (*sagesse / intelligence*)		Not talking softly, quietly (*ne pas parler doucement*)		*kanda* (cont.)
Advice, guidance (*conseils*)				
Circumcision (*circoncision*)				
Upbringing/manners (*éducation*)		Theft (*vol*)	9x	
Initiation (*initiation*)				
Honouring dead parents (*honorer les parents qui sont déjà morts*)				Social-religious aspects
Ancestor cult (*culte aux ancêtres*)				
Going to the cemetery (*aller au cimetière*)				
Funerals, funeral rites (*funérailles, célébration des obsèques*)	2x			
Following the parents' religion (*suivre même religion que les parents*)		Refute (?) the parents' religion (*réfuter la religion des parents*)		
Fetishes (*fétichisme*)				
(Traditional) dance (*danse [traditionnelle]*)	4x			
Respecting taboos (*respect des interdits*)				
Respecting the tradition (*respect de la tradition*)				
Praying (*prier*)				
Fear of witchcraft (*crainte de la sorcellerie*)		Witchcraft (*sorcellerie*)	7x	
Integrity (*intégrité*)		No integrity (*manque d'intégrité*)		(social) Behaviour
		Hypocrisy (*hypocrisie*)	4x	
		Slander (*médisance*)	2x	
		Injustice (*injustice*)		
		Intimidation (*intimidation*)		
		Lying (*mentir*)	3x	
Humbleness (*humilité*)		Haughtiness (*orgueil*)	3x	
		Kill (*tuer*)	3x	
Love (*amour*)	2x	Hatred (*haine*)		
		Indifference (*indifférence*)		
		Insults (*injures*)		
Chastity (girls/boys)		Drunkard (*ivrogne*)		
Greeting politely (*saluer poliment*)		Impoliteness (*impolitesse*)	2x	
Dressing decently (*s'habiller décemment*)		Not dressing decently (*ne pas s'habiller décemment*)		
		Walk quickly in front of people (*marcher vite devant les gens*)		

Inheritance (*héritage*)		Coveting (*convoitise*)	2x	
House (*maison*)				
Money (*argent*)		Loving money (*amour de l'argent*)		
Wealth, riches (*richesse*)		Poverty (*pauvreté*)		
Having financial and material means (*avoir des moyens, fin./mat*)		Being in debt (*avoir les dettes*)		
Possessing fields (*avoir des champs*)				
Hunting / fishing (*chasse et pêche*)	3x			Wealth, work, health
Being a great hunter (*être grand chasseur*)				
Loving work [hunting, fishing, farming] (*aimer le travail [chasse, pêche, champêtre]*)		Laziness (*paresse*)	3x	
Eating and drinking (*manger et boire*)				
Health (*santé*)		Illness (*maladie*)		
		Misery, hardship (*misère*)		
		Jealousy (*jalousie*)		
		Ungratefulness (*ingratitude*)		

APPENDIX 4: WORKSHEET FOR EXEGESIS

Questions for exegetical work at FTPB (academic year 2010/11 and 2011/12)

French original:

1) **Lisez** le texte (plusieurs versions) et notez les versions choisies

2) **Contexte** biblique :   - Qu'est qui se passe avant et après ?
   - Quels sont les connexions ?
   - Comment est-ce que ces connexions aident à comprendre le texte ?

3) **Message original** :   a) Qu'est-ce qui se passe ?
   b) Quelles sont les personnes importantes ?
   c) Que font-elles ? Regardez bien les verbes !
   d) Qui est le coupable ?
   e) Qui est touché par le péché commis ? Quelles sont les conséquences ?
   f) Qui est offensé par ces actions ? Quelles sont les conséquences ?

4) **Application** (pour votre culture aujourd'hui – notez votre culture)

   a) Qu'est-ce qui est frappant, étonnant ?
   b) Qu'est-ce que vous ne comprenez pas ?
   c) Qu'est-ce qui est similaire dans votre culture (en comparaison avec le texte)?
   d) Qu'est-ce qui est différent (par rapport à votre culture) ?
   e) Quels sont les points à réfléchir / transformer / changer dans votre propre culture ?
   f) Quel serait le point principale que vous prêcheriez (point principale d'une prédication sur ce texte) dans une paroisse de l'EEC ?

English translation of the above:

1) **Read** the text (multiple versions) and note down the chosen versions.

2) Biblical **context**:   - What events happen before and after?
   - How are the events connected?
   - How do these events help to understand the text?

3) **Original message**:   a) What happens?
   b) Who are the important persons?
   c) What do they do? Look closely at the verbs used!
   d) Who is the culprit?
   e) Who is affected by the committed sin? What are the consequences?
   f) Who is offended by the actions? What are the consequences?

4) **Application** (in your culture today – note down your cultural background)

   a) What was striking, surprising?
   b) What do you not understand?
   c) What is similar to your culture (in comparison to the text)?
   d) What is different (regarding your culture)?
   e) What are the issues that need further reflection / transformation / change in your own culture?
   f) What is the main point you would preach about in your EEC congregation?

APPENDIX 5: STORY – GENERATIONS AFFECTED

Original text in French: A

['J'ai une histoire à raconter au sujet des conséquences du vol. Il y avait une fois un grand chasseur. Il avait mis des pièges, et il est allé pour voir s'il y a des animaux dans les pièges qu'il avait mis] dans la forêt. Maintenant, une femme est passé qui est allé au champs. Lorsqu'elle est passée par là, à côte du piège, elle a aperçu que il y avait un gibier qui était dans le piège. Et pour tant que c'est pas pour son mari, mais c'est pas pour elle, mais elle a eu l'audace de prendre, d'enlever le gibier, l'animal sur, l'animal de ce piège, puis elle est partie avec. Le chasseur quand il vient et remarque que non ce piège-là il y avait un animal ici, mais quelqu'un a du prendre d'abord. Le soir quand tout le monde revient des champs, quand le messieur prend la parole au niveau souvent les, les, y'a des mbongi y'a des ... et de part et d'autre du village qui passaient en disant que vraiment celui ou celle qui a pris l'animal sur mon piège est vraiment prié de venir de me le rendre. S'il a déjà mangé, c'est pas grave, mais qu'il me dise que non c'est moi, je lui ferais rien. Donc il a beau circuler le message. Personne s'est manifesté. Vraiment je vous assure si quelqu'un, je sais que parfois c'est la fête, tout ça je comprends. Mais qu'il vienne dire, ah, c'est moi. Je ne ferais absolument rien. Au cas où si la personne ne se présente pas, ce qui va lui arriver, en tous cas. ... Bon personne ne s'était manifesté et c'est passé comme ça. Bon la femme en question avait mangé le gibier tout ça et c'est passé. Mais la maman-là, qui avait volé, au lieu que les conséquences retombent sur elle-même c'est sur ses fils et ses filles. Donc la descendance quand elle mettait au monde c'était des enfants paralytiques. De génération en génération. Paralytique!' (TRSC_Ms#05)

English translation:

'I have a story for you about the consequences of stealing. Once upon a time there was a man who loved hunting. He had put down some traps and he was now going to see if any animals were in the traps he had put in the forest. Now a woman was going along the same way to her fields. When she got close to the trap she noticed that there was an animal in it. Though it wasn't her husband's, nor hers, she was bold enough to pick up the animal in the trap, and then to go off with it. The hunter came along and noticed that there had been an animal in the trap but that somebody must have taken it already. In the evening when everybody is coming back from the fields there are *mbongi* in the village saying that the man or woman who has taken the animal from my trap should kindly give it back. If he has already eaten the animal then never mind, but let him admit that he took it, I won't harm him. Well now, he told people this message, but it was no good: nobody owned up. So the woman I mentioned had eaten the animal in the trap and that was that. But the mother who had stolen the animal, instead of the consequences happening to her they happened to her sons and daughters. The children she gave birth to were all paralyzed. One generation after another, all paralyzed!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adegbola, Ebenezer A.
  1969   'The theological basis of ethics: A study of the ethics of dynamism'. *In:* Dickson, Kwesi A. and Ellingworth, Paul, eds. *Biblical revelation and African beliefs.* London: Lutterworth Press, pp. 116–136.

Adkins, Arthur William H.
  1978   'Theoria versus praxis in the Nicomachean ethics and the republic'. *Classical Philology,* 73 (4), pp. 297–313.

Agang, Sunday
  2009   'Who's afraid of witches? Among African Christians, too many of us are'. *Christianity Today.* Available at: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/septemberweb-only/137-21.0.html> [Accessed 20 June 2009]

Agar, Michael
  1983   'Ethnographic evidence'. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography,* 12, pp. 32–48.

  2006   'Culture: Can you take it anywhere?' *International Journal of Qualitative Methods,* 5 (2), pp. 1–12.

Altrichter, Herbert
  1999   'Quality features of an action research strategy'. *Change: Transformation in Education,* 2 (1), pp. 1–11.

Altrichter, Herbert et al.
  2002   'The concept of Action Research'. *The Learning Organization,* 9 (3), pp. 125–131.

Anderson, Arnold A.
  1998   *2 Samuel.* World Biblical Commentary. Dallas, TX: Word Incorporated.

Anderson, Gary A.
  2009   *Sin: A History.* New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press.

Andersson, Efraim
  1951   'Munkukusa, en nyhednisk folkrörelse i Kongo'. *Svensk Missionstidskrift,* 41.

  1958   *Messianic Popular Movements in the Lower Congo.* Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri Aktiebolag. (Ethnographica Upsaliensia, vol. 14)

  1968   *Churches at the Grass-Roots: A Study in Congo-Brazzaville.* Translated into English by Dorothea M. Barton. London: Lutterworth Press.

