Setting the Scene for the Project ‘Science and Religion in French-speaking Africa’

This project studies the discourse of university students and academics in three major cities in French-speaking Africa. It is an interdisciplinary project and makes contributions at the intersection of several lines of inquiry. As such, it is in line with the growing realisation that debates concerning the relationship between science and religion are both geographically and culturally located (Livingstone 2003; Brooke and Numbers 2011). We use a social scientific approach to achieve a better understanding of the possible contributions that French-speaking Africa can make to the global debate on science and religion. We then bring these local insights into dialogue with other strands of the science and religion debate, which, for the last few centuries, has been dominated by North Atlantic perspectives. This demands an interdisciplinary conversation between insights acquired using social scientific methods and theological and philosophical positions concerning what we call ‘the relationship between science and religion’. From the start it should be clear that we use the term ‘sciences’ to describe all academic disciplines. This matches the way the participants of the field research use the term and makes it possible to research how academia and academic formation are appreciated more generally. Chapters 4 and 5 show that this appeared to be an important issue among the participants.

This study locates itself in the emerging field of intercultural theology: the theological study of, and dialogue between, varying religious perspectives in terms of how they exist in relation to their respective social and cultural environments (Frederiks, Dijkstra, and Houtepen 2003; Küster 2005; Cartledge and Cheetham 2011; Toren 2015 c). This promising yet young theological discipline is still in considerable flux, and we hope that this project will contribute to both the self-understanding of the discipline and to its methodological explorations. In the context of this project, these methodological considerations are particularly stimulated by our desire to engage in a project that is theological, not only in the sense that it studies religious or theological positions, but also in the sense that it uses these to engage in the study of God in terms of God’s relation to this world. After all, these theological questions are crucial to understanding what is often called ‘the relationship between science and religion’ or ‘science and the Christian faith’. Other methodological reflections are

prompted by the desire and need to include the ‘espoused theology’ of Christian students and academics as a source of theological insights. This in turn demands reflection on the relationship between ‘espoused theology’ and ‘formal theology’ and on the question of how to best gain access to this espoused theology (see also Chapter 2).

The priority we give to intercultural theology helps to explain the way in which we deal with social scientific and theological questions, and this also influences the research outcomes. For example, it means that we do not address some of the issues and questions that are usually discussed in the social sciences. For example, the sociological emphasis on institutions, or the role of churches, is only superficially discussed. Even some typical systematic theological themes, such as the richness of the Christian understanding of creation, are only touched upon. Nevertheless, although this research concentrates on the science and religion debate, it also contributes unique data and insights relevant to other areas of inquiry that connect theology and the social sciences. Recent decades have seen the development of global Christianity as a field of study (e.g., as popularized in Jenkins 2002; Jenkins 2006). In these studies, much attention is given to the interaction of Western Christianity with traditional cultures and other religious traditions. Modernity, however, provides another crucial component in this mix of intercultural encounter and engagement. In the process, one sees the development of ‘alternative’ or ‘multiple modernities’, which reveal that the European model of the encounter between modernity and pre-modern traditions is not the only model, and is far from inevitable as has often been assumed (Gaonkar 2001; Berger 1999; Wagner 2015). In Chapter 6 we discuss the importance of the notion of ‘alternative modernities’ in relation to the findings of the research. The research presents a case study of cultural interaction between different traditions in French-speaking Africa, and, thus allows us to study what we call the anatomy of the interculturalization of the Christian faith in specific cultural contexts.

This book presents the results of the research and consists of three parts. The first three chapters offer a presentation of the theoretical and methodological framework used and introduce the contexts of the research. In the second part, the three case-studies – the discourses from Yaoundé, Abidjan and Kinshasa – are described and analysed in Chapters 4 and 5. The third part examines the relevance of the studied discourses for the further development of intercultural theology (Chapter 6) and the ongoing global debate on science and religion (Chapter 7). In this first chapter, we set the scene for the project. We first argue for the need to locate the science and religion debate in the multiple cultural and religious contexts in which it unfolds. We argue that both ‘science’ and ‘religion’ as concepts and as practices are socially and culturally

located. This also invites us to clarify our understanding of the relationship between the concepts 'religion' and 'Christian faith'. Furthermore, we explain why French-speaking Africa is a particularly fertile soil for the exploration of the cultural particularities of the science and religion debate, but also confronts us with a number of special challenges. Finally, we sketch and explain the main characteristics of this project's design, paying special attention to positionality. The theoretical and methodological issues related to the notions of intercultural theology, the use of discourse analysis as an analytic approach, and our choice of Group Model Building and focus groups for data collection will be discussed in Chapter 2.

