APPENDIX: Pierson's Eight Major Theses
(from MH 520 Syllabus, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1985)

Thesis	Label	Description
1	TWO STRUCTURES	This thesis describes the two church structures that God used in church history – the church congregational structure (sometimes called modality), and the church mission structure (sometimes called sodality). The thesis states the normative use of both structures, as part of God's redemptive purposes. It seeks to relate the strengths and weaknesses of both of these structures, and the interdependent nature of the two structures.
2	THEOLOGICAL BREAKTHROUGHS	This thesis refers to the observation that every new expansion (and renewal movement) has usually been accompanied by new understandings of some aspect of the gospel, and/or the meaning of being a Christian, in a given time and context.
3	SPIRITUAL DYNAMIC	Various elements seem to accompany renewal and expansion, such as: renewed experience with God, koinonia, along with small group activity, lay leadership, study of the scriptures, new hymnology, use of spiritual gifts, mystical experiences with God, sacrificial dedication to the principle of the cross, etc. This thesis seeks to describe the underlying causes of the spiritual dynamic of expansion or renewal movements.

4	MISSION STRUCTURES	A major thesis, which Pierson will repeat, is the use of mission structures, in the expansion of the gospel into new areas: cultural, geographical, and linguistic. This thesis seeks to understand the patterns of the mission structures, their associations with each other, and with the congregational structures, and with the new Christianity, arising from their efforts. A part of this thesis involves the generation of new mission theory, and application of it by the mission structures, to the gospel's expansion.
5	HISTORICAL CONTEXTUAL CONDITIONS	A key element in new movements of renewal and expansion is the historical context. There appear to be certain times, when the contextual situations are "right", so that something really happens. This thesis seeks to posit that idea, and to describe it.
6	KEY PERSON	This thesis recognises that breakthroughs, expansion, renewal movements, and the like, are almost always triggered by a key person.
7	INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION	There is a contagion with movements. The spread of information about movements results in new offshoots of movements. And what is true about movements, in general, is true of ideas, in particular. This thesis seeks to capture that dynamic.
8	LEADERSHIP PATTERNS	New movements of expansion usually happen in connection with new patterns for the selection and training of church leaders. This dynamic is examined.

THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF SIN, RELATIVE TO ANIMISTIC WORLDVIEW (PART 1 OF 2)

A Case Study for Translating "Sin" in the Tabo Language of Papua New Guinea: Is Animistic Terminology Adequate or Does it Miss the Mark?

Tim Schlatter

Tim Schlatter has lived for over 25 years in Papua New Guinea, first growing up as the son of Highlands missionary parents in the 1960s and 1970s, and, secondly, working in church planting and Bible translation ministries for the Tabo people of the Western Province since 1988. He has earned graduate degrees from Lewis and Clark College and Ashland Theological Seminary, in the United States. Linguistic training was completed through SIL (University of Oregon).

SIN OR NOT TO SIN, THAT IS THE QUESTION

Several years ago, while checking the translation draft of Zechariah's prophecy, concerning his infant son (Luke 1:67-79), I discussed with other Tabo language speakers the theology of Jesus' salvific work, a key theme of the passage. "What did Jesus come to save us from?", I asked.

"That's easy," was the response. "He came to save us from our *kuba*." (*Kuba* is the generic Tabo word for "bad".)

"What do you mean?", I pressed. "What *kuba* did He come to save us from?"

"You know – our *kuba*, the bad way we live. We don't live in nice houses like yours; our clothing is ragged and dirty; it's hard to find school fees for our kids; we don't have a medical aid post in our village; our wives get tired of making sago; and we get tired of eating it. It would be much nicer to just open tins of food like you foreigners."

"Oh," said I, not entirely taken aback. (I had heard many similar complaints before.) "But what about *acting* in a *kuba* fashion; for instance, not obeying God's commands? Did Jesus come to save us from our habit of breaking God's laws?"

"Of course," they answered. "Everyone knows that."

"Do they really?", I wondered to myself.