Arndt, William, Danker, Frederick W. & Bauer, Walter, eds.
  2000   *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG). 3rd ed. (electronic). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Asamoah-Gyadu, J. Kwabena
  2013   *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context.* Oxford: Regnum Books.

Assohoto, Barnabé
  2002   *Le salut en Jésus-Christ dans la théologie africaine: réalités africaines et salut en Jésus-Christ.* Cotonou: Édition du CART. (Tome 2)

Awolalu, Omosade
  1976   'Sin and its removal in African Traditional Religion'. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* 44 (2), pp. 275–287.

Axelson, Sigbert
  1970 *Culture Confrontation in the Lower Congo.* From the Old Congo Kingdom to the Congo Independent State with special reference to the Swedish missionaries in the 1880's and 1890's. Stockholm: Gummesson. (Studia missionalia Upsaliensia, vol. 14)

Bailey, Kenneth E.
  2005 *The Cross and the Prodigal: Luke 15 through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Balandier, Georges
  1963 *Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire: dynamique sociale en Afrique centrale.* 2ᵉ éd. mise à jour et augmentée. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

  1965 *La vie quotidienne au royaume de Kongo du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle.* Paris: Librairie Hachette.

  1968 *Daily life in the Kingdom of the Kongo: From the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth century.* Translated from French by Helen Weaver. Cleveland, OH: The World Publishing Company.

Baldwin, Joyce G.
  2008 *1 and 2 Samuel.* Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Nottingham; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Balz, Horst R. & Schneider, Gerhard, eds.
  1990 *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (EDNT). Electronic ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Barth, Karl
  1960 *Church Dogmatics.* III/2 The Doctrine of Creation. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.

  1963 *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Basden, George T.
  1966 *Among the Iboos of Nigeria.* London: Frank Cass.

Bastian, Adolf
  1874 *Die deutsche Expedition an der Loango-Küste.* Nebst älteren Nachrichten über die zu erforschenden Länder. Jena: Hermann Costenoble. (Vol. 1)

Basunga N'soni, Vincent de Paul
  2013 'Vie et survie du « bukongo » d'hier à aujourd'hui'. *In:* Kouloumbou, Maire-Jeanne and Mavouangui, David, eds. *Valeurs kongo: spécificité et universalité.* Paris: L'Harmattan, pp. 65–78.

Bauer, Johannes B.
  1970 'Sin'. *In:* Bauer, Johannes B., ed. *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology.* London: Sheed and Ward, pp. 849-862.

Bebbington, David W.
  1989 *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s.* London: Unwin Hyman.

Bergen, Robert D.
  1996 *1, 2 Samuel.* New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman. (electr. version)

Berlin, Adele
  1992 'Parallelism'. *In:* Freedman, Daniel N., ed. *The Anchor Bible dictionary.* ABD, vol. 5. New York, NY; London: Doubleday, pp. 155–162.

294

Bertram, Georg
    1976   φρόνησις. *In:* Kittel, Gerhard, Bromiley, Geoffrey W. and Friedrich, Gerhard, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.* TDNT, vol. 9. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, pp. 220–235.

Bevans, Stephen B.
    2002   *Models of contextual theology.* Revised and expanded edition. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. (Faith and cultures series)

Biemoundonghat, Camille
    2000   *Etude critique sur la croyance du salut dans la culture Koongo du Congo-Brazzaville.* Rome: Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana.

Birch, Bruce C. et al.
    1999   *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament.* Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Blair, Hugh J.
    1992   'Josua'. *In:* Guthrie, Donald and Balders, Günter, eds. *Kommentar zur Bibel.* Wuppertal; Zürich: Brockhaus, pp. 277–304.

Bockie, Simon
    1993   *Death and the Invisible Powers: The World of Kongo Belief.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich et al.
    2005   *Ethics.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer works, vol. 6)

Bouana, Raymond
    1961   *La notion de Dieu chez les ancêtres Bakongo.* Thèse de licence (bachelor equivalent). Faculté libre de Théologie Protestante de Montpellier. Montpellier.

Boutsana, Grégoire
    2013   'Le sacré koongo'. *In:* Kouloumbou, Maire-Jeanne and Mavouangui, David, eds. *Valeurs kongo: spécificité et universalité.* Paris: L'Harmattan, pp. 99–116.

Brown, Francis, Driver, Samuel R. & Briggs, Charles A.
    1977   *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (BDB). (Logos electr. edition). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Browning, Don S.
    1991   *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

Brueggemann, Walter
    1989   *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

    1990   *First and Second Samuel.* Louisville, KY: John Knox Press. (Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching)

    1993   *Texts under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

Brunner, Emil
    1947   *Revelation and Reason: The Christian Doctrine of Faith and knowledge.* Translated by Olive Wyon. London: Student Christian Movement Press Ltd.

    1964   *Truth as Encounter.* New enlarged edition. Translated from German. London: SCM Press.

Bryman, Alan
　　2003　'Triangulation'. *Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods.* London: Sage Publications, pp. 1142–1143.

Bujo, Bénézet
　　1992　*African Theology in its Social Context.* Translated from German by John O'Donohue. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. (Faith and cultures series)

　　2001　*Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality.* New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company.

Bunseki Fu-Kiau, Kimbwandènde K.
　　2001　*African Cosmology of the Bântu-Kôngo. Tying the spiritual knot: Principles of life and living.* 2nd ed. Brooklyn, NY: Athelia Henrietta Press, publication in the name of Orunmila.

Bunyi, Joy O.
　　1989　*Contextualization of Theological Education from the Metro Manila Context.* Unpublished Ed.D. dissertation. Asia Graduate School of Theology. Manila.

Butler, Trent C.
　　1998　*Joshua.* World Biblical Commentary. Dallas, TX: Word Incorporated.

Calvin, Jean
　　1960　*Institutes of the Christian Religion.* Book I. Edited by John T. McNeill; translated by Ford Lewis Battles. London: SCM Press. (The Library of Christian Classics, vol. 20)

Cameron, Helen et al., eds.
　　2010　*Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology.* London: SCM Press.

Carr, Wilfred & Kemmis, Stephen
　　1986　*Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research.* London; Philadelphia, PA: Falmer Press.

Carson, Donald A.
　　2005　'Maintaining scientific and Christian truths in a postmodern world'. *In:* Alexander, Denis, ed. *Can we be sure about anything? Science, Faith and Postmodernism.* Leicester: Apollos, pp. 102–125.

Cavazzi, Giovanni A.d.M.
　　1937　*Descrizione storica dei tre regni Congi, Matamba e Angola.* Modern edition. Tivoli.

Chopp, Rebecca S.
　　1987　'Practical theology and liberation'. *In:* Mudge, Lewis S. and Poling, James N., eds. *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology.* Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, pp. 120–138.

Cibangu, Sylvain K.
　　2012　'Qualitative Research: The Toolkit of Theories in the Social Sciences'. *In:* López-Varela, Asunción, ed. *Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to Social Sciences and Knowledge Management:* InTech, pp. 95–126.

Cimpric, Aleksandra
　　2010　*Children Accused of Witchcraft: An Anthropological Study of Contemporary Practices in Africa.* UNICEF WCARO. Available at: <http://www.unicef.org/wcaro/ wcaro_children-accused-of-witchcraft-in-Africa.pdf> [Accessed 20 June 2016]

Clifford, Richard J.
　　1999　*Proverbs.* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

Conrad, Joachim
1974- שָׁחַת šāḥaṯ. *In:* Botterweck, G. Johannes, Ringgren, Helmer and Fabry, Heinz-Josef, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* TDOT, vol. 14. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Eerdmans, pp. 583–595.

Cook, Tina
1998 'The importance of mess in Action Research'. *Educational Action Research,* 6 (1), pp. 93–109.

Cox, Harvey
1995 *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publications.

Cuvelier Mgr, Jean & Boon, Josef, eds.
1953 *Document sur une mission française au Kakongo 1766-1777.* Brusells: MIRCB.

Dabrock, Peter
2010 'Drawing distinctions responsibly and concretely: A European Protestant perspective on foundational theological bioethics'. *Christian Bioethics,* 16 (2), pp. 128–157.

Dalmalm, Åsa
1985 *L'église à l'épreuve de la tradition: la communauté évangélique du Zaïre et le kindoki.* Paris: EDITAF.

Daube, David
2008 *Studies in Biblical Law.* Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Denzin, Norman K. & Lincoln, Yvonna S.
1994 'Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research'. *In:* Denzin, Norman K. and Lincoln, Yvonna S., eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 1–17.

Dereau, Léon
1957 *Lexique Kikôngo-Français - Français-Kikôngo.* D'après le dictionnaire de K. E. Laman. Namur: Maison d'éditions ad. Wesmael-Charlier.

Descourvières, Jean-Joseph
1953 'Relation de la mission des prestres séculiers pour le royaume de Loango et les environs'. (Document no. 8 de 1770). *In:* Cuvelier Mgr, Jean and Boon, Josef, eds. *Document sur une mission française au Kakongo 1766-1777.* Brussels: MIRCB, pp. 45–59.

Devauges, Roland
1977 *L'oncle, le ndoki et l'entrepreneur: La petite entreprise congolaise à Brazzaville.* Paris: Orstom. (Travaux et Documents no. 75)

Dick, Bob
1993 *You want to do an action research thesis?* Available at: <http://www.aral.com.au/resources/arthesis.html> [Accessed 27 May 2014]

2002 'Postgraduate programs using action research'. *The Learning Organization,* 9 (4), pp. 159–170.

Diefenbach, Thomas
2009 'Are case studies more than sophisticated storytelling? Methodological problems of qualitative empirical research mainly based on semi-structured interviews'. *Quality & Quantity,* 43 (6), pp. 875–894.

