

1 Introduction

1.1 PRESENTATION OF THE PROBLEM

This study deals with the encounter between Christianity, symbolized by the cross of Jesus Christ, and the realm of the indigenous people of Nias and the Batu Islands (the Ono Niha) and their culture, symbolized by the images of the primal religion, the *adu*. During the course of one century (1865-1965), two missionary societies, the Rhenish Mission (RM) and the Dutch Lutheran Mission (DLM), were working among the Ono Niha, each propagating a certain type of Protestantism. As a result of their work, a considerable number of people were converted to Christianity and a large number of viable Christian congregations sprang up on Nias, the Batu Islands, and elsewhere. These congregations later united, forming two independent churches, which then merged in 1960. By 1965, the majority of the Ono Niha had embraced Christianity and the Protestant Christian Church (BNKP)¹, established in 1936, had become the most dominant social factor on Nias and the Batu Islands.

The course of Christianization transformed the Niasan culture. In its turn, the Niasan culture shaped a unique type of Christianity. Although this whole transformation was a reciprocal process, the two entities involved were not equal. The stronger Christianity grew, the more dominant and uncompromising it became towards most aspects of the indigenous culture, particularly primal religion.² Nevertheless, the indigenous culture did strongly influence the form Christianity assumed among the Ono Niha. The gradual shift in dominance from the veneration of the *adu* to the worship of Jesus Christ, however, gave evidence of the transformation within the communal identity of the Ono Niha.

The process of the growth of Niasan Christianity will be discussed from two complementary points of view: the historical and the sociological. Questions such as the following have guided the authors: What were the motives of the European missionaries? How was Christianity communicated and how was it received by those addressed? What impact did Christianity have on the society as a whole and vice versa? Have the young churches been more than mere copies of their European 'mothers'? To what extent did the policy of the Niasan churches concerning the indigenous culture differ from that of the missionary societies? What role did Christianity play in national liberation and development? Has Niasan society been

¹ This translation of *Banua Niha Keriso Protestan* (BNKP) was introduced by Ephorus Bazatulö Chr. Hulu, who, in 1988, was the director of the Training Centre for Education and Evangelisation of the BNKP (PLPI-BNKP). The reason for this translation was that the BNKP is not confined to the borders of the Nias Regency. Also, Hulu was aware of the danger of an exclusive ethnic identity of the BNKP. During the years 1936-1948, the official name was 'Banoea Niha Keriso Protestan ba danö Nias' (B.N.K.P.-Nias), The Protestant Christian Church of Nias (note: *niha Keriso* = Christian).

² Previously used terms, such as 'animism', 'tribal religion' and 'ethnic religion', have a discriminatory tone and should be avoided. The terms 'traditional religion' and 'primal religion' are neutral and not disparaging. The authors choose the latter, since both Islam and Christianity on Nias claim to be traditional religions. F.L. Cooley, *The Growing Seed*, 1981, p. 173, uses 'autochthonous religion'. Rachmat Subagya, *Agama Asli di Indonesia*, 1981, p. 1, says that traditional religion or primal religion is the spiritual uniqueness of one tribe, as long as it developed within that tribe itself without any influence or imitation of other religions.

transformed by Christianity? What is the significance of the Christian faith for the new cultural identity of the Ono Niha? And finally: How is one to find a new paradigm for constructing a contextual theology for the Niasan churches?

1.2 SETTING OF THE GOSPEL AND CULTURE PROJECT

Applying the Christian teachings to a particular cultural context has been problematic throughout the history of the expansion of Christianity³ ever since biblical times.⁴ After the Protestant missions had reached Nias and the Batu Islands in the wake of the colonization process of the nineteenth century, the European missionaries – and a little later also the indigenous Christian leaders – were confronted with the problem of whether and how to bring together or to keep apart what they understood as being the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the indigenous culture of the Ono Niha.