We went on to another topic, but the primary answer the men had given for the meaning of *kuba* rankled in my mind. This was the word we had, so far, regularly used to translate "sin", either by itself, or as part of a phrase. I could not get around the fact that the first response given, regarding the word's meaning had an entirely non-moral sense; the primary meaning of *kuba*, in the respondents' minds had been focused on the community suffering a lack of material goods, being physically destitute. Indeed, later investigations strengthened my discomfort; although *kuba* can, and often does, have moral significance, the moral focus often seems secondary to other factors. Furthermore, even in obviously moral contexts for *kuba*'s usage, actions, which the people labelled as "bad", often contradicted biblical teaching, as to God's perspective of good and evil. Creating disharmony within a village or clan or family, for instance, is decidedly *kuba*, according to the local people. Yet Jesus said He came to bring a sword rather than peace; He promised division would come to families of those who followed Him (Matt 10:34-37). What about speaking against tribal elders and customs, or, in the modern setting, being critical of church leaders and traditions? Such action is independent, consequently prideful, and, of course, *kuba*, according to local belief. In contrast, scripture informs us that Jesus continually challenged the hypocrisy and practice of the Pharisees; the pride was on the Pharisees' side of the ledger, not with Jesus (Matt 23:2-36; Mark 3:2-6; 11:15-18; John 8:42-59).

This study, then, is borne out of gleaning, bit by bit, how the Tabo people really use and comprehend the word *kuba*, and by a desire to learn more. It intends to answer the question of which word or phrase in Tabo is best suited for translating the general concept of sin, and then, going beyond the most generic rendering, to find suitable forms to represent each of the other

synonyms used in scripture. Up to this point in the translation project (Genesis and the gospel of Mark in publication, with an additional 40 percent of the New Testament in rough draft form) the Tabo Translation Committee has settled on using the word *kuba*, or the phrase "doing *kuba*", in order to translate "sin". In addition, where the source text makes use of various synonyms of sin, the Committee has not been overly careful, nor consistent, in choosing receptor language forms that semantically match. To complicate matters, there has been expressed reluctance to make changes to the initial draft choices.

Recently, I came across an article, written by Carl Harrison, a linguist, who has worked among Indian tribes of Brazil, in which he writes:

> The words "good" and "bad", in natural languages, generally have a meaning, relative to something or somebody. If you steal my radio, that's good for you, bad for me. An idea, like absolute good, may not exist. "Stealing radios is bad", or "stealing is bad", may be practically meaningless statements in some language, especially if the society has no concept of a good God, who keeps track.[1]

Although the Tabo people have, in general, accepted the Christian message of such a God (one who is both good Himself, and who sets the standard for ethical behaviour for humans), this is a relatively recent phenomenon, the result being more of a syncretistic mix of beliefs, rather than a wholesale paradigmatic shift. To me, this means that the use of *kuba*, for "sin", in the translation, remains highly suspect.

A casual look at other Papua New Guinea languages reveals that their translation committees more often than not similarly opted for the generic "bad" solution (paranomasia unintended). Of six translations, only one translated "sin" alternatively. Tuma-Irumu, of the Morobe Province, used, primarily, an idiomatic phrase, meaning "practising defectiveness", the defect being a knot, or gnarl, of a tree.[2] The other languages looked at were

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[1] Carl H. Harrison, "Summary on the concept of sin", in *Notes on Translation* 1-106 (1985), pp. 17-18.

[2] Information on the Tuma-Irumu language was obtained from Ross Webb, an SIL Bible translator, who worked among these people during the 1980s and 1990s. *Momi* is the word

Gogodala and Bamu, of the Western Province,[3] Angal Heneng and Huli, of the Southern Highlands Province,[4] and Niugini Pidgin, which rivals English as the national language, and certainly has more speakers, if not prestige.[5] The choice made for Niugini Pidgin's *Buk Baibel* is especially interesting, in that the translation was overseen by some of the best consultants the United Bible Societies have working in the country, leading to most of Papua New Guinea's Christian circles regarding it with due respect.[6] The phrase used most frequently to translate "sin" in *Buk Baibel* was simply *pasin nogut*, literally "bad fashion", or "bad practice".

As the exegetical and linguistic "expert" on the Tabo Translation Committee, however, I have not been satisfied with the use of *kuba* for

for "gnarl of a tree", which, in conjunction with the verb for "practise" is idiomatic for "sin", and most scripture references to sin were thus translated. Tuma-Irumu, however, on numerous occasions, alternatively translated "sin" by using *waki* (generic word for "bad") in either the phrase "doing *waki*" or the phrase "following a *waki* road".