Dodd, Henry & Perkins, Robert
2012 *Republic of Congo: Mpila munitions depot explosions, 4 March 2012.* Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), ed. London. (Case studies of explosive violence). Available at: <http://aoav.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/ 2013/06/2012_06_case_ study_of_explosive_violence_republic_of_congo1.pdf> [Accessed 29 July 2013]

Dohmen, Christoph & Rick, D.
1974- רעע rʿʿ. *In:* Botterweck, G. Johannes, Ringgren, Helmer and Fabry, Heinz-Josef, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* TDOT, vol. 13. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Eerdmans, pp. 560–588.

Dorier-Apprill, Elisabeth, Kouvouama, Abel & Apprill, Christophe
1998 *Vivre à Brazzaville: Modernité et crise au quotidien.* Paris: Editions Karthala.

Doutreloux, Albert
1967 *L'ombre des fétiches: Société et culture yombe.* Louvain: Editions Nauwelaerts.

Doyle, Sarah
2013 'Reflexivity and the capacity to think'. *Qualitative Health Research,* 23 (2), pp. 248–255.

Durham, John I.
1998 *Exodus.* World Biblical Commentary. Dallas, TX: Word Incorporated.

Egelkraut, Helmuth et al.
2000 *Das Alte Testament: Entstehung - Geschichte - Botschaft.* 4., durchgesehene u. erweiterte Auflage. Giessen; Basel: Brunnen-Verlag.

Eikeland, Olav
2012 'Action Research - Applied Research, Intervention Research, Collaborative Research, Practitioner Research, or Praxis Research?' *International Journal of Action Research,* 8 (1), pp. 9–44.

Eissfeldt, Otto
1941 'Lade und Stierbild'. *Zeitschrift für Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft (ZAW),* 58 (3-4), pp. 199–215.

Ekholm Friedman, Kajsa
1991 *Catastrophe and Creation: The Transformation of an African Dulture.* Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers.

Elliott, John
1991 *Action Research for Educational Change.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Ellis, Alfred B.
1894 *The Tshi-Speaking Peoples of the Gold Coast.* Reprinted 1966. London: Frank Cass.

Evans-Pritchard, Edward E.
1965 'Witchcraft explains unfortunate events'. *In:* Lessa, William A., Vogt, Evon Z. and Watanabe, John M., eds. *Reading in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach.* New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, pp. 328–332.

Fahlgren, Karl H.
1932 *Ṣedāḳā.* Nahestehende und entgegengesetzte Begriffe im Alten Testament. Inaugural Dissertation. Uppsala.

Farley, Edward
1987 'Interpreting situations: An inquiry into the nature of practical theology'. *In:* Mudge, Lewis S. and Poling, James N., eds. *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology.* Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, pp. 1–26.

Felner, Alfredo De Albuquerque
    1933   *Angola.* Apontamentos sôbre a ocupação e início do estabelecimento dos portugueses no Congo, Angola e Benguela. Extraídos de documentos históricos. Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade.

Ferrance, Eileen
    2000   *Action Research.* Providence, RI: Brown University. (Themes in Education)

Finlay, Linda
    2002a 'Negotiating the swamp: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice'. *Qualitative Research,* 2 (2), pp. 209–230.

    2002b '"Outing" the researcher: The provenance, principles and practice of reflexivity'. *Qualitative Health Research,* 12 (4), pp. 531–545.

    2009   'Debating phenomenological research methods'. *Phenomenology & Practice,* 3 (1), pp. 6–25.

Flick, Uwe
    2009   *An Introduction to Qualitative Research.* 4th ed. London: Sage Publications.

Flick, Uwe et al.
    2012   '"I can't prescribe something just because someone asks for it…": Using mixed methods in the framework of triangulation'. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research,* 6 (2), pp. 97–110.

Forrester, Duncan B.
    1990   'Divinity in use and practice'. *In:* Forrester, Duncan B., ed. *Theology and Practice.* London: Epworth, pp. 3–9.

    2000   *Truthful Action: Explorations in Practical Theology.* Edinburgh: T & T Clark.

Fowler, James W.
    1985   'Practical theology and theological education: Some models and questions'. *Theology Today,* 42 (1), pp. 43–58.

Fuhs, Hans F.
    1974- עָבַר ʿāḇar. *In:* Botterweck, G. Johannes, Ringgren, Helmer and Fabry, Heinz-Josef, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* TDOT, vol. 10. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Eerdmans, pp. 408–425.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg
    1990   *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik.* 6. ed. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. (Gesammelte Werke; Hermeneutik I)

    2004   *Truth and method.* 2nd, rev. ed. Translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshal. London ; New York, NY: Continuum.

Gambeg, Yvon-Norbert
    2001   'L'habitat kongo aux XVIe - VIIIe siècles'. *In:* Kouloumbou, Marie-Jeanne, ed. *Histoire et civilisation kongo.* Publication de l'Association Mbanza-Kongo pour la Culture. Paris: L'Harmattan, pp. 35–55.

Gatabantou, Samuel
    2001   'Le juge et le justiciable dans la société kongo'. *In:* Kouloumbou, Marie-Jeanne, ed. *Histoire et civilisation kongo.* Publication de l'Association Mbanza-Kongo pour la Culture. Paris: L'Harmattan, pp. 39–48.

Geertz, Clifford
  1983   Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology. New York, NY: Basic Books (ed. 2000).

Gesenius, Wilhelm & Buhl, Frants
  1962   *Hebräisches und aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament.* 17. Aufl. (1915), Neudruck. Berlin; Göttingen; Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag.

Gibson, Nancy
  2004   'Action Research'. *In:* Lewis-Beck, Michael S., Bryman, Alan and Liao, Tim F., eds. *The Sage Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 4–6.

Gilliland, Dean S.
  2005   'The incarnation as matrix for appropriate theologies'. *In:* Kraft, Charles H., ed. *Appropriate Christianity.* Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, pp. 493–519.

Gilmer, Penny
  [n.d.] *Learning through action research while teaching undergraduat science.* The University of Alabama. Available at: <http://education.ua.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Background-Research-Paper-No.-41.pdf> [Accessed 04 June 2014]

Glaser, Barney G. & Strauss, Anselm L.
  2008   *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research.* 3rd paperback printing. New Brunswick: Aldine.

Goldingay, John
  2006   *Old Testament Theology.* Vol. 2: Israel's Faith. Downers Grove, IL; Milton Keynes: IVP Academic; Paternoster.

Gollwitzer, Helmut
  1977   'Theorie und Praxis im theologischen Denken'. *Evangelische Kommentare,* 10, pp. 522–525.

Goma-Foutou, Emmanuel C.
  2001   'De la direction de la société et de la culture: par la royauté des mani kongo'. *In:* Kouloumbou, Marie-Jeanne, ed. *Histoire et civilisation kongo.* Publication de l'Association Mbanza-Kongo pour la Culture. Paris: L'Harmattan, pp. 9–37.

Görg, Manfred
  1974- בָּזָה bāzāh. *In:* Botterweck, G. Johannes, Ringgren, Helmer and Fabry, Heinz- Josef, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* TDOT, vol. 2. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Eerdmans, pp. 60–65.

Gould, Judy & Nelson, Jennifer
  2005   'Researchers reflect from the cancer precipice'. *Reflective Practice,* 6 (2), pp. 277–284.

Gräb, Wilhelm
  2001   'Sünde: VIII. Praktisch-Theologisch'. *In:* Müller, Gerhard et al., eds. *Theologische Realenzyklopädie (TRE),* Bd. 32. Berlin: de Gruyter, pp. 436–442.

Gray, Richard
  1990   *Black Christians and White missionaries.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Greenwood, Davydd J. & Levin, Morten
  1998   *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Groome, Thomas H.
 1987 'Theology on our feet: A revisionist pedagogy for healing the gap between academia and ecclesia'. *In:* Mudge, Lewis S. and Poling, James N., eds. *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology.* Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, pp. 55–78.

Grundmann, Walter
 1976 ἁμαρτάνω. *In:* Kittel, Gerhard, Bromiley, Geoffrey W. and Friedrich, Gerhard, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.* TDNT, vol. 1. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, pp. 267–316.

Guba, Egon G.
 1990 *The Paradigm Dialog.* Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Guba, Egon G. & Lincoln, Yvonna S.
 1994 'Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research'. *In:* Denzin, Norman K. and Lincoln, Yvonna S., eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 105–117.

Guignon, Charles B.
 2006 *Excerpt: The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger.* Available at: <http://assets.cambridge.org/97805218/21360/excerpt/9780521821360_excerpt.pdf> [Accessed 25 March 2014]

Guillemin, Marilys & Gillam, Lynn
 2004 'Ethics, reflexivity, and "ethically important moments" in research'. *Qualitative Inquiry,* 10 (2), pp. 261–280.

Gummesson, Evert
 2003 'All research is interpretive!' *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing,* 18 (6), pp. 482–492.

Guthrie, Donald & Balders, Günter, eds.
 1992 *Kommentar zur Bibel.* 1. Sonderaufl. Wuppertal; Zürich: Brockhaus.

Gyekye, Kwame
 1997 *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African experience.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Hamati-Ataya, Inanna
 2013 'Reflectivity, reflexivity, reflexivism: IR's "reflexive turn" and beyond'. *European Journal of International Relations,* 19 (4), pp. 669–694.

Handicap International, UK
 2013 *Congo-Brazzaville explosion, one year on: Land made safe for affected communities.* Available at: <http://www.handicap-international.org.uk/resources/stories/africa/20130305_congobrazzaville> [Accessed 06 August 2013]

Harris, R. L., Archer, Gleason L. & Waltke, Bruce K., eds.
 1999 *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (TWOT). Logos electr. edition. Chicago, IL: Moody Press.