The attitudes of the missionaries, and subsequently of their native protégés, toward ‘Gospel and culture’ were determined by certain devotional patterns and theological choices. The most vigorous and continuous spiritual undercurrent in the missionary movement of Europe, as well as in the younger churches, was Pietism and Revivalism. Essentially, both Pietism and Revivalism considered a compromise between ‘the Gospel’ and ‘this world’ to be dangerous. This led to a tendency among the Christians to hold themselves aloof from secular public life. On the other hand, especially at the seminarian level and, so to speak, as a dialectical antithesis to the devotional undercurrent in the missionary circles, the influence of Cultural Protestantism was at work, attempting to reconcile Christian teaching with the dominant intellectual (usually bourgeois) ideals of Western civilization.⁵

During the second half of the nineteenth century, many German theologians joined the chorus of colonialist chauvinism, claiming the superiority of white Christian civilization over other cultures. For champions of the colonialist movement, such as Friedrich Fabri (1824-1891), the very fact that Germany was a Christian country justified, yes, even necessitated, its becoming a colonial power, since they were sure that ‘heathen’ cultures had no right to existence and would fade away in the face of a victorious Christianity.

Others were less aggressive, though none the less arrogant. The prominent German missiologist Gustav Warneck (1834-1910) claimed to appreciate non-Christian cultures while nevertheless holding that all nations could and should be ennobled by Christianization. This was similar to the Ethical Policy implemented by the Dutch in their colonies around the turn of the century. It merely served, however,

³ The most complete overview of the spread of Christianity is given in the seven volumes of K.S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity, 1937-1945/1971*. Specifically concerning the problem of ‘Gospel and culture’, cf. H.R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 1951/2001.

⁴ Cf. S.W. Ariarajah, *Gospel and Culture*, 1994, p. 1; Choan-Seng Song, ‘Culture’, in: N. Lossky, *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 1991, pp. 257-259.

⁵ For Cultural Protestantism, reaching back to the apologetic theology of Friedrich D. Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and culminating in the ethical theology of the Kingdom of Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889), it is not the church, but civilization in accordance with the teachings of Christ which is the realization of the kingdom of God. In fact this often results in a Christian justification of cultural achievements. Christ becomes a symbol for the highest values of bourgeois culture; cf. H.R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 2001, pp. 83-115.

as a moral justification of colonialism and was a haughty glorification of Western civilization.

The World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh (1910) harshly denounced primal religions as containing 'no preparation for Christianity'.⁶ Not long afterwards, Christian Europe manifested its spiritual bankruptcy in two world wars caused by inhumane ideologies. While Europe was struggling with National Socialism, Fascism, and Communism, the most urgent topics on the theological agenda in Asia as of the 1920s were national independence and the relationship of Christianity to other faiths. The conviction was growing that Christianity was not necessarily bound to Western civilization. Christ belongs to all. The door was opening for the development of indigenous forms of Christianity.

Symptomatic of this development outside Europe was the second general assembly of the International Missionary Council (IMC), held in Jerusalem in 1928, which called on Christians to adopt values from different religions. Hendrik Kraemer (1888-1965), who attended this assembly, saw this as a dangerous trend which distorted the essential message of the Bible. Ten years later, at the third assembly of the IMC in Tambaram, South India (1938), he successfully translated his biblical, culturally non-compromising position into the missiological context. He rejected 'the call of Jerusalem' as syncretism⁷, emphasizing that Christianity centres on the unique revelation in Jesus Christ. Therefore, other religions, or parts of them, and be it 'values', are neither 'preparatory stages' towards Christianity, nor can they contribute anything substantial to the truth of this unique revelation. Kraemer was of the opinion that, on the other hand, the 'adaptation' or 'incarnation' of concepts and practices from other religious and cultural settings in order to 'translate' and 'interpret' the Gospel, was permissible, as long as it did not change the essence of the Christian message.

Kraemer's call in Tambaram was a clear farewell to 'Culture Protestantism'; it added to the fear of syncretism. According to Theo Sumartana⁸ from Indonesia, such an exclusive approach in no way furthers the contextualization of Christianity in Asia.