[3] The Gogodala generic word for "bad" is *sosawe*, which was used consistently by itself, or in a phrase to translate "sin" in the 1978 edition of their New Testament. The translation project was worked on by a number of missionaries, who did not necessarily have linguistic training, nor did they always communicate with each other, in their separate endeavours. Consistency, for some key theological terms, therefore, is, at times, sorely lacking, but, in the case of "sin" the various translators apparently had agreement. The Bamu Bible translation project is only now getting under way, with no books yet in publication. When local evangelists translate scripture texts for use in ministry, however, they employ *ubauba* (generic word for "bad"), when speaking of "sin", thus following the pattern, established previously, by neighbouring Gogodala and Tabo Christians.

[4] Information on the Angal Heneng language was obtained from conversations with Victor and Elsie Schlatter, who have spent over 30 years living among native speakers in the Nipa Valley. During much of this time, their primary work was oversight of the New Testament translation project. "Sin" was usually translated as *koraob bismisao*, that is "doing bad things". Information on Huli was obtained from Alan Bickell, for several years, a teacher at the Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea's Huli Bible School. *Ko bero* is the phrase commonly used to translate "sin", which, literally, back translates into English as "doing bad". The nominalised form is *mana ko*, or "bad things".

[5] The Pidgin Bible potentially reaches a readership of two million plus speakers, and is used by Christians across a wide spectrum of denominational loyalty, especially in Papua New Guinean towns.

[6] To my knowledge, one Christian group alone, has pointedly rejected the translation, on the grounds that its translation committee departed from a literal interpretation of the Authorised King James version in English. In response, this particular denomination produced their own highly-literalistic Pidgin translation from the KJV, and published the two (Pidgin and English) in parallel format.

"sin", a sentiment held ever since the conversation with my Tabo friends three years ago, and, more recently, strengthened by reading Harrison's article.[7] My dissatisfaction is not lessened by the Committee's reluctance to change their previous work, nor is it altered by awareness that gifted translators, elsewhere, have apparently seen no problem with similarly translating "sin". There are three issues. Primarily, as I have already expressed, I struggle with the very general level of meaning for *kuba*. The word describes everything, from breaking of tradition, to poor quality craftsmanship, and, thus frequently, the usage lacks any moral connection. This seems rather serious, when the scriptural concept of sin is in focus. Secondly, I dislike the word's close association with religious forms, not all that distant from the Tabo people's memory and current practice, forms which directly conflict with the gospel message.[8]

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, I believe the Tabo Translation Committee adopted the single-word substitution of *kuba* for "sin", not because they truly considered any other alternatives, but simply because they observed the choice already made in the scriptures of the nearby Gogodala language. The Gogodala New Testament went into print initially in 1978. Besides helping Gogodala believers grow in faith, in the late 1980s, it became a tool, used by bilingual evangelists in establishing the Tabo church. As such, it is considered by many Tabo believers (at least those who speak both languages) to be the "authorised" version of the Bible. Additionally, it is the standard scripture text used at the evangelical Bible school, upriver from the Tabo homeland, the training institution, from which all Tabo pastors have graduated. So, as a result, there is strong

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[7] Harrison, "Concept of sin", pp. 17-18, does suggest that the words "good" and "bad" can be used, if a means is found of anchoring them to an absolute standard, like God, that is, defining a list of behaviour patterns one should live up to, if one wants to please God. This also gives the people an idea of what God is like, and does not mean that, in other contexts, "good" and "bad" cannot be used in their normal, relative senses. But the anchoring of the two opposing concepts to God Himself is essential if "sin" is to be defined for a people, who have previously never heard of such a thing.

[8] Consider Joseph E. Grimes' comment in "Sin", in *Notes on Translation* 1-22 (1966), p. 11. He writes, "Theological terms are a problem, because the translator has to take linguistic material, already in use in the target language, and impress it into the service of a system of thought that is totally different from the system, for which it is customarily used . . . we have to use a single set of terms to talk about two contrasting sets of ideas, Christian and pagan."

aversion among Tabo believers, and their representatives on the Translation Committee, to depart from norms, seen in the majority local-language Bible. This is unfortunate, because even the Bible Society, which approved the earlier Gogodala publication, admits that, in it, sound translation principles were often ignored. A revision has been recommended.