Hastings, Thomas J.
 2007 *Practical Theology and the One Body of Christ: Toward a Mission-Ecumenical Model.* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. (Studies in practical theology)

Hauerwas, Stanley
 2004 *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence.* London: SPCK.

Heidegger, Martin
  1962   *Being and Time.* New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers.

Heitink, Gerben
  1999   *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains.* Manual for Practical
          Theology. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. (Studies in practical
          theology)

Hermans, Chris A.M.
  2004   'When theology goes "practical": From applied to empirical theology'. *In:* Hermans,
          Chris A. M. and Moore, Mary E., eds. *Hermeneutics and Empirical Research in
          Practical Theology: The Contribution of Empirical Theology by Johannes A. van der
          Ven.* Leiden: Brill, pp. 21–51.

Heron, John
  [n.d.] *One page introduction to co-operative inquiry.* South Pacific Centre for Human
          Inquiry. Available at: <http://www.human-inquiry.com/cionepag.htm> [Accessed
          27 May 2014]

  1996   *Co-operative Inquiry: Research into the Human Condition.* London; Thousand Oaks,
          CA: Sage Publications.

Heron, John & Reason, Peter
  2006   'The practice of co-operative inquiry: Research "with" rather than "on" people'. *In:*
          Reason, Peter and Bradbury, Hilary, eds. *Handbook of Action Research.* The
          Concise Paperback Editon. London: Sage Publications, pp. 144–154.

Hersak, Dunja
  2001   'There are many Kongo worlds: particularities of magico-religious beliefs among the
          Vili and Yombe of Congo-Brazzaville'. *Africa: Journal of the International African
          Institute,* 71 (4), pp. 614–640.

Hertz, Rosanna, ed.
  1997   *Reflexivity and Voice.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Hess, Richard S.
  1996   *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary.* The Tyndale Old Testament
          Commentaries. Leicester: InterVarsity Press.

Hesselgrave, David
  1978   *Communication Christ Cross-culturally.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

  1979   'The contextualization continuum'. *Gospel in Context,* 2 (3), pp. 4–11.

Hesselgrave, David & Rommen, Edward
  1989   *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

Hiebert, Paul G.
  1987   'Critical contextualization'. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research,* 11 (3),
          pp. 104–112.

  1991   'Beyond anti-colonialism to globalism'. *Missiology,* 19 (3), pp. 263–282.

  1994   *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker
          Books.

  1996   'Critical issues in the Social Sciences and their implications for Mission Studies'.
          Missiology: An International Review, 24 (1), pp. 65–82.

2007   'The missionary as mediator of global theologizing'. *In:* Ott, Craig and Netland, Harold A., eds. *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity.* Nottingham: Apollos, pp. 288–308.

2008   *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

Hilton, Anne
  1985   *The Kingdom of Kongo.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Holliday, Adrian
  2007   *Doing and Writing Qualitative Research.* 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications.

Holter, Inger M. & Schwartz-Barcott, Donna
  1993   'Action research: what is it? How has it been used and how can it be used in nursing?' *Journal of Advanced Nursing,* 18 (2), pp. 298–304.

Hunter, William J.
  2007   'Action research as a framework for science education research'. *In:* Bodner, George M. and Orgill, Mary Kay, eds. *Theoretical Frameworks for Research in Chemistry/ Science Education.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall. (Prentice Hall series in educational innovation), pp. 152–171.

Hutton, Erica
  2009   *A theoretical comparison of phenomenology and hermeneutics.* Hutton & Associates. Available at: <http://ericahutton.blogspot.ch/2009/03/theoretical-comparison-of-phenomenolgy.html> [Accessed 02 July 2014]

Idowu, Emanuel B.
  1973   *African traditional religion: a definition.* London: SCM Press.

Ikuenobe, Polycarp
  2006   *Philosophical Perspectives on Communalism and Morality in African Traditions.* Lanham, MD.: Lexington Books.

Ingold, Tim
  2008   *Anthropology is NOT Ethnography.* Radcliffe-Brown Lecture in Social Anthropology. British Academy. Available at: <http://proc.britac.ac.uk/tfiles/ 154p069.pdf> [Accessed 30 July 2014]

Jacobson-Widding, Anita
  1979   *Red—White—Black as a Mode of Thought: A Study of Triadic Classification by Colours in the Ritual Symbolism and Cognitive Thought of the Peoples of the Lower Congo.* Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell International.

Janowski, Bernd
  2005   'Der Mensch im alten Israel: Grundfragen alttestamentlicher Anthropologie'. *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche,* 102 (2), pp. 143–175.

Janzen, John M. & MacGaffey, Wyatt
  1974   *An anthology of Kongo religion: primary texts from Lower Zaïre.* Lawrence: University of Kansas. (Publications in Anthropology no. 5)

Jenni, Ernst & Westermann, Claus, eds.
  1997   *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament.* TLOT. Translated by Mark E. Biddle. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.

Johnson, Andrew P.
  2008   *A short guide to Action Research.* 3rd ed. Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.

Johnson, Nicole
  2009   'The role of self and emotion within qualitative sensitive research: a reflective account'. *Enquire* (4), pp. 23–50.

Julian, Ruth
  2004   *Discipleship in the shadow of change: tradition, modernity and discipleship in the Bakongo context.* Dissertation. E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission and Evangelism. Asbury Theological Seminary. Asbury, NJ.

  2010   'Ground level contextualization'. *In:* Cook, Matthew et al., eds. *Local Theology for the Global Church: Principles for an Evangelical Approach to Contextualization.* Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, pp. 57–74.

Kakkori, Leena
  2009   'Hermeneutics and Phenomenology problems when applying hermeneutic phenomenological method in educational qualitative research'. *Paideusis,* 18 (2), pp. 19–27.

Kalu, Ogbu
  2008   *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction.* Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Karakayali, Nedim
  2004   'Reading Bourdieu with Adorno: The limits of critical theory and reflexivity'. *Sociology,* 38 (2), pp. 351–368.

Karrer, Martin
  2001   'Sünde: IV. Neues Testament'. *In:* Müller, Gerhard et al., eds. *Theologische Realenzyklopädie (TRE),* Bd. 32. Berlin: de Gruyter, pp. 375–389.

Käser, Lothar
  2014   *Foreign Cultures: An Introduction to Ethnology.* Translated from German by Geoffrey Sutton. Nürnberg: VTR Publications.

Kaufman, Peter
  2012   'Scribo ergo cogito: Reflexivity through writing'. *Teaching Sociology,* 41 (1), pp. 70–81.

Kemmis, Stephen & McTaggart, Robin
  1988   *The Action Research Planner.* 3rd ed. Geelong: Deakin University Press.

  2000   'Participatory action research'. *In:* Denzin, Norman K. and Lincoln, Yvonna S., eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 567–605.

  2005   'Participatory action research: Communicative action and the public sphere'. *In:* Denzin, Norman K. and Lincoln, Yvonna S., eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 559–603.

Kidner, Derek
  1973   *Psalms 1-72: An introduction and commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms.* The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. London: InterVarsity Press.

Kincheloe, Joe L. & McLaren, Peter L.
  1994   'Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research'. *In:* Denzin, Norman K. and Lincoln, Yvonna S., eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 138–157.

King, Lewis M., Dixon, Vernon J. & Nobles, Wade W., eds.

    1976   *African Philosophy: Assumptions & Paradigms for Research on Black Persons.* Los Angeles: Fanon Research and Development Center. (J. Alfred Cannon research conference series)

Kitsimbou, Xavier B.

    2001   *La démocratie et les réalités ethniques au Congo.* Thèse de Sciences Politiques. Université de Nancy. Nancy. Available at: <http://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/16/84/67/PDF/THESE.pdf> [Accessed 08 August 2013]

Kittel, Gerhard, Bromiley, Geoffrey W. & Friedrich, Gerhard, eds.

    1976   *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.* TDNT. Electr. edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Knierim, Rolf P.

    1965   *Die Hauptbegriffe für Sünde im Alten Testament.* Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus.

    1997a   חטא ḥṭʾ. *In:* Jenni, Ernst and Westermann, Claus, eds. *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament.* TLOT. Translated by Mark E. Biddle. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, pp. 406–411.

    1997b   חנף ḥnp. *In:* Jenni, Ernst and Westermann, Claus, eds. *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament.* TLOT. Translated by Mark E. Biddle. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, pp. 447–448.

    1997c   עָוֹן ʿāwōn. *In:* Jenni, Ernst and Westermann, Claus, eds. *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament.* TLOT. Translated by Mark E. Biddle. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, pp. 862–866.

    1997d   פֶּשַׁע pešaʿ. *In:* Jenni, Ernst and Westermann, Claus, eds. *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament.* TLOT. Translated by Mark E. Biddle. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, pp. 1033-1037.

Koch, Klaus

    1970-   חָטָא ḥāṭāʾ. *In:* Botterweck, Johannes G. and Ringgren, Helmer, eds. *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament.* ThWAT, Bd 2. Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, pp. 857–870.

    1974a-   חָטָא chāṭāʾ. *In:* Botterweck, G. Johannes, Ringgren, Helmer and Fabry, Heinz-Josef, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* TDOT, vol. 4. Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge: Eerdmans, pp. 309–319.

    1974b-   עָוֹן ʿāwōn. *In:* Botterweck, G. Johannes, Ringgren, Helmer and Fabry, Heinz- Josef, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* TDOT, vol. 10. Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge: Eerdmans, pp. 546–562.

    1983   'Is there a doctrine of retribution in the Old Testament?' *In:* Crenshaw, James L., ed. *Theodicy in the Old Testament,* 4. Philadelphia, PA; London: Fortress Press; SPCK. (Issues in Religion and Theology, Vol. 4), pp. 57–87.