After World War II, theologians in the so-called Third World were busy with de-colonisation and nation building. This led to a resurgence of indigenous values. In Indonesia, the ideology of *Pancasila* provided a code of mutual respect among the religions and enhanced a pride in cultural diversity. Christian leaders involved in constructing a national Christian identity, such as Tahi B. Simatupang (1920-1990), wished to position Christianity firmly within the cultural and ideological setting of Indonesia.⁹

⁶ The World Missionary Conference, Report of Commission IV; cf. D. Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians*, 1997, pp. 426-439.

⁷ H. Kraemer, *Christian Message in a non-Christian World*, 1938/1947. As a philologist, Kraemer takes this term very literally (from Greek *synkretizein*, which means to combine).

⁸ Th. Sumartana, *Mission at the Crossroads: Indigenous Churches, European Missionaries, Islamic Association and Socio-Religious Change in Java 1812-1936*, 1991, pp. 332-344.

⁹ Concerning the history of the indigenous Protestant theology in Indonesia, cf. A.G. Hoekema, *Denken in dynamisch evenwicht: de wordingsgeschiedenis van de nationale protestantse theologie in Indonesië (ca. 1860-1960)*, 1994; by the same author, *Berpikir dalam keseimbangan yang dinamis: sejarah lahirnya teologi Protestan Nasional di Indonesia (sekitar 1860-1960)*, 1997.

Gospel and Culture

In the 1960s, 'Gospel and culture' became one of the main topics of the ecumenical movement. This was encouraged, firstly, by the third general assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), held in 1961 in New Delhi, India, during which not only older churches from the Orthodox tradition, but also many of the younger churches from the 'Third World' challenged the predominantly Western character of theology. A second influential factor was the Roman Catholic program of enculturation decided upon by the second Vatican Council (1962-1965).¹⁰ The fundamental studies of Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962)¹¹, Paul Tillich (1886-1965)¹² and Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998)¹³ placed the topic of 'Gospel and culture' high on the theological agenda.

In Asia, the pioneering endeavours of Christian thinkers such as Vengal Chakkarai (1880-1958) and Pandipeddi Chenchiah (1886-1959)¹⁴ inspired Indian theologians such as Paul D. Devanandan (1901-1962), Daniel T. Niles (1908-1970) and Madathiparampil M. Thomas (1916-1996) to develop Asian contextual theologies. Another leading Indian theologian after independence is Stanley J. Samartha (1920).¹⁵ In Japan, Katsumi Takizawa (1909-1984) and Seiichi Yagi (1932) both dedicated themselves to the dialogue between their Buddhist context and Christian theology.¹⁶ In his book *Reconciliation and Renewal in Japan* (1967), the Japanese Masao Takenaka touched on the relevant social and cultural issues in his native land. His compatriot Hideo Ohki wanted to free Japanese theology from its 'German prison'.¹⁷ Kosuke Koyama (1929), also Japanese, developed his 'Water Buffalo Theology' while working as a missionary in Thailand.¹⁸

In 1965, at the East Asia Christian Conference (EACC) in Kandy, Sri Lanka, Asian Christian leaders arrived at the insight that it was necessary to develop more systematically in Asia a contextual theology which had been liberated from its Western cultural domination.¹⁹ The next year, the EACC, convened in Hong Kong, made the criticism that Asian churches had, for fear of syncretism, treated Western confessional formulations as absolute truths.

In the 1970s, Asians, like Africans, focussed increasingly on the relationships of Christianity with other religions and with the multitude of diverse non-Western cultural settings. Koyama, using an illustration from the above-mentioned Niles, stressed the endless multiplicity of the possible contextual settings of the Gospel, which has to take root in local soil, rather than being transferred as a 'potted plant'.²⁰

¹⁰ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1966, pp. 1025-1120.

¹¹ H.R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 1951 / 2001.

¹² P. Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 1959.

¹³ L. Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 1986.

¹⁴ Cf. J. Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*, 1978, pp. 263-265. P. Chenchiah, *Rethinking Christianity in India*, 1938.