Before undertaking this study, the following solutions for translating the most basic rendering of "sin" in Tabo, though given little thought by the Translation Committee, were personally considered as plausible alternatives: (1) a phrase, depicting violation of God's *talona* (a word, whose primary meaning is "taboo", that is, a prohibition, which protects from giving offence to spirit deities); (2) a phrase, meaning "not submitting to God"; (3) a phrase, meaning "breaking God's rules"; (4) a phrase, parallel in meaning to ἁμαρτία, the most-frequent Greek word translated as "sin"; or (5) a yet-to-be-discovered appropriate figure of speech. Given the complexity of human language, and knowing that the same word can semantically shift its emphasis from context to context, using more than one of the above ideas has always seemed most likely.

So, this study aims to determine first, for myself, which of the above solutions are satisfactory, and then to broach the entire subject, once again, with the Translation Committee's Tabo-language experts. It is hoped that the conclusions reached will enable the Committee, in future work, to make better choices for translating, not only the most-generic references to "sin" in scripture, but, also, after identifying the semantic domains of each of its synonyms,[9] to find equally-valid solutions for them. Besides aiding in future scripture translation, the Tabo Committee's decisions will be applied to earlier translation drafts of the synoptic gospels and Acts, in conjunction with the checking and revision process, already requisite for them. We are seeking, not only accuracy, but also consistency, for the entire New Testament project. I note this to be an ideal time for exploring the concept of sin in the Tabo culture and language, because the majority of translation

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[9] See Richard Chevenix Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, London UK: Macmillan, 1880, pp. 239-248; also Robert Baker Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament: Their Bearing on Christian Doctrine*, Donald R. White, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1983, pp. 76-84. Trench identifies eight such words for classical Greek; Girdlestone discusses 11 for Hebrew.

work on the epistles (where the theology of sin, and the use of the term, are pervasive) has yet to be tackled by our Committee.[10]

The conclusions, arrived at here for Tabo,, will also be applicable to the Gogodala scriptures should a revision ever be undertaken. Beyond this, the present research should benefit any Bible translation team, working in a language of similar animist background. The topic of translating "sin" was first addressed, for specific animist language situations, by a number of Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) translators working in sub-Sahara Africa in the 1950s.[11] These studies were followed by an excellent paper by Joseph Grimes in 1966. His work was published in conjunction with comments of other SIL field linguists in *Notes on Translation*.[12] Although thorough, Grimes' treatment occurred 30-plus years ago, and much knowledge has accrued since: in anthropology, linguistics, translation principles, and biblical studies.

Another well-known classic in Bible translation circles was published by Wayne Dye in 1976, in which he argued for an ethnotheological approach to communicating the biblical concept of sin.[13] But, in the years since, only a single journal article, dealing directly with translating "sin" for an animist language, can be found.[14] This might imply that, for many, the issues are

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[10] See Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich's comment in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, tran/abrid., Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1964, p. 49. Regarding "sin" in the synoptic gospels and Acts, they write, "the role of the [word group for sin] is relatively slight. Jesus does not speak about sin, but acts in awareness to it, and is conscious of being the victor over it."

[11] Three articles, all from *The Bible Translator*, are noted as dealing with the translation of "sin" in specific animist language contexts. These are: (1) Earl Anderson, "Lexical Problems in the Kipsigis Translation", in *The Bible Translator* 1-2 (1950), pp. 85-90; (2) D. B. Long, "The Revision of the Chokwe New Testament", in *The Bible Translator* 4-3 (1953), pp. 135-137; and (3) Quentin D. Nelson, "Ngbandi Terminology in Translating Christian Ideas", in *The Bible Translator* 8-4 (1957), pp. 145-149. (Kipsigis is a language of Kenya; Chokwe is a Bantu language of Central Africa; Ngbandi is a language of the Republic of Congo.)

[12] Grimes, "Sin", pp. 11-16.

[13] T. Wayne Dye, "Toward a Cultural Definition of Sin", in *Missiology* 4-1 (1976), pp. 27-41.