    1991a   'Gibt es ein hebräisches Denken?' *In:* Koch, K. *Spuren des hebräischen Denkens. Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie.* B. Janowski & M. Krause, eds. Neukirchen-Vluyn. (Gesammelte Aufsätze, Bd. 1), pp. 3–24.

    1991b   'Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?' *In:* Koch, K. *Spuren des hebräischen Denkens. Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie.* B. Janowski & M. Krause, eds. Neukirchen-Vluyn. (Gesammelte Aufsätze, Bd. 1), pp. 65–103.

1991c 'Wesen und Ursprung der „Gemeinschaftstreue" im Israel der Königszeit.' *In*: Koch, K. Spuren des hebräischen Denkens. Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie. B. Janowski & M. Krause, eds. Neukirchen-Vluyn. (Gesammelte Aufsätze, Bd. 1), pp. 107–127.

Koehler, Ludwig et al., eds.
1999 *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.* HALOT. (Logos electronic ed.). Leiden: Brill.

Kolélas, Bernard B.
2006 *Le déchirement.* Roman. Abidjan: CEDA/NEI.

2007 *Les épreuves initiatiques chez les Bantu.* Collection « Interdépendance africaine ». Paris: Édition Menaibuc.

Kornfeld, Walter & Ringgren, Helmer
1974- קדש qdš. *In:* Botterweck, G. Johannes, Ringgren, Helmer and Fabry, Heinz-Josef, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* TDOT, XII. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Eerdmans, pp. 521–545.

Koshy, Valsa
2005 *Action Research for Improving Practice: A Practical Guide.* London; Thousand Oaks CA; PCP/Sage Publications.

Kraft, Charles H.
1978 'The contextualization of theology'. *Evangelical Missions Quarterly,* 14 (1), pp. 31–36.

1990 *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-cultural Perspective.* 8th printing. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Kurian, George T., ed.
2012 *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Laman, Karl E.
1916 'Förfäderns kult hos Bakongo'. *Svensk Missionstidskrift* (4), n.p.

1919 'Själsteorier och andekult hos Bakongo'. *Svensk Missionstidskrift* (7), n.p.

1923 *Sanningsstrålar: Animism och missionsmetodik bland primitiva folk.* Stockholm: Svenska Missionsförbundets Förlag.

1936 *Dictionnaire ki-kongo - français.* Brussels.

1953 *The Kongo I.* Stockholm, Sweden: Victor Pettersons Bokindustri Aktiebolag. (Studia Ethnographica Upsaliensia; Vol. 4)

1957 *The Kongo II.* Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri Aktiebolag. (Studia Ethnographica Upsaliensia; Vol. 8)

1962 *The Kongo III.* Sweden. (Studia Ethnographica Upsaliensia; Vol. 12)

1968 *The Kongo IV.* Lund: Betlingska Boktryckeriet. (Studia Ethnographica Upsaliensia; Vol. 16)

2000 *Rayons de vérité - suivie de: Là où les ténèbres se dissipent.* Traduction en français par Birgitta Åhman: Svenska Missionsförbundet.

Landsberger, Benno & von Soden, Wolfram
1965 *Die Eigenbegrifflichkeit der babylonischen.* Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

Lane, Dermot A.
  1984   *Foundations for a Social Theology: Praxis, Process and Salvation.* New York, NY: Paulist.

Lavenda, Robert H. & Schultz, Emily A.
  2010   *Core Concepts in Cultural Anthropology.* 4th ed. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

Laverty, Susann M.
  2003   'Hermeneutic phenomenology and phenomenology: A comparison of historical and methodological considerations'. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods,* 2 (3), pp. 21–35.

Lewin, Kurt
  1946   'Action research and minority problems'. *Journal of Social Issues,* 2, pp. 34–46.

Lienhard, Ruth
  2000   *Restoring Relationships: Theological reflections on Shame and Honor among the Daba and Bana of Cameroon.* Dissertation (PhD). School of World Mission. Fuller Theological Seminary. Pasadena, CA.

  2001   'A "Good Conscience": Differences between Honor and Justice Orientation'. *Missiology: An International Review,* 19 (2), pp. 131–141.

Lincoln, Yvonna S. & Guba, E.G.
  1985   *Naturalistic Enquiry.* London: Sage Publications.

Livingston, G. Herbert
  1999   פָּשַׁע pāšaʿ (1846). *In:* Harris, R. L., Archer, Gleason L. and Waltke, Bruce K., eds. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament.* TWOT. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, pp. 741–742.

Loba-Mkole, Jean-Claude
  2005   *Triple heritage: Gospels in intercultural mediations.* Kinshasa: Centre de Recherches Interdisciplinaires de Limete; Pretoria : Sapientia Publishers.

  2007   'From inculturation theology to intercultural exegesis'. *In:* Kabasele Mukenge, André, Loba-Mkole, Jean-Claude and Aroga Besong, Dieudonné P., eds. *Cultural readings of the Bible in Africa.* Quand l'Afrique s'approprie la Bible! Yaoundé: Éditions CLÉ, pp. 39–68.

Loder, James E.
  1998   *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

  1999   'Normativity and context in practical theology: "The interdisciplinary issue"'. *In:* Schweitzer, F. and van der Ven, Johannes A., eds. *Practical Theology: International Perspectives.* Frankfurt: Peter Lang, pp. 359–381.

Lohfink, Norbert
  1974-   חָרַם ḥāram. *In:* Botterweck, G. Johannes, Ringgren, Helmer and Fabry, Heinz-Josef, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* TDOT, vol. 5. Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge: Eerdmans, pp. 180–199.

Luc, Alex
  1996   חָטָא ḥāṭāʾ. *In:* VanGemeren, Willem A., ed. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis.* NIDOTTE, Vol. 2. Carlisle: Paternoster Press, pp. 87–93.

Lumwamu, François
    1986   *Recherches sur la koine kongo.* Thèse pour le doctorat d'Etat et Lettres et Sciences Humaines. Sorbonne. Paris.

Lumwamu, François & Ndamba, Josué
    1987   *Atlas linguistique de l'Afrique Centrale (ALAC).* Situation linguistique de l'Afrique centrale, inventaire préliminaire: le Congo. Brazzaville.

Luyaluka, Kiatezua L.
    2009   *Vaincre la sorcellerie en Afrique: Une étude de la spiritualité en milieu kongo.* Paris: L'Harmattan. (Études africaines)
    2010   *L'inefficacité de l'église face à la sorcellerie africaine.* Paris: L'Harmattan. (Études africaines)

Luzbetak, Louis
    1988   *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Lynch, Michael & McNally, Ruth
    2003   '"Science", "common sense," and DNA evidence: a legal controversy about the public understanding of science'. *Public Understanding of Science,* 12 (1), pp. 83–103.

MacGaffey, Wyatt
    1970a *Custom and Government in the Lower Congo.* Berkeley, CA; Los Angeles, CA; London: University of California Press.
    1970b 'The Religious Commissions of the Bakongo'. *Man,* 5 (1), pp. 27–38.
    1972   'The West in Congolese experience'. *In:* Curtin, Philip D., ed. *Africa and the West: Intellectual Responses to European Culture.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 49–74.
    1977a 'Cultural roots of Kongo prophetism'. *History of Religions,* 17 (2), pp. 177–193.
    1977b 'Economic and Social Dimensions of Kongo Slavery'. *In:* Miers, Suzanne and Kopytoff, Igor, eds. *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 235–257.
    1977c 'Fetishism revisited: Kongo nkisi in sociological perspective'. *Africa,* 47 (2), pp. 172–184.
    1983   *Modern Kongo Prophets: Religion in a Plural Society.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. (African systems of thought)
    1986   *Religion and Society in Central Africa: The BaKongo of Lower Zaire.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
    1988   'Complexity, astonishment and power: The visual vocabulary of Kongo Minkisi'. *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 14 (2), pp. 188–203.
    1990   'The personhood of ritual objects: Kongo "minkisi"'. *Etnofoor,* 3 (1), pp. 45–61.
    1994   'African objects and the idea of fetish'. *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* (25), pp. 123–131.
    2000   *Kongo Political Culture: The Conceptual Challenge of the Particular.* Bloomington, IN; Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press.

MacIntyre, Christine
    2000   *The Art of Action Research in the Classroom.* London: David Fulton.

Maddox, Randy L.

    1990   'The recovery of theology as a practical discipline'. *Theological Studies,* 51, pp. 650–672.

    1991   'Practical Theology: A discipline in search of a definition'. *Perspectives in Religious Studies* (18), pp. 159–169.

Magesa, Laurenti

    1998   *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Mair, Lucy

    1969   *Witchcraft.* New York, NY: World University Library.

Marshall, I. Howard & Wood, D. R.W., eds.

    1996   *New Bible Dictionary.* 3rd ed. Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Marshall, Judi & Reason, Peter

    1994   'Adult learning in Collaborative Action Research: Reflections on the supervision process'. *Studies in Continuing Education: Research and Scholarship in Adult Education,* 15 (2), pp. 117–132.

Mason, Jennifer

    2002   *Qualitative Researching.* 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications.

Masters, Janet

    1995   *The History of Action Research.* Available at: <http://www.iopp.ru/pub/21sept06_M2.doc> [Accessed 28 May 2014]

Mauthner, Natasha S. & Doucet, Andrea

    2003   'Reflexive accounts and accounts of reflexivity in qualitative data analysis'. *Sociology,* 37 (3), pp. 413–431.

Maykut, Pamela & Morehouse, Richard

    1994   *Beginning Qualitative Research: A Philosophy and Practical Guide.* London: Falmer Press.

Mbiti, John S.