1 Which Science? Whose Religion?

Discussions of the relationship between science and religion are often conducted as if they play out in a historical vacuum. However, detailed historical studies have shown that social and cultural geography has a significant influence on how concrete exchanges between scientific theories and religious beliefs have played out. David Livingstone, from whom we have derived the title of this section (Livingstone 2011; cf. MacIntyre 1988), has for example shown how Darwinism was received differently by Calvinists with similar theological convictions in Belfast, Edinburgh and Princeton depending on crucial aspects of their respective social and cultural contexts (Livingstone 1999). If this is the case within the context of Western science and religion debates, it is to be expected that the role of the cultural context will increase when one starts exploring widely divergent cultural contexts such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America and their sub-regions. Indeed, the limited number of regional studies (e.g., Silva 2014; Kim 2014) and collections (Fennema and Paul 1990; Brooke and Numbers 2011; *Zygon* 50.2, 2015) that are currently available demonstrate that this is the case.

The importance of the cultural location of the science and religion debate is partly a consequence of the fact that the development of science is itself socially located, as became clear through Thomas Kuhn's landmark study *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1996). Kuhn showed through his historical study that the scientific theories that are considered most adequate by specific researchers are not only dependent on the experimental data available, but also on the scientific paradigms that are most widely accepted. Paradigm change therefore demands a veritable revolution.

The role of social and cultural location may be even greater when one looks at religion as the other pole of the equation. The formulation of a 'science and

religion' debate assumes that both entities, science and religion, have relatively fixed meanings, though it has been argued that both only received their current meanings in the 19th century (Bagir 2015, 408). It furthermore presupposes a certain symmetrical relationship between the two that can be conjoined by 'and' (Bagir 2015, 406).

The notion of religion itself always reflects a particular religious tradition. Western understandings of religion may have parallels in notions such as *dharma* (in Hinduism) or *dīn* (in Islam), but these notions only partially overlap. When one reads of other religious and cultural traditions through the lens of a certain understanding of 'religion', it always highlights certain elements, hides others, and has the potential to skew crucial aspects of the traditions. Some would therefore say that how one understands 'religion' itself is always a cultural construct (Auffarth and Moher 2006). Furthermore, one might also argue that how one understands 'religion' always reflects certain theological presuppositions that need to be brought out into the open and properly questioned (Toren, 2017)

Even though the Christian religion has profoundly shaped North Atlantic cultures, one needs to be careful not to equate the dominant Western understanding of religion with a Christian understanding. The dominant concept of religion has itself been shaped by social conditions after the Enlightenment which led to the development of an increasing domain labelled as 'secular', which is deemed to be outside the legitimate sphere of influence of religious authorities (Asad 1993, 2003). These concepts of religion were furthermore shaped by the influence of modern science itself. According to Jan Platvoet and Henk van Rinsum,

in the modern West ... the huge development of the natural sciences since Newton has had immense consequences for its cosmology: it forced the 'spiritual' to retreat to the 'transcendent' and placed an ever thicker cosmological ceiling between the spiritually empty perceptible realm, and the (postulated) meta-empirical world(s) of spiritual beings, causing communication with it or them to atrophy and religion to be conceived no longer as communication but as meaning, concern or cosmology.