[14] Gerrit Van Steenbergen, "Translating Sin in Pokoot", in *The Bible Translator* 42-4 (1991), pp. 431-436. In Van Steenbergen's article, I find the animist-belief context for Pokoot to be quite different from that of the Tabo people, in particular, and Papua New

already resolved. However, the work of Katherine Barnwell (SIL), and her colleagues, suggests differently. They are in the midst of revising an as-yet-unpublished work, entitled *Key Biblical Terms in the New Testament: an Aid for Bible Translators*,[15] which, along with numerous other resources, is being made available to translators on CD-ROM. Within the *Key Biblical Terms* section, sin and its synonyms are discussed, along with appropriate suggestions for translators, perhaps a more-comprehensive treatment than any previous single source. Our present study, however, goes beyond all earlier efforts (including Barnwell's), in that it compiles lexical data from a number of authorities, it considers words from both Old and New Testaments, it applies the data to translating for animist languages, in particular, and it then creates a specific paradigm for translating "sin" (and all its synonymous forms) for the Tabo language.

In this paper, the theology of sin, from a scriptural viewpoint, is first explored. "Sin" is defined, and doctrine established, with both Old and New Testament views being considered. Following the commentary on biblical theology, the Hebrew and Greek words, variously translated into English by "sin", or one of its synonyms, are presented, followed by a summary of general observations made from the lexical data. Greater emphasis is placed on the New Testament, because its completion is,

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Guineans, in general. Nonetheless, the solution, the Pokoot Translation Committee decided on, and the many they rejected, has helped in directing our own investigation for Tabo.

[15] Katherine Barnwell, Paul Dancy, and Anthony Pope, *Key Biblical Terms in the New Testament*, Dallas TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics Publications, 1995, [CD-ROM]. Only the prepublication version is currently available from SIL. In the work by Barnwell, et al, the stated primary purpose is to "help translators, who work from English, as the source language, to understand the original Greek terms". The following information is included for each key term:

1. A brief summary of the meaning of the term, with its different senses.
2. A detailed discussion of each sense.
3. For each different sense, examples of New Testament references, in which the term occurs.
4. Suggestions for translating, which are based on back-translations from specific languages. (Caution is given that these are incomplete references, and will not be suitable in every language, the purpose being to generate some ideas for consideration.)
5. Notes on collocations, in which the term occurs.
6. Notes on other words in the same general area of meaning (i.e., synonyms).
7. A reference list of articles and books for further study.

admittedly, the immediate focus of the Tabo Translation Committee. To complete this paper's foundation, then, the importance of one's view of sin, relative to two other major biblical doctrines – God's character (especially His holiness), and the atonement – is considered.

In the second section of the paper, the way animist groups conceptualise sin is contrasted with the view of scripture. Data is presented from select anthropological and missiological studies, conducted among African peoples, Aboriginal Australians, and Melanesians. What constitutes taboo, and the purposes for interdiction within a culture, are included in the discussion. Are cultural taboos observed out of respect for fellow humans, or for fear of the spirits of dead ancestors, or for fear of even higher powers in the spiritual realm? From this, the ways in which animism regards spirit world organisation, the characteristics of spirit deities, and how deity is offended and appeased, will be investigated. In order to translate the scriptures, without reinforcing theological error, it is important to know how these kinds of previously-held beliefs inherently conflict with parallel biblical doctrines.[16]

In concluding the second section, the Tabo traditional belief system, itself, is presented. The various Tabo categories of spirit beings, and their interactions with humans, are detailed, followed by an explanation of what traditionally constitutes the basis for tribal morality. Then, the moral sense of the word *kuba* (generic "bad") is investigated, to see what actions and attitudes were formerly thus labelled. Answers are sought to two questions: (1) in what ways, if any, do Tabo beliefs differ from those of animist groups in general?, and (2) what are the traditional points of conviction for wrongdoing among the Tabo people?

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[16] See John Beekman, "Anthropology and the Translation of the New Testament Key Terms", in *Notes on Translation* 1-80 (1980), p. 32. Beekman writes: "There should be no question that a good understanding of the culture of a people is essential for good translation work. Its significance influences the quality of a translation at every level, but it is particularly important as it relates to those crucial New Testament terms, upon which the message of the gospel depends. The necessity of understanding the receptor language culture, as it relates to religious beliefs and practices, is most critical, when it comes to the translation of New Testament key terms."