    1974a   *Afrikanische Religionen und Weltanschauung.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

    1974b   'Theological impotence and the universality of the Church'. *Lutheran World,* 21 (3), pp. 251–260.

    1990   *African Religions and Philosophy.* 2nd rev. and enl. ed. London: Heinemann.

Mbonyinkebe, Sebahire

    1974   'Brèves réflexions sur la conception traditionnelle du péché en Afrique Centrale'. *Cahiers des religions africaines,* 8 (16), pp. 155–165.

McCarter, Peter K.

    1984   *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary.* The Anchor Yale Bible. New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press.

McKernan, James

    1996   *Curriculum Action Research: A Handbook of Methods and Resources for the Reflective Practitioner.* 2nd ed. London: Kogan Page.

McKernan, Jim

    1988   'The countenance of curriculum action research: Traditional, collaborative, and emancipatory-critical conceptions'. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision,* 3 (3), pp. 173–200.

McKinney, Larry J.
  2003   'Evangelical theological education: implementing our own agenda'. Lecture presented at International Consultation for Theological Educators (ICETE). High Wycombe.

McLeod, John
  2001   *Qualitative Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy.* London: Sage Publications.

McManus Holroyd, Ann E.
  2007   'Interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology: Clarifying understanding'. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology,* 7 (2), pp. 1–12.

McNiff, Jean
  2002   *Action Research for Professional Development: Concise Advice for New Action Researchers* [Accessed 23 May 2014]

Mengi, Kilandamoko K.
  1981   *L'évangélisation missionnaire protestante face à la culture kongo. L'enracinement de l'Évangile dans une culture.* Thèse doctorale (PhD). Faculté de théologie. Université de Laval. Québec.

Menkiti, Ifeanyi A.
  1984   'Person and community in African traditional thought'. *In:* Wright, Richard A., ed. *African Philosophy: An Introduction.* Lanham, MD: University Press of America, pp. 171–181.

Metzner, Rainer
  2011   'Sin, guilt, and forgiveness: V. New Testament'. *In:* Betz, Hans D. et al., eds. *Religion Past & Present: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion,* 10. Leiden; Boston, MA: Brill, pp. 24–27.

Meyer-Blanck, Michael
  2011a   'Practical Theology: II. History'. *In:* Betz, Hans D. et al., eds. *Religion Past & Present: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion,* 10. Leiden; Boston, MA: Brill, pp. 274–275.

  2011b   'Practical Theology: III. As an Academic Discipline'. *In:* Betz, Hans D. et al., eds. *Religion Past & Present: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion,* 10. Leiden; Boston, MA: Brill, pp. 275–277.

Moreau, A. Scott
  1995   'The human universals of culture: Implications for contextualization'. *International Journal of Frontier Missions,* 12 (3), pp. 121–125.

  2005   'Contextualization: From an adapted message to an adapted life'. *In:* Pocock, Michael, Van Rheenen, Gailyn and McConnell, Douglas, eds. *The Changing Face of World Missions: Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. (Encountering mission), pp. 321–348.

  2012   *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models.* Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.

Mosis, R.
  1974-   עָכַר ʿāḵar. *In:* Botterweck, G. Johannes, Ringgren, Helmer and Fabry, Heinz-Josef, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* TDOT, vol. 11. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Eerdmans, pp. 67–71.

Moustakas, Clark
  1994   *Phenomenological Research Methods.* London: Sage Publications.

Mufwene, Salikoko S.
  2009 'Kituba, Kileta, or Kikongo? What's in a name?' *Le nom des langues III. Le nom des langues en Afrique sub-saharienne: pratiques dénominations, catégorisations,* BCILL (124), pp. 211–222.

Mulago, Vincent (gwa Cikala Musharhamina)
  1973 *La religion traditionnelle des bantu et leur vision du monde.* Kinshasa: Presses Universitaires du Zaïre. (Bibliothèqe du centre d'études des religions africaines)

Müri, Sabine & Bidounga, Jean-Valère
  2009 *Guide orthographique de la langue kituba.* Brazzaville: SIL-Congo.

Mushete, Ngindu
  1991 'Modernity in Africa'. *In:* Jenkinson, William, O'Sullivan and Helene, eds. *Trends in Mission: Toward the 3rd Millennium.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Ndamba, Josué
  2000 'Des véhiculaires aux vernaculaires à Brazzaville. La ville et les changements de fonctions linguistiques'. *In:* Calvet, Louis J. and Moussirou-Mouyama, Auguste, eds. *Le plurilinguisme urbain.* Actes du colloque de Libreville "Les villes plurilingues" (25-29 septembre 2000). Paris: Institut de la francophonie, diffusion Didier Érudition. (Langues et développement), pp. 135–145.

Nederveen Pieterse, Jan
  2009 *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange.* New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield.

Nel, Marius
  2014 'Sin: Hebrew Bible/Old Testament'. *In:* Brawley, Robert L., ed. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Ethics.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 279-284.

Nicholls, Bruce
  1979 'Towards a theology of Gospel and culture'. *In:* Stott, John R. W. and Coote, Robert T., eds. *Gospel and Culture: The Papers of a Consultation on the Gospel and Culture, Convened by the Lausanne Committee's Theology and Education Group.* Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, pp. 69–82.

Nida, Eugene A.
  1954 *Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions.* New York, NY: Harper & Brothers.

Nkouka, Martial
  2000 'Émergence des langues véhiculaires comme langues premières chez les adolescents de Brazzaville'. *In:* Calvet, Louis J. and Moussirou-Mouyama, Auguste, eds. *Le plurilinguisme urbain.* Actes du colloque de Libreville "Les villes plurilingues" (25-29 septembre 2000). Paris: Institut de la francophonie, diffusion Didier Érudition. (Langues et développement), pp. 147–159.

Nolte-Schamm, Claudia
  2006 'African anthropology as a resource for reconciliation: *ubuntu/botho* as a reconciliatory paradigm in South Africa'. *Scriptura: International Journal of Bible, Religion and Theology in Southern Africa,* 93, pp. 370–383.

Nowak, Kurt
  2002 *Schleiermacher: Leben, Werk und Wirkung.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

N'sondé, Mâ-Ntsiéla (Steve-Régis)
    2003a 'Nzambi était-ce un dieu pour les anciens Bâ-Kongo?' *L'arbre à Palabres,* 14, pp. 98–107.

    2003b *Origines d'un procès de transformation de la vie étique Koongo.* Mémoire (Diplôme d'études approfondies - DEA). École des hautes études en sciences sociales. Paris.

Nussbaum, Barbara
    2009 'Ubuntu: Reflections of a South African on our common humanity'. *In:* Murove, Munyaradzi F., ed. *African Ethics: An Anthrology of Comparative and Applied Ethics.* Scottsville: University of Kwazulu-Natal Press, pp. 100–109.

O'Brien, Rory
    2001 'Um exame da abordagem metodológica da pesquisa ação [An Overview of the Methodological Approach of Action Research]'. *In:* Richardson, Roberto, ed. *Teoria e Prática da Pesquisa Acão [Theory and Practice of Action Research].* João Pessoa, Brazil: Universidade Federal da Paraíba, English version available online: http://www.web.ca/robrien/papers/arfinal.html [n.p.].

Odman, Per-Johan
    1988 'Hermeneutics'. *In:* Keeves, J. P., ed. *Educational Research Methodology and Measurement: An International Handbook.* New York, NY: Pergamon Press, pp. 63–70.

O'Leary, Zina
    2004 *The Essential Guide to Doing Research.* London: Sage Publications.

Oswalt, John N.
    1973 'The golden calves and the Egyptian concept of deity'. *Evangelical Quarterly,* 45 (1), pp. 13–20.

Ott, Craig
    2007 'Conclusion: Globalizing theology'. *In:* Ott, Craig and Netland, Harold A., eds. *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity.* Nottingham: Apollos, pp. 309–336.

    2014 'The power of biblical metaphors for the contextualized communication of the Gospel'. *Missiology: An International Review,* 42 (4), pp. 357–374.

    2015 'Globalization and contextualization: Reframing the task of contextualization in the twenty-first century'. *Missiology: An International Review,* 43 (1), pp. 43–58.

Palmer, Richard E.
    1969 *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer.* Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Parratt, John K.
    1969 'Religious change in Yoruba society: A test case'. *Journal of Religion in Africa,* 2, pp. 113–128.

Parrinder, Geoffrey
    1949 *West African Rreligion: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Akan, Ewe, Yoruba, Ibo, and Kindred Peoples.* London: Epworth Press.

    1969 *Religion in Africa.* 2nd ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

    1974 *African Traditional Religion.* 3rd edition. London: Sheldon Press.

Patai, Daphne
    1994 'When method becomes power (response)'. *In:* Gitlen, Andrew D., ed. *Power and method.* New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 61–73.

Peacore, Linda
  2008   'Theology of experience'. *In:* Dyrness, William A. and Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti, eds. *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church.* Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham: IVP Academic; InterVarsity Press, pp. 305–307.

Pedersen, Johannes
  1926-   *Israel, its Life and Culture.* London: Oxford University Press (1926 vols. 1-2; 1940 vols. 3-4)   .

Peleka-Mvouza, Daniel
  1988   *Éducation traditionnelle et proverbes en milieu lari (Congo-Brazzaville).* Thèse de doctorat en Sciences de l'éducation. Université Paris Descartes (Paris V). Paris.

Pietz, William
  1985   'The problem of the fetish, I'. *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* (9), pp. 5–17.

  1987   'The problem of the fetish, II: The origin of the fetish'. *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* (13), pp. 23–45.

  1988   'The problem of the fetish, IIIa: Bosman's Guinea and the Enlightenment theory of fetishism'. *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* (16), pp. 105–124.