PLATVOET and RINSUM 2008, 170

In this context, certain approaches to the science and religion debate will automatically have a cultural advantage. Consider, for example, Stephen Jay Gould's NOMA principle, the notion that science and religion represent 'non-overlapping magisteria' with different authorities in separate domains of life (Gould 1999). If one lives in a cultural environment where the definitions of science and of religion are both shaped by social pressures to carve out a

separate sphere for science that is independent of the influence of religious authorities, the notions of science and religion shaped in this context will themselves give the NOMA principle a certain degree of immediate attraction or even culturally determined self-evidence – unless of course there are aspects of one's understanding of either science and/or religion that mitigate against these clear-cut separations, aspects that have also remained present in the North Atlantic world.

2 French-speaking Africa

This study contributes to intercultural dialogue concerning the interface between science and religion by studying perspectives from French-speaking Africa. We have opted to study this region because it provides the setting for the confluence of three different cultural influences: African traditional cultures/religions, Western colonial and postcolonial involvement, and, relatively independent of the latter, Christian mission and African Christianity. This creates a context in which an 'alternative modernity' could possibly be developed. Apart from a number of less important cultural influences, Islam also represents a major cultural factor in this region. Most university students and academics would be influenced by three major cultural influences: either traditional culture, modernity, and Christianity, or traditional culture, modernity and Islam. Yet, they are mainly influenced by *one* of these world religions (Christianity or Islam), but not by both of them to the same degree, or even close to the same degree. Within the confines of this project we could not study both, so we opted to focus on Christianity. All participants in the research are Christians and are not profoundly influenced by Islam, although in Abidjan some of the participants came from mixed religious families.

With the label 'French-speaking Africa', we refer to a collection of around 16 nations in sub-Saharan Africa that use French as the national language or one of the national languages. This use of French as the language for education and administration is of course a colonial heritage in countries that used to be either French or Belgian colonies. The number of countries that use French as a national language is in flux, because the role of European languages, and of French among these, is a crucial aspect of post-colonial cultural politics. The change to English as the language of education in Rwanda in 2008 shows that these matters are not fixed. Moreover, it also shows the interests that are at stake in these choices.

On the ground, cultural divides between former English and former French colonies are not sharp, and modern-day national boundaries often go right through areas inhabited by the same ethnic groups. However, our focus on

French-speaking Africa makes sense for the purpose of this study. We are interested in the intercultural exchange between African traditions, Christian faith and modern science. Educational politics have been deeply influenced by colonial interests, and the introduction of science in French-speaking Africa has been influenced by the French notion of the *laïcité*, or the 'secularity' of public education and science, a notion that will receive further attention in Chapter 3. This means that this region in Africa has experienced the introduction of the Western academic tradition with the sharpest separation or even opposition between science and religion.

For our project we have selected three major university cities: Abidjan in Ivory Coast, Yaoundé in Cameroon and Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Abidjan and Yaoundé are university cities that are shaped by French colonial history, while the Democratic Republic of Congo is a former Belgian colony and has not known the same separation between church and state. Kinshasa therefore functions as a contrasting case study and a test for our study of the unique influence of the French *laïcité* tradition in the other two university cities. Because of the influence and history of its university, we could also have selected Dakar in Senegal, which hosts the only university in French-speaking Africa that was founded in the colonial era before independence. However, we did not select Dakar because Islam is by far the dominant non-African religion in Senegal and it would therefore be less well suited for studying the cultural interaction between African traditions, Christian mission, and Western science.

A second crucial influence that shapes the debate on science and religion in French-speaking Africa is Africa's pre-colonial traditions. This is of course what is historically 'first' and appears to provide a fundamental layer to the discourses. It might be misleading to speak of 'African Traditional Religions' because this might suggest that one could isolate certain beliefs and practices as 'religious', which does not do justice to the profound way in which what in current Western discourse would be labelled 'religion' is intertwined with all aspects of life. This also means that practices that in other contemporary contexts are labelled as 'science' (such as questions of metallurgy and ecology) are intertwined with religious practices (Feierman and Janzen 2011). This does not necessarily mean that Africans are 'notoriously' or 'incurably religious' (Mbiti 1969, 1; Parrinder 1969, 235; Magesa 1997, 25ff.) or 'religiocentric' (Okorochoa 1992, 169; for criticism of this idea, see Messi Metogo 1997; Toren 2003; Platvoet and Rinsum 2003). It does, however, mean that one can find elements of practices that in modern Western culture would be labelled 'religion' and those that would be labelled 'science' but without being able to separate these fields. This heritage is still pervasive in modern post-colonial Africa, as Cyril Okorochoa points out,