¹⁵ Cf. V. Küster, *Die vielen Gesichter Jesu Christi: Christologie interkulturell*, 1999, pp. 86-101.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 102-128.

¹⁷ Cf. D.J. Elwood, *Teologi Kristen Asia*, 1993, pp. XXV, 117-131.

¹⁸ K. Koyama, *Water Buffalo Theology*, 1974/1999.

¹⁹ Cf. D.J. Elwood, *Teologi Kristen Asia*, 1993, pp. 3-8.

²⁰ K. Koyama, *Theology in Contact*, 1975, p. 67.

Contextuality

Shoki Coe from Taiwan coined the term 'contextualization'²¹, warning that 'enculturation' has the tendency merely to look backwards to the traditional culture. While cultural continuity is important, the Christian message must also address current trends of urbanization and modernization (and we have to add: globalization), providing orientation toward a more humane culture in the future. Asia has no need for a 'chameleon theology'²², which merely changes its colour according to the cultural context, but it does have need of a critical analysis of that context, detecting the latter's virtues and values, while at the same time challenging its inhumane aspects.

As of 1976, the development of contextual theologies has been coordinated by the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), which has distanced itself from dominant Western theology, opting for local theologies. Characteristic here is the creative interaction of Gospel and culture (including interreligious dialogue), and the preferential option for the poor.²³

Today, Africans are among the leading 'contextual theologians'. Their insights are of global significance. Lamin Sanneh from The Gambia, for instance, puts much emphasis on the 'translatability'²⁴ of the Christian faith into cultural idioms. Translations of the Bible into the vernacular have 'destigmatized'²⁵ non-Western cultures from the odour of 'heathenism'. Dora R. Mbuwayesango and others from the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians disagree with Sanneh, arguing that the use of symbols of the pre-Christian tradition for expressing the Christian faith was 'religious usurpation' or 'religious colonialism' which effectively destroyed the primal religion.²⁶ John Mbiti, Kwame Bediako, and others²⁷ set the trend concerning the 'rehabilitation' of the indigenous religious heritage. They hold that 'heathen societies' had a genuine knowledge of God and a variety of rich religious cultures prior to the coming of the missionaries. By having underestimated this, Western missionaries had pre-programmed a long-lasting identity crisis.²⁸ However, despite the misconceptions of the past, the young churches acknowledge the positive significance of the service of Western missions. Mbiti emphasises that the missionaries were right in putting Christ at the centre. Without Jesus Christ, any religiosity would be incomplete.²⁹

Indonesia

In Indonesia, Eka Darmaputera was the first to abandon Western theology, developing a local theology in the context of the Indonesian *Pancasila*-state³⁰. His

²¹ S. Coe, 'Kontekstualisasi sebagai jalan menuju pembaruan', in: D.J. Elwood, *Teologi Kristen Asia*, 1993, pp. 10-18; for the history of the use of this term, cf. D.J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, pp. 420-432.

²² Cf. S. Coe, 'Kontekstualisasi sebagai jalan menuju pembaruan', 1993, p. 16.

²³ Cf. K. Schäfer, 'Kontextuelle Theologien – eine Zwischenbilanz', in: *Afrika? Afrika! : Staat, Nation und Kirchen*, Jahrbuch Mission 34, 2002, pp. 185-195; L. Sanneh, *Encountering the West*, 1993, p. 12.

²⁴ L. Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 1989, p. 47.

²⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 1-8, 88-125; by the same author, *Encountering the West*, 1993, pp. 78-140.

²⁶ Dora R. Mbuwayesango, 'How Local Divine Powers Were Suppressed: A Case of Mwari of the Shona', in: Musa W. Dube (ed.), *Other Ways of Reading*, 2001, pp. 63-77 (quotations on p. 67).

²⁷ Cf. D. Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians*, 1997, pp. 426-434.

²⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 428-429.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 433.