Pigafetta, Filippo L.D. & Duarte, Lopes
  2002   *Description du Royaume de Congo et des contrées environnantes (1591): la description de Filippo Pigafetta & Duarte Lopes.* Traduite de l'italien, annotée et présentée par Willy Bal. Paris: Éditions Chandeigne.

Pillow, Wanda
  2003   'Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research'. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education,* 16 (2), pp. 175–196.

Plaskow, Judith
  1990   *Standing Again at Sinai.* San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Pobee, John S.
  1979   *Towards an African Theology.* Nashville: Parthenon Press.

Polkinghorne, Donald
  1983   *Methodology for the Human Sciences: Systems of Inquiry.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Pollner, Melvin
  1975   '"The very coinage of your brain": The anatomy of reality disjunctures'. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences,* 5 (3), pp. 411–430.

Porter, Joshua R.
  1965   'The legal aspects of the concept of "corporate personality" in the Old Testament'. *Vetus Testamentum,* 15 (3), pp. 361–380.

Potvin, Louise, Bisset, Sherry & Walz, Leah
  2010   'Participatory action research: Theoretical perspectives on the challenges of researching action'. *In:* Bourgeault, Ivy, Dingwall, Robert and de Vries, Ray, eds. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Methods and Health research.* London: Sage Publications, pp. 433–453.

Priest, Robert J.

    2007   '"Experience-near theologizing" in diverse human contexts'. *In:* Ott, Craig and Netland, Harold A., eds. *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity.* Nottingham: Apollos, pp. 180–195.

Punch, Maurice

    1994   'Politics and ethics in qualitative research'. *In:* Denzin, Norman K. and Lincoln, Yvonna S., eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 83–97.

Randles, William G.L.

    1968   *L'ancien royaume du Congo des origines à la fin du XIXe siècle.* Paris: Mouton & Co. (Civilisation et Sociétés; Vol. 14)

Rapoport, Robert N.

    1970   'Three dilemmas in action research: With special reference to the Tavistock experience'. *Human Relations,* 23 (6), pp. 499–513.

Reason, Peter

    1994   *Participation in Human Inquiry.* London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

    2001   'Learning and change through action research'. *In:* Henry, Jane, ed. *Creative Management.* London: Sage Publications, pp. 182–194.

Reason, Peter & Bradbury, Hilary, eds.

    2008   *The Sage Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice.* 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Reason, Peter & Heron, John

    1997   *A short guide to co-operative inquiry.* South Pacific Centre for Human Inquiry. Available at: <http://www.human-inquiry.com/cishortg.htm> [Accessed 08 February 2012]

Richardson, Roberto, ed.

    2001   *Teoria e Prática da Pesquisa Acão [Theory and Practice of Action Research].* João Pessoa, Brazil: Universidade Federal da Paraíba.

Ricœur, Paul

    2008a   *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation.* 1. India ed. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

    2008b   *From Text to Action.* London: Continuum.

Ringgren, Helmer

    1974-   מָעַל māʿal. *In:* Botterweck, G. Johannes, Ringgren, Helmer and Fabry, Heinz-Josef, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* TDOT, vol. 8. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Eerdmans, pp. 460–463.

Ringgren, Helmer & Seebass, Horst

    1974-   פָּשַׁע pāšaʿ. Vol.XII. *In:* Botterweck, G. Johannes, Ringgren, Helmer and Fabry, Heinz-Josef, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* TDOT, vol. 12. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Eerdmans, pp. 133–151.

Robertson, Roland

    1992   *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

    1995   'Glocalization: Time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity'. *In:* Featherstone, Mike, Lash, Scott and Robertson, Roland, eds. *Global Modernities.* London, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. (Theory, culture & society), pp. 25–44.

2000   'Globalization and the future of "traditional religion"'. *In:* Stackhouse, Max L. and Paris, Peter J., eds. *Religion and the Powers of the Common Life.* Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International. (Theology for the twenty-first century; vol. 1), pp. 53–68.

Robinson, Henry W.
1981   *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel.* 2. ed. Edinburgh: T & T Clark; Fortress Press.

Robinson, Oliver C.
2011   'The idiographic / nomothetic dichotomy: Tracing historical origins of contemporary confusions'. *History & Philosophy of Psychology,* 13 (2), pp. 32–39.

Robson, Colin
2011   *Real World Research: A Resource for Users of Social Research Methods in Applied Settings.* 3rd ed. Chichester: Wiley.

Rogerson, John W.
1978   *Anthropology and the Old Testament.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

1985   'The Hebrew conception of corporate personality: A re-examination'. *In:* Lang, Bernhard, ed. *Anthropological Approaches to the Old Testament.* Philadelphia, London: Fortress Press; SPCK. (Issues in Religion and Theology; Vol. 8), pp. 43–59.

Ruch, Ernest A. & Anyanwu, Kane C.
1984   *African Philosophy: An Introduction to the Main Philosophical Trends in Contemporary Africa.* Revised edition. Rome: Catholic Book Agency.

Ruppert, Lothar
1974-   נָאַץ nāʾaṣ. *In:* Botterweck, G. Johannes, Ringgren, Helmer and Fabry, Heinz-Josef, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* TDOT, vol. 9. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Eerdmans, pp. 118–125.

Rüterswörden, Udo
1974-   שָׂרַף śārap̄. *In:* Botterweck, G. Johannes, Ringgren, Helmer and Fabry, Heinz-Josef, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* TDOT, vol. 14. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Eerdmans, pp. 218–228.

Ryan, Thomas
2005   'When you reflect are you also being reflexive?' *The Ontario Action Researcher,* 8 (1).

Rynkiewich, Michael A.
2002   'The world in my parish: Rethinking the standard missiological model'. *Missiology: An International Review,* 30 (3), pp. 301–322.

2011a   'Do we need a postmodern anthropology for Mission in a postcolonial world?' *Mission Studies,* 28 (2), pp. 151–169.

2011b   *Soul, Self, and Society: A postmodern Anthropology for Mission in a Postcolonial World.* Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.

Sakuba, Xolani Sherlock-Lee
2004   *The Relationship between Sin and Evil in African Christian Theology.* Thesis for the degree of Magister Theologae. University of the Western Cape. Cape Town.

Sandelowski, Margarete & Barroso, Julie
2002   'Finding the findings in qualitative studies'. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship,* 34 (3), pp. 213–219.

Sawyerr, Harry

 1972   'Sin and salvation: soteriology viewed from the African situation'. *In:* Becken, Hans-Jürgen, ed. *Relevant Theology for Africa.* Report on a consultation of the Missiological Institute at Lutheran Theological College, Mapumulo, Natal, September 12-21. Durban (Kwazulu-Natal): Lutheran Publishing House, pp. 126–147.

Scharbert, Josef

 1957   'Formgeschichte und Exegese von Ex 34,6f und seiner Parallelen'. *Biblica,* 38 (2), pp. 130–150.

 1958   'Solidarität in Segen und Fluch im Alten Testament und in seiner Umwelt'. *Bonner Biblische Beiträge,* 14 (1).

Schirrmacher, Thomas

 2006   'Die christliche Botschaft angesichts von schuld- und schamorientierten Gewissen und Kulturen'. *In:* Schirrmacher, Thomas and Müller, Klaus W., eds. *Scham- und Schuldorientierung in der Diskussion: Kulturanthropologische, missiologische und theologische Einsichten.* Nürnberg: VTR. (edition afem - mission academics; 20), pp. 237–300.

Schirrmacher, Thomas & Müller, Klaus W., eds.

 2006   *Scham- und Schuldorientierung in der Diskussion: Kulturanthropologische, missiologische und theologische Einsichten Lecture series: edition afem - mission academics,* 20. Nürnberg: VTR.

Schleiermacher, Friedrich & Schmid, Dirk

 2002   *Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums zum Behuf einleitender Vorlesungen (1811/1830).* Berlin, New York: de Gruyter. (De Gruyter Texte)

Schreiter, Robert J.

 1985   *Constructing Local Theologies.* Maryknoll, NY.: Orbis Books.

 1997   *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Schultz, Carl

 1999   עָוָה ʿāwâ (1577). *In:* Harris, R. L., Archer, Gleason L. and Waltke, Bruce K., eds. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament.* TWOT. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, pp. 650–652.

Schunk, Klaus-Dietrich

 1974a- כָּחַשׁ kāḥaš. *In:* Botterweck, G. Johannes, Ringgren, Helmer and Fabry, Heinz-Josef, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* TDOT, vol. 7. Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge: Eerdmans, pp. 132–135.

 1974b- רָגַם rāḡam. *In:* Botterweck, G. Johannes, Ringgren, Helmer and Fabry, Heinz-Josef, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* TDOT, vol. 13. Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge: Eerdmans, pp. 324–326.

Schwandt, Thomas A.

 1994   'Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry'. *In:* Denzin, Norman K. and Lincoln, Yvonna S., eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 118–137.

SIL-Congo

 2007   *Dictionnaire kituba (munukutuba)-français.* Dibuku ya bampova. Eds. Nicaise Bahouamio, Jean Pierre Mary, Sabine Müri. Brazzaville: SIL-Congo.

2010 *Dictionnaire beembe-français.* Mukaanda mambaangukulu kibeembe-lumputu. Eds. Guy Kouarata, Sabine Müri, Sara Brown. Brazzaville: SIL-Congo.

Sklar, Jay
2015 'Sin'. *In:* Balentine, Samuel E., ed. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Theology.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 297-308.