The African professor of atomic physics, for instance, sees no contradiction between his scientific knowledge and his consulting the 'native doctor' for 'help' in gaining special insight into his research. A professor of obstetrics and gynaecology may send his wife to a 'Prayer House' or to his or her illiterate grandmother to enlist the help of a herbalist or a native conjurer to make conception possible even if his Western scientific investigations have shown that the woman has lost both fallopian tubes, for instance, and may have reached menopause.

OKOROCHA 1992, 169

This makes Africa a particularly apt point of comparison for Western science and religion debates. It allows us to study the discussion on science and religion in a context where the pre-colonial heritage is still present, even if we cannot say beforehand in what way or to what degree. Furthermore, it provides us with a context in which 'the supernatural' or 'spiritual' is experienced as a pervasive reality and is not so much at odds with the scientific enterprise as in the dominant North Atlantic culture. Yet, as with the use of notions such as 'religion' and 'science', we need to be conscious that the concept of 'the supernatural' can easily skew our analysis. A concept of 'the supernatural' shaped by Western understandings of nature and approaches to the 'natural sciences' is likely to be quite different from one developed in Africa, where nature might simply be understood as having more aspects or layers to it. As expressed by Steven Feierman and John Janzen,

Sub-Saharan African history of knowledge should prove very instructive in grasping the character of a way of apprehending the world that while it fosters knowledge for a variety of practical ends, is open to the continuous interaction between visible and invisible, worldly and sacralized realms.

FEIERMAN and JANZEN 2011, 231

The Christian faith forms the third major flow in this intercultural exchange. As we will further explain in Chapter 3, one cannot simply subsume Christian mission as one aspect of colonial influence or one of the means used in the colonial agenda. There were regular tensions between missionaries and colonial powers, such as in the area of educational policies for example. In the field of healing – one of the crucial areas of interaction between 'science' and 'religion' in sub-Saharan Africa – missionaries presented an alternative to the colonial discourse and practice (Feierman and Janzen 2011, 230; Bosch-Heij 2012). The translation of the Bible into indigenous languages furthermore allowed recourse to biblical stories that were used to justify healing practices in

African Independent Churches and neo-charismatic movements, but also in churches originating in Western mission movements. This provides another Christian discourse that can be clearly distinguished from the colonial and the missionary discourse (see among the many examples Milingo 1984; cf. Haar 1992; Bosch-Heij 2012).

The focus on French-speaking Africa also confronts us with specific challenges. In other parts of the world, one could turn to literary resources in which a local science and religion discourse is captured. An example would be the Vedic Science movement, which is based on Advaita Hinduism and aims to present an alternative to the Western science and religion dialogue (e.g., Dobson 1983; Sriraman 2005; Sriraman 2013). Apart from the dialogue on science and religion in white communities in South Africa (Conradie and Du Toit 2015), we have found few examples of academic texts engaging with the science and religion debate in sub-Saharan Africa. When we asked for authors in this field among theologians in the cities of our research, two names were mentioned: Makanzu and Bame Bame. The impressive work of the Congolese theologian Makanzu Mavumilusa, *Quand Dieu te gêne* (1986), makes an original contribution from French-speaking Africa. The author initiates a debate from African Christianity with Western scientific views from different disciplines, attacking the strong atheist tendency among the Western scientists. However, the author relies on theories of the sixties and seventies and for that reason is somewhat outdated. More importantly, however, we could not find this book in the theological libraries of the three cities we visited, nor was it quoted by any of the participants. The book was published in Germany and seems to have had a very limited distribution in both Africa and Europe; its influence therefore is very restricted. Also, while the Cameroonian theologian Michael Bame Bame is known for his engagement with the sciences, this did not result in the development of a well-developed perspective on science and faith published in the form of a book or an article (Cf. Bame Bame 1994). This means that the proper contribution of African discourse to the worldwide science and religion debate can only be discovered when one studies the espoused discourse within the academic community. This demands empirical investigation, which is one of the reasons why we opt to use Group Model Building and focus groups (see Chapter 2).