³⁰ Cf. E. Darmaputera, *Pancasila, Identitas dan Modernitas*, 1987.

goal was to prevent the rise of a destructive Christian fundamentalism.³¹ Since only contextual theology is genuine theology, Darmaputera holds that a thorough knowledge of hermeneutics is the most important prerequisite for a theologian. How can the Christian truths (*kerygmata*), as handed down through Holy Scripture and the Christian tradition, meaningfully be communicated in the present context?³² In Darmaputera's opinion, the answer lies in an interdisciplinary approach. In order to find the right idiom for communicating the Gospel, the theologian has to cooperate with the sociologist, the politician, the economist, etc.

Emmanuel G.Singgih³³, also an Indonesian, uses a different approach in relation to contextualization. Instead of taking 'indigenisation' as his starting point, i.e., wrapping Christianity up in a cultural cloak (traditional architecture, art, music, etc.), he departs from the practical experience of Christians in Indonesia, and particularly their cultural contexts, which, in his opinion, provide a preconception (*prapengertian*) or a foreknowledge (*prapaham*) of the Gospel.

Andreas A. Yewangoe wrote his dissertation on 'The Theology of the Cross in Asia'.³⁴ The suffering of Jesus Christ lies at the centre of his deliberations, leading him towards an Indonesian theology of liberation. Yewangoe holds that the Cross is the sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God, a presence which entails justice, the unity of humankind and freedom. Therefore, he wants the churches of Indonesia to become churches of the Cross, i.e., that they never forget nor neglect the suffering of Christ. This, in turn, will open their eyes and ears to the suffering of their fellow human beings. God can not be found within the church if he is not recognised in the suffering of his creation in this world. This does not mean that the church is to have a masochistic pleasure in suffering, but that the church is called upon to side with the poor, the unfortunate and the downtrodden.

Similarly to Darmaputera, Yewangoe wants to develop an Indonesian contextual theology against the background of the *Pancasila*-ideology.³⁵ Concerning the interaction between Gospel and culture, he emphasises the transforming power of the Gospel. However, he also holds that, conversely, culture also transforms the Gospel. Theology is, in his opinion, the skill of bringing the deeper values of culture into dialogue with the Gospel.³⁶

A number of substantial contributions to the topic of the interaction between Gospel and culture have also been made by Indonesian theologians who have focused on a specific cultural context at the local level. Fridolin Ukur, for example, studied the interaction between Gospel and culture among his native Dajak in Kalimantan³⁷, drawing the conclusion that, in the past, the European missionaries had not taken into account the Dayak's unique socio-religious character. Due to a lack of understanding, they had regarded the primal religion as worthless heathen-

³¹ *Ibid.* pp. 17-18; cf. J. Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*, 1975, p. 272.

³² E. Darmaputera, 'Menuju teologi Kontekstual di Indonesia', in: E. Darmaputera (ed.), *Konteks Berteologi di Indonesia*, 1988, pp. 8-15.

³³ E.G. Singgih, *Dari Israel ke Asia: Masalah Hubungan di Antara Kontekstualisasi Teologi dengan Interpretasi Alkitabiah*, 1982, pp. 17-29; the same author, *Berteologi dalam Konteks: Pemikiran-pemikiran mengenai Kontekstualisasi Teologi di Indonesia*, 2000.

³⁴ Cf. A.A. Yewangoe, *Theologia Crucis di Asia*, 1989, pp. 268-364.

³⁵ Cf. A.A. Yewangoe, 'Implikasi Teologi Pembebasan Amerika Latin terhadap Misiologi', in: John Campbell-Nelson et al. (eds.), *Mengupayakan Misi Gereja yang Kontekstual*, 1995, p. 82.

³⁶ Cf. A.A. Yewangoe, 'Injil dan Kebudayaan: Skema Niebur dalam Perspektif Sumba', in: John Campbell-Nelson et al. (eds.) *Mengupayakan Misi Gereja yang Kontekstual*, 1995, pp. 201-209.