Smith, David W.
2013 *Phenomenology.* The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/phenomenology/> [Accessed 05 August 2014]

Smith, Joel
2009 *Phenomenology.* Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Available at: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/phenom/#SH2a> [Accessed 25 March 2014]

Smith, Jonathan A.
2004 'Reflecting on the development of interpretative phenomenological analysis and its contribution to qualitative research in psychology'. *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* 1 (1), pp. 39–54.

Sogolo, Godwin
1993 *Foundations of African Philosophy: A Definitive Analysis of Conceptual Issues in African Thought.* Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.

Somekh, Bridget
2008 'Action Research'. *In:* Given, Lisa M., ed. *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 5–8.

Soret, Marcel
1959 *Les Kongo nord-occidentaux.* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France. (Monographies ethnologiques africaines)

Sprinkle, Joe M.
2000 'The rationale of the laws of clean and unclean in the Old Testament'. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society,* 43 (4), pp. 637–657.

Stenström, Oscar
1999 *Proverbes des Bakongo.* Uppsala; Kimpese: Swedish Institute of Missionary Research; Presses de l'Université protestante de Kimpese.

Stoebe, Hans J.
1997 רעע rʿʿ. *In:* Jenni, Ernst and Westermann, Claus, eds. *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament.* TLOT. Translated by Mark E. Biddle. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, pp. 1249–1254.

Stonelake, Alfred R.
1937 *Congo: Past and Present.* London: World Dominion Press.

Stott, John
2003 *Evangelical Truth.* Rev. ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Strauss, Anselm L. & Corbin, Juliet
1990 *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques.* London: Sage Publications.

Stuart, Douglas K.
2006 *Exodus.* New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Sundberg, Carl
2000   *Conversion and Contextual Conceptions of Christ: A Missiological Study among Young Converts in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo.* Uppsala: Swedish Institute of Missionary Research. (Studia missionalia Svecana; Vol. 81)

Swartenbroeckx, Pierre, ed.
1973   *Dictionnaire kikongo et kituba - français.* Vocabulaire comparé des langages kongo traditionnels et véhiculaires Lecture series: *Série III: Travaux linguistiques,* Vol. 2. Bandundu: Ceeba Publications.

Swinton, John & Mowat, Harriet
2006   *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research.* 4 (2011). London: SCM.

Tanchanpongs, Natee
2010   'Developing a palate for authentic theology'. *In:* Cook, Matthew et al., eds. *Local Theology for the Global Church: Principles for an Evangelical Approach to Contextualization.* Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, pp. 109–123.

Tappert, Theodore G. & Lehmann, Helmut T.
1967   *Luther's Works: Table Talk.* Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press. (54)

Tate, Martin E.
1998   *Psalms 51-100.* World Biblical Commentary. Dallas, TX: Word Incorporated.

Taylor, John V.
2001   *The primal vision: Christian Presence amid African Religion.* New ed. London: SCM Press. (SCM classics)

Tempels, Placide
1959   *Bantu Philosophy.* Reprinted 1969. Translated into English from 'La philosophie bantoue' by Dr. A. Rubbens. Paris: Présence Africaine.

Theological Education Fund
1972   *Ministry in Context: The Third World Program of the Theological Education Fund, 1970-1977.* Bromeley: TEF Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, World Council of Churches.

Thiel, Josef F.
1983   'Zur Diachronie des Nzambi-Namens in Bantu-Afrika'. *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie,* 108 (1), pp. 105–131.

Thornton, John K.
1983   *The Kingdom of the Congo: Civil War and Transition 1614-1718.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

1998   *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the antonian movement, 1684 - 1706.* Cambridge: Cambridge University. Press.

2004   'Origin traditions and history in Central Africa'. *African Arts,* 37 (1), 32-37+93-94.

Tillich, Paul
1973   *Systematic Theology.* Vol. 1. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Tonda, Joseph
2002   *La guérison divine en Afrique centrale (Congo, Gabon).* Paris: Karthala. (Collections "Hommes et sociétés")

Torrance, Thomas F.
1976   *Space, Time and Resurrection.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Tracy, David
    1987   'Practical theology in the situation of global pluralism'. *In:* Mudge, Lewis S. and Poling, James N., eds. *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology.* Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, pp. 139–154.

Tshiamalenga, Ntumba
    1974   'La philosophie de la faute dans la tradition Luba'. *Cahiers des religions africaines,* 8 (16), pp. 167–186.

Tylor, Edward B.
    1871   *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom.* London: Murray.

Vaccarino, Franco et al.
    2006   *Action Research Initiatives: The Wanganui Adult Literacy and Employment Programme.* Palmerston North: Dept. of Communication and Journalism, Massey University.

van Binsbergen, Wim
    2003   *Intercultural Encounters: African and Anthropological Lessons towards a Philosophy of Interculturality.* Münster: Lit Verlag.

van Dam, Cornelis
    1996   רעע r ʿ ʿ. *In:* VanGemeren, Willem A., ed. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis.* NIDOTTE, vol. 3. Carlisle: Paternoster Press, pp. 1154–1159.

van Deusen Hunsinger, Deborah
    1995   *Theology and Pastoral Counseling: A New Interdisciplinary Approach.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

van Manen, Max
    1990   *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy.* Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy. London; Ontario, NY: State University of New York Press.

van Wing, Joseph
    1938   *Études bakongo II: religion et magie.* Brussels: Institut Royal Colonial Belge. (Mémoires, Collection in-8°; Tome IX, fascicule 1)

    1941   'Bakongo magic'. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland,* 71 (1/2), pp. 85–97.

    1959   *Études bakongo I: histoire et sociologie.* 2nd ed. Brussels: Desclée, De Brouwer.

Venter, Elza
    2004   'The notion of ubuntu and communalism in African educational discourse'. *Studies in Philosophy and Education,* 23 (2/3), pp. 149–160.

Verhoef, Heidi & Michel, Claudine
    1997   'Studying morality within the African context: A model of moral analysis and construction'. *Journal of Moral Education,* 26 (4), pp. 389–407.

Volf, Miroslav
    1996   *Exclusion and Embrace: a Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.

2002 'Theology for a way of life'. *In:* Volf, Miroslav and Bass, Dorothy C., eds. *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, pp. 245–263.

von Rad, Gerhard
1962 *Old Testament Theology I.* The theology of Israel's historical traditions. Edinburgh London: Oliver and Boyd.

1972 *Wisdom in Israel.* London: SCM Press.

von Soosten, Joachim
1994 'Die "Erfindung" der Sünde'. *In:* Beintker, Michael, Schökel, Luis M. and Baldermann, Ingo, eds. *Sünde und Gericht.* Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag. (Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie; Bd. 9), pp. 87–110.

Wadsworth, Yoland
1998 *What is participatory action research?* Action Research International, Paper 2. Available at: <http://www.aral.com.au/ari/p-ywadsworth98.html> [Accessed 22 August 2014]

Walls, Andrew F.
1982 'The Gospel as prisoner and liberator of culture'. *Missionalia,* 10 (3), pp. 93–105.

2011 'Word and Worldview: Inspecting the Human Auditorium'. Andrew Walls Lectures. Lecture series: *Words and the Word of God.* Horsleys Green. 28.03.2011.

2012 'Worldviews and Christian conversion'. *In:* Corrie, John and Ross, Cathy, eds. *Mission in Context: Explorations Inspired by J. Andrew Kirk.* Farnham; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, pp. 155–165.

Watts, Michael
2001 *Heidegger: A Beginner's Guide.* London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Westermann, Claus
1991 *Abriss der Bibelkunde: Altes Testamen, Neues Testament.* 13. Aufl., durchges. von Ferdinand Ahuis. Studienausgabe. Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag.

Westermann, Diedrich
1937 *Africa and Christianity.* London: Oxford University Press.

1949 *The African Today and Tomorrow.* London: International African Institut.

Whitehead, James D.
1987 'The practical play of theology'. *In:* Mudge, Lewis S. and Poling, James N., eds. *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology.* Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, pp. 36–54.

Whiteman, Darell L.
1997 'Contextualization: The theory, the gap, the challenge'. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research,* 21 (1), pp. 2–7.

Wiher, Hannes
2003a *L'Évangile et la culture de honte en Afrique occidental.* Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft. (Edition iwg - mission academic scripts, no. 21)

2003b *Shame and Guilt as a Key to Cross-cultural Christian Ministry.* Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft. (Edition iwg - mission academics scripts, no. 10)

Wilcke, Margaretha M.
2002 'Hermeneutic phenomenology as a research method in social work'. *Currents,* 1 (1).

Wildman, Wesley
  2010   *Hermeneutics and phenomenology.* Boston University. Available at: <http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/wphil/lectures/wphil_theme19.htm> [Accessed 02 July 2014]

Williams, Rowan
  2005   'Sin'. *In:* Lacoste, Jean-Yves, ed. *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology.* New York, NY; Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 1476-1479.

Willoughby, William C.
  1928   *The Soul of the Bantu: a sympathetic study of the magico-religious practices and beliefs of the Bantu tribes of Africa.* London: Student Christian Movement Press Ltd.

Wolff, Hans W.
  1974   *Anthropology of the Old Testament.* Translated from the German by Margaret Kohl. London: SCM Press.

Wolters, Albert
  1985   *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Woudstra, Marten H.
  1981   *The Book of Joshua.* New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Wright, Nicholas T.
  1991   'How can the Bible be authoritative?' *Vox Evangelica,* 21, pp. 7–32.

  2003   *The Resurrection of the Son of God.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

Wrogemann, Henning
  2003   'Theologie und Wissenschaft der Mission'. *In:* Dahling-Sander, Christoph et al., eds. *Leitfaden ökumenische Missionstheologie.* Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, pp. 17–31.

Zuber-Skerritt, Ortrun
  1993   'Improving learning and teaching through action learning and action research'. *Higher Education Research and Development,* 12 (1), pp. 45–58.