3 'Science and religion' or 'science and Christian faith'?

So far, we have spoken alternatively about the 'science and religion' discourse and the relationship between 'science and Christian faith'. This relationship

between religion and Christian faith needs further clarification. The questions “Which science? Whose religion?” imply that one cannot discuss the science and religion discourse using a general notion of religion. As indicated before, this risks imposing a limited notion of religion on a particular religious tradition that does not do justice to it (Auffarth and Moher 2006; Bagir 2015), and it suggests that the notion of religion is theologically neutral (Toren, 2017). Using the term science leads to similar problems of course. As we will see in this research, the participants’ identification of science with Western culture not only refers to the origin of modern science but also indicates that it is dominated by, and is therefore at the service of, Western cultures. In this project we focus on groups that self-identify as Christian, but, from this perspective, we also intend to contribute to the wider science and religion debate: it is by starting with the study of science and religion discourse embedded in particular cultural and social contexts, and interacting with particular religious traditions, that we intend to contribute to the broader academic study of science and religion.

Our interest in the Christian faith means that we have selected university students and academics who self-identify as ‘Christian’. We have consciously invited representatives of different Christian traditions, although the choice of our partner organisation means that the majority of participants come from evangelical Protestant backgrounds. We did not put any further limitations on the selection of participants and thus in theory we could have had participants with dual religious identities. However, in the course of the research we have not encountered any participant who identified as both Christian and Muslim (which is very unlikely in these contexts in Africa) or as both Christian and an adherent of an African traditional religion (though certain participants were open to the possibility that people who self-identify as Christian could integrate certain traditional practices that others might label as ‘religious’).¹ Positive relationships with African traditions were mostly discussed in terms of ‘African traditional culture’, presumably with the presupposition that African traditional religion and African traditional culture could be sufficiently distinguished.

‘Christian faith’ is used in both a descriptive and normative sense. It is used descriptively because we are interested in eliciting and understanding the espoused theologies of academics and students who self-identify as Christians. In that sense one could use it in the plural, as ‘Christianities’, as is becoming increasingly popular amongst those who study worldwide Christianity in order to do justice to the large diversity between Christian expressions in different

¹ See Brice’s contribution in Chapter 4.

parts of the world and existing next to each other in the same space (e.g., Gilley and Stanley 2006; Padilla and Phan 2016; Tishken 2015). However, 'Christianity' is also used in a normative sense by members of the Christian community. This is the case in the discourse itself, where participants converse about the question of which approaches to one's 'field of study' or 'academic field' are more or less faithful to one's Christian faith and to its normative texts and traditions, or the normative presence of God in Christ and the Holy Spirit. Other questions, such as what the social and cultural environment requires, have a subordinate place in the discourse.

Different religions focus on disparate theological issues in the science and religion debate. As a result of their belief in God as the Creator and redemption happening in history, mainstream Christian traditions have considered exchanges with the scientific study of nature and history unavoidable and even beneficial, which might not be equally true for other Christian traditions. Christian faith is the main religious tradition examined in the North Atlantic debate on science, and this makes intercultural dialogue relatively easier than it might have been between radically different religious traditions, although the cultural differences can complicate the dialogue considerably. For example, Zainal Abidin Bagir expresses concern about the tendency to focus the science and religion debate on 'cognitive truths' when, in other religious contexts, 'practices' would be a much more significant expression of religion (Bagir 2015, 406). Realising that the Christian faith, like other faiths, is a multi-layered reality, and that this is also the case in the way it relates to science, is an important reminder for our research. For example, in the following discourse analysis this point becomes clear through the attention given to issues of (colonial) power relations. Yet, the particular attention paid to 'beliefs' and 'world-view' in the study of religion may not be a modern Western imposition on Christianity, but rather, at least in part, a heritage of the Christian tradition (Toren 2014, 10ff.). We do not need to assume any specific answer to the question about which aspects of Christianity play a role in the science and religion discourse in these three university cities, but we do need to be open to the possibility that the aspects of the discourse that demand our attention may be influenced by a variety of factors, including the broad (and potentially fluid) characteristics of the different religious traditions concerned.