³⁷ F. Ukur, *Tantang-Djawab Suku Dayak*, n.d..

dom. As a consequence, the Dayak still face difficulties in integrating Christianity into their tribal culture. These difficulties, in turn, impede effective pastoral counselling. Ukur therefore demands of the church a theological reinterpretation of the indigenous culture of the Dayak, leading to its subsequent transformation, in order to overcome the fragmentation of the tribal identity.³⁸

Another example is Theo Kobong from South Sulawesi, who wants to develop a contextual missiology in the cultural context of his native Toraja.³⁹ He uses the concept of the traditional clan-house, the *tongkonan*, in his endeavor to forge a paradigm for the ideal Christian community or church. In his opinion, the traditional *tongkonan* must, however, undergo a fundamental transformation in order to become the *tongkonan* of Christ. And this transformation can take place only as the result of a dynamic process of 'inspired' interpretation.

An essential problem of cultural transformation through Christian interpretation is that pre-Christian culture is usually regarded as something which has to be developed, adjusted, or raised to a 'Christian' level. Quite a different approach is used by Benny Giay from West-Papua (Indonesia), who argues that, prior to the coming of the missionaries, the important doctrinal themes of Western Christianity, such as God, Bible, salvation, Jesus Christ, and eschatology had already existed in the form of 'indigenous counterparts' in the primal religion.⁴⁰ It was the Christian 'redefinition' of the 'perceived indigenous religious beliefs', as practiced by Zakheus Pakage, a local religious leader among the Me of Paniai in the highlands of West-Papua (the place of origin of Dr. Giay), that had caused the people to accept the Gospel.⁴¹ Therefore, Giay defends the right of a free, local interpretation of the Bible, even at the risk of, in the eyes of Western theologians, heresy. Whereas this may happen at the expense of the universality of the Gospel, it certainly ensures the integration of pre-Christian religious traditions into local theologies.

On Nias and the Batu Islands, particularly on the part of the mainline Protestant churches, very little has been undertaken in terms of finding a paradigm for constructing contextual theologies.⁴² At present, there are, however, increasing efforts among Christian intellectuals to reinterpret pre-Christian religious traditions and to integrate them into a local theology. This study attempts to make a contribution towards achieving this goal.

³⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 310-313.

³⁹ Th. Kobong, *Evangelium und Tongkonan: Eine Untersuchung über die Begegnung zwischen christlicher Botschaft und der Kultur der Toraja*, 1989.

⁴⁰ B. Giay, *Zakheus Pakage and his Communities: Indigenous Religious Discourse, Socio-political Resistance, and Ethnohistory of the Me of Irian Jaya*, 1995, p. 3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 242 ('To the people, Zakheus' program was a new religious system built on the existing religious views through which they could see the changes and historical developments which was (sic) taking place in the region').

⁴² Indigenous Christian movements or individuals which diverged from the missionary theology and challenged the ecclesiastical status quo were not tolerated. Their activities usually resulted in schisms or them being condemned as heretics (cf. Ch. 5.6.4 and Ch. 5.8 in this study). In Roman Catholic circles on Nias, inculturation has, since the 1960s, assumed programmatic significance, both in liturgy and theology. Cf. U.M. Telaumbanua, *Evangelization and Niasan Culture, A Pastoral Study towards Inculturation of the Christian Faith among the People of Nias*, 1993.

1.3 RESEARCH IN CONTEXT

1.3.1 Cross-cultural Cooperation

Traditionally, researching and drafting a dissertation in a faculty of Divinity, as in most other disciplines, is regarded and experienced as a very long and lonely business. This individual competition stands in sharp contrast to the cherished praxis of relational learning in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. For studies involving cross-cultural, missionary and ecumenical relations – as in the case of this dissertation – the individualistic approach is prone to be one-sided, to say the least. Therefore, Dr. Hans Visser from the Hendrik Kraemer Institute (previously in Oegstgeest, now in Utrecht), suggested that it should be done in teamwork, the team being comprised of an Asian (or African) and a European (or North American). The promotor and co-promotors received this suggestion well.

In cross-cultural cooperation, the perspectives of both the European missionary societies and the indigenous Ono Niha could be explained by the authors, who stem from different continents and races. Since Hummel and Telaumbanua have worked together on Nias (for about seven years) and in Europe (in the course of this study project), they have equipped themselves for cooperation on various occasions. Each has his specific cultural, linguistic, and academic background. Together they can communicate fluently in Indonesian and English. Telaumbanua, however, has not mastered speaking Dutch and German and Hummel cannot speak the Niasan vernacular. Nevertheless, they can – with mutual help and use of dictionaries – read some basic texts and understand terms' meanings.

The teamwork has involved regular consultations, translating sources and discussing them with each other, visiting resource persons, historical places and archives together, and reading each other's chapters. The authors have experienced their teamwork in the course of investigating and writing this dissertation as an ecumenical endeavour in its own right. It was a fruitful, time consuming and sometimes difficult process of intercultural interaction, leading to a more objective dealing with the subject matter.

1.3.2 Division of Tasks

Despite the close teamwork, the actual writing was done separately, except for the initial Introduction and the final Conclusion. The basic division of tasks has been as follows:

- Ch. 1 Introduction: Hummel and Telaumbanua.
- Ch. 2 Land and People of Nias and the Batu Islands: Telaumbanua.
- Ch. 3 Societies doing Missionary Work on Nias and the Batu Islands: Hummel.
- Ch. 4 Christian Missions on Nias and the Batu Islands, 1865-1930: Hummel.
- Ch. 5 Independent Churches on Nias and the Batu Islands, 1930-1965: Hummel.
- Ch. 6 The Encounter between Christianity and Niasan Culture: Telaumbanua.
- Ch. 7 Towards a Contextual Theology for Nias and the Batu Islands: Telaumbanua.
- Ch. 8 Conclusion: Hummel and Telaumbanua.

The authors have commented on and added to one another's chapters. The list of abbreviations, the glossary, the maps, the bibliography and interviews, and the indexes of personal names, places and subjects have been compiled together. Hummel, in close cooperation with Telaumbanua, has also provided a summary of the entire study in Dutch.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

This study largely follows an empirical, inductive methodology⁴³ in reconstructing the historical and sociological data as objectively as possible. To a lesser extent, it is deductive, when drawing conclusions and offering new perspectives.

Telaumbanua approaches the subject matter mainly in terms of sociological description and analysis. In Ch. 2 he employs a more descriptive manner, while in Ch. 6 he uses a systematic and anthropological approach, in order to discuss critically the way of life of the Ono Niha in its interaction with Christianity. In Ch. 7, he outlines the present-day situation of Protestant theology on Nias. For this he focussed on the BNKP, which is by far the largest Niasan church. Telaumbanua then makes some deductive suggestions for a contextual local theology on Nias and the Batu Islands within the larger framework of the debate on contextual theology within Indonesia.

Hummel uses historical description throughout his chapters. In Ch. 3 he describes and analyses the two Protestant missionary societies in a comparative manner. In Ch. 4 and Ch. 5 he reconstructs the history of mission and church among the Ono Niha in a more systematic way. Wherever necessary, the historical data are ordered thematically, following the chronological sequence of events, and are discussed critically. Both Hummel and Telaumbanua intentionally favour a focus on those who have been the object of missionary and cultural activities, paying relatively more attention to the indigenous people. They also give due appreciation to the efforts of women (the wives of missionaries, deaconesses and Niasan Christian women).

1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

This study has eight chapters, including an introduction and a conclusion. In Ch. 2 and Ch. 3 a general overview is given, first of the land and peoples of Nias and the Batu Islands, after which the two missionary societies which brought Christianity to this part of the world are outlined. The history of Christianization, at first under the leadership and close supervision of the European missionaries and subsequently within the independent churches on Nias and the Batu Islands, is reconstructed in Ch. 4 and Ch. 5. In Ch. 6 the historical reconstruction is complemented by a sociological description and analysis of the interaction between Christianity and the Niasan culture within the society. This is followed, in Ch. 7, by an evaluation of the present character of the BNKP and some suggestions concerning what shape a contextual Niasan theology should take in the future.