4 Project Design

One of the guiding principles in the design of this project was the desire to set up an intercultural dialogue in which the cultural 'others' are not only

conversation partners in the metaphorical sense, but also become active participants in, and co-owners of, this intercultural conversation. The term 'dialogue' is often used in the metaphorical sense to describe the coming together of different ideas or perspectives, usually separated by historical time, for the purpose of comparison. Thus, one can legitimately set up a 'dialogue' on science and religion with Thomas Aquinas, even though he can no longer actually talk back. One can even set up imaginary dialogues between fictional conversation partners as a literary means of exploring how such perspectives might mutually enrich or critique each other (e.g., Kreeft 1982). However, the notion of dialogue gains a richer meaning if conversation partners are active participants in the conversation. This limits the power difference and provides an additional safeguard to ensure that culturally different perspectives are still interpreted in terms of their respective conceptual frameworks. However, such an understanding of dialogue presents particular challenges for this research design. One needs to create a framework for the research in which all the different partners have reasons for being interested in the project. It is even better if the different partners are intrinsically motivated by the project and not (only) for certain extrinsic reasons, such as remuneration. This raises the buy-in of the partners and increases the quality of the data and shared analysis that result from the project. In this research project, this happens through a partnership between the Protestant Theological University (PThU) in Groningen, the Netherlands, and the Groupes Bibliques Universitaires d'Afrique Francophone (GBU-AF).

In this project we collaborated with the three national GBU-AF movements in Ivory Coast, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Cameroon. These movements were interested in collaborating with us because of their desire to help their members function as Christians within their universities. Traditionally, GBU-AF invested considerably in the pastoral support of their members and in evangelism at high schools and institutions of higher education. However, they are increasingly interested in helping their members engage as Christians in the academic world itself and ask what Christian living and Christian service mean in such a context. The project was therefore designed along two parallel axes: one axis was the research track in which we explored the existing discourse on science and Christian faith. In this track we also asked whether there would be potential to deepen, broaden, or strengthen this discourse in order to help current and future generations of students and academics.

The second track was the formative track in which we helped students and academics think through these questioned engage as Christians with their religious convictions in their respective fields of study. In all three university cities, we planned three research sessions using Group Model Building and

focus groups, as we explain in the next chapter. The second and third research sessions in each city happened within the context of a two-day conference for 20–30 students and academics with a larger public event on the following day, all with an explicit formative intention for the participants. We carefully planned for the research sessions to take place before the conferences so that the more formative aspects of these conferences would interfere as little as possible with the research on the local discourse in the GMB sessions. Unfortunately, political tensions in Kinshasa did not allow us to have the third session in Kinshasa before the analysis of the results. As part of the project we are developing course material on science and religion for student groups within and beyond GBU-AF and creating a website that allows students to explore these questions. Therefore, the project as a whole could be characterised as Participatory Inquiry and Action Research (Reason and Bradbury 2001; Conde-Frazier 2012; Toren and Bom, 2018).

The collaboration with GBU-AF – and in particular the Groupe Biblique des Elèves et Etudiants du Cameroun (GBEEC), where the local research assistant and facilitator was based – provided us with local partners with whom we could host our research sessions and conferences. Furthermore, they provided a dependable partner in a region of the world where social structures, including academic structures, are often fragile, and where the development of relationships, both academic and other, can demand complex processes of negotiation depending on often invisible loyalties and pressures. This is also the case in Europe to a certain degree, but as cultural foreigners, and because of the distance, these relationships are much harder to negotiate in an intercultural project.

Such a complex international project is therefore only possible when one can build on an existing network of relationships. Our personal histories as Project Director and Co-director and Senior Researcher (the two authors of this study) have therefore been a crucial ingredient in this project. Because our personal locations in different networks not only allowed us to do this research, but also colour our perspectives, it is appropriate to give an indication of our own location within these networks.