⁴³ Cf. J.A.B. Jongeneel, *Philosophy, Science, and Theology of Mission in the 19th and 20th Centuries* 1, 2002, pp. 175-181.

1.6 SOURCES

1.6.1 Primary Sources

Unpublished primary written accounts come largely from minutes, reports, letters and papers of European missionaries⁴⁴, as well as the Niasan churches. Also, published primary materials in the Niasan and Indonesian languages, as well as European publications such as mission magazines offer first hand information. The authors consulted these sources in the following archives:

1. The church archive of the Protestant Christian Church (BNKP) in Gunungsitoli.
2. The archive of the Theological Seminary, STT BNKP Sundermann, in Gunungsitoli.
3. The archive of the Regency of Nias.
4. The archive of the Rhenish Missionary Society in Wuppertal-Barmen.
5. The archive of the Dutch Lutheran Missionary Society in Amsterdam.
6. The archive of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Amsterdam.
7. The archive of the Mission Council of the Netherlands Reformed Church and the library of the Hendrik Kraemer Institute in Utrecht.

Unpublished materials, given to the authors by former missionaries, were deposited for insight at the above-mentioned archive of the Rhenish Missionary Society in Wuppertal.

1.6.2 Secondary Sources

The secondary sources used in this study are limited to published books, parts of books, articles in magazines, as well as academic theses relating to Nias and the Batu Islands. They include the works written from a missionary or church perspective (e.g., Theodor Müller-Krüger, *Die „große Reue“ auf Nias*, 1931, and Ubald M. Telaumbanua, *Evangelization and Niasan Culture*, 1993), as well as a selection from the enormous library of ethnographical, anthropological and sociological research, the most remarkable of which are the works of E.E.W.Gs. Schröder, *Nias I and II*, 1917 (the first volume encompasses 866 pages of detailed descriptions of the ethnography of Nias and the second presents 270 photographs and maps), Peter Suzuki, a Japanese American who did his research in Leiden, The Netherlands, resulting in a systematic reconstruction of the primal religion of the Ono Niha (*The Religious System and Culture of Nias, Indonesia*, 1959), and Andrew Beatty, *Society and Exchange in Nias*, 1992, 'an ethnographic analysis and a contribution to theoretical discussions in that tradition' (*ibid.*, p. 1), as well as the works of Johannes M. Hämmerle⁴⁵, a Roman Catholic priest and acknowledged expert on

⁴⁴ For an evaluation of the written accounts of missionaries during the years 1861 until 1914, cf. Maren Fuhrmann, *Der historisch-ethnographische Aussagewert deutschsprachiger Missionsliteratur über die Batak auf Sumatra und die indigene Bevölkerung von Nias*, 1989.

⁴⁵ Two recent works of Hämmerle are: *Asal usul masyarakat Nias: Suatu interpretasi*, 1999, and *Nias – eine eigene Welt: Sagen, Mythen, Überlieferungen*, 1999.

Niasan culture, of Bamböwö La'ia⁴⁶, a Niasan Protestant theologian and anthropologist, and of Sökhi'aro W. Mendröfa⁴⁷, the most famous cultural observer on Nias and the Batu Islands.

1.6.3 General Literature

Since the focus of this dissertation is on 'Gospel and culture', some theological literature on this theme has been consulted as well. While, naturally, the main focus here is on Indonesian scholars, the authors have also referred to works of other Asian, as well as African, American and European theologians (cf. Ch. 1.2). Lastly, a number of historical and sociological works were read to gain an understanding of the general background and context of this topic.

1.6.4 Oral Tradition

Concerning the oral tradition, a number of interviews were held with elderly Ono Niha and with former European missionaries or their children.

⁴⁶ The most well-known study being: B. La'ia, *Solidaritas Kekeluargaan dalam Salah Satu Masyarakat Desa di Nias-Indonesia*, 1983.

⁴⁷ S.W. Mendröfa, *Börö Gotari Gotara*, 1969; by the same author, *Fondrakö Ono Niha: Agama Purba, Hukum Adat, Hikayat dan Mitologi Masyarakat Nias*, 1981.