5 Positionality

Although our team – Lynda Zegha, Benno van den Toren and Klaas Bom – included people from both the North Atlantic world and French-speaking Africa, the project was directed from the Netherlands and the main researcher, Klaas Bom, is Dutch. As such, there is an obvious bias which could easily be

seen in a negative light. The African and female input was clearly limited by the dominant role played by Western men. Klaas also facilitated the research sessions and was therefore the main 'face' of the research for the participants. The way our team functioned confirms the typical colonial hierarchy with Lynda in the role of assistant. The fact that the two Westerners are theologians from a protestant theological institution automatically gives them a certain authority in these groups of mainly protestant participants. It is therefore understandable that the female minority in the student group in Yaoundé was initially shy in its participation during the first research session (see Chapters 4 and 5). The financial support given by Templeton World Charity Foundation makes the North Atlantic supremacy complete. On top of this, the further reflection and writing of this monograph was carried out by two white men.

Nevertheless, there are also a great many positive aspects to the relationships between the research team and the population. Lynda Zegha is Cameroonian by birth, lives in Yaoundé, and holds an MA in International Relations from Yaoundé. She has personal experience of university life in French-speaking Africa. Lynda is also a member of a Pentecostal church and has a Bamileke background (see more on this in Chapters 3 and 4). Lynda was engaged in all the research sessions and assisted the model builder and the facilitator, and coordinated and controlled the transcriptions, etc.. Benno van den Toren, the director of the project, is familiar with both the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) and French-speaking Africa. He worked part-time for IFES-the Netherlands during his PhD studies in theology. Amongst national IFES movements, there is a strong sense of belonging to a worldwide family, which helped the development of his relationship with GBU-AF. He taught theology at the Faculté de Théologie Evangélique de Bangui in the Central African Republic, a pan-African school attracting students from all over French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa (1997–2005). During a subsequent period as a tutor of Christian Doctrine at Wycliffe Hall, an Anglican college within the University of Oxford (2005–2013), he became involved in projects on science and faith issues, and most notably was project director of 'Configuring Adam and Eve: Exploring Conceptual Space at the Interface of Theological and Scientific Reflection on Human Origins'. His subsequent appointment as Professor of Intercultural Theology at the Protestant Theological University allowed him to start exploring the relationship between the science and faith discourse and cultural diversity, as evidenced in this project. Klaas Bom is also a theologian from a Dutch Reformed background like Benno van den Toren. He studied theology and philosophy at Utrecht University and in Paris and is specialized in early modernity in France (Pascal, Descartes) and its medieval roots. He is familiar with the academy in France as well as with the history of

French thought on science and religion. As a professor of theology, he lived and worked for nine years in different countries in Latin America, where he studied Latin American Pentecostalism. This experience of the Global South was crucial for this project. These engagements and the experience of the research team facilitated the contact with the local populations and the process of the research but are also possible hindrances to interpreting the results.

In an intercultural project, the cultural location of the different partners can and should be recognized and valued. Yet, these cultural ties also raise a number of questions that we have been wrestling with throughout the project. How can one engage in an academic project with a movement which, in its mission, does not necessarily maintain the type of religious neutrality often expected in Western research projects? How does one engage in genuine academic dialogue with perspectives that may themselves be at odds with the secular presuppositions that dominate much of Western academia? And what does this imply for the position of the team members who are all Christians? These questions also relate to the somewhat problematic position of theology at modern universities in the North Atlantic world. We will attempt to address these questions in our exploration of interculturality and intercultural theology in the next chapter and in the final two chapters. However, the questions we raise do not just point to limitations; sometimes what appears to be a limitation can actually facilitate the research. We already mentioned the importance of the IFES network that gave us a unique entrance to the university experience of Christians in francophone Africa. Additionally, some participants thought that research in this part of Africa conducted from the Netherlands makes sense, because the Netherlands is not a francophone country and there is no commitment to French culture and therefore less influence of *laïcité*.