In the third section, an overview of translation theory, especially as it relates to scripture, and previously unwritten languages, is presented. Functional equivalence, as opposed to single-word substitution, is emphasised. Accuracy of meaning in a translation can be accomplished only by abandoning literal woodenness, especially in situations, where the receptor culture's worldview (and language) are greatly different from that of the source text, and of the translator. Several translational considerations, relative to establishing equivalence, for key religious terms within these cultures, are discussed, with multiple-sense lexical items, concordance, semantic domain analysis, and a variety of non-literal solutions being included in the coverage. The multiple senses of *kuba* are contrasted with those of the English word "bad", providing yet further evidence why this Tabo word is a poor choice for rendering the concept of "sin".

The fourth section of the paper presents a specific solution for communicating "sin" in a translation of the Tabo scriptures. Each alternative possibility, mentioned earlier, is examined, followed by a choice for rendering $\dot{\alpha}\mu\alpha\rho\tau\acute{\iota}\alpha$, the most-generic Greek word. Then, for each of the 10 New Testament synonyms for $\dot{\alpha}\mu\alpha\rho\tau\acute{\iota}\alpha$, the semantic domain analysis, begun in the previous section, is completed. An attempt is made to determine the parameters of meaning for, especially, the primary sense of each synonym, and thus, distinguish them from each other. It is the resultant discrete clusters of meaning, for which appropriate Tabo expressions are suggested. This is the point, at which information from the previous sections is drawn together: biblical theology, anthropological studies, and translation theory, all carry roughly equal weight in the decisions made. The solutions proposed are ones, which have met with tentative approval, in random checks with native speakers, but approval by the entire Translation Committee will have to wait till a later date.

In the conclusion of this paper, an attempt is made to expand the decision reached for translating "sin" in Tabo (one particular isolated context) to the wider context of translation in general. The summarisations, provided here for the biblical perspective of sin, and of the semantic ranges of its various synonyms in scripture, although found piecemeal in other bodies of research, have previously not been presented as comprehensively, nor as a

single unit, nor with the translation of sin into a minority language[17] specifically in mind. As such, it is hoped the data assembled will be of benefit to other translation teams, which wrestle also with "sin".

Furthermore, it is hoped that the summarisation of how sin is understood (or potentially misunderstood) in an animistic culture is of benefit to translators, working in similar ethnic situations. The process of analysis, used for the Tabo language, should be applicable to other animistic cultural groups, even though the process will, necessarily, be modified for other settings, and particular conclusions will vary accordingly. Regardless, the importance of determining the associated semantic domains of religious terms, in a particular culture, before simply adopting the term, as a suitable translation for a biblical concept is, once again, underscored. If a certain receptor language word has too wide a range of meaning, it may be inappropriate to use alone, especially if it carries theological overtones that directly contradict the Christian message.

THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE OF SIN

THEOLOGY'S LIMITATIONS

"The whole problem with systematic theology is the fact that it *is* systematic", one seminary professor wryly commented. "If God had intended for humans to reduce the mysteries of His character, and dealings with them, to a neat array of doctrinal issues, if He had wanted the entirety of revelation systematised in a set of handbooks, He surely would have given us scripture in that format initially."

The point is valid. Indeed, if biblical revelation teaches anything at all, it is that the great mysteries of the universe – the how of past creation, the unfolding of future eschatology, the miracle of the incarnation, the marvel of the atonement – these are intended by God to remain somewhat veiled,

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[17] See D. J. Clark, "Minority Languages' Status and Attitudes Towards Bible Translation", in *The Bible Translator* 48-3 (1997), pp. 336-338. Clark argues the importance of discerning, for minority languages, what the attitude is likely to be to having their own translation of the scriptures, yet concludes that, for many situations, a translation is necessary. While admitting that "minority" is a difficult term to define, and then demonstrating the difficulty, by referencing a number of geographical and linguistic situations around the globe, he still uses the term freely.

at least for the duration of our present temporal existence. We have not been given a giant jigsaw puzzle, intended for a few, of superior intellect, to assemble, with the rest standing back to admire their achievement. God reminds us, through Isaiah: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways. . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Is 55:8-9). And Paul later adds, "Oh, the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counsellor?" (Rom 11:33-34) The scriptures are full of such sentiments.

The scholarly pursuit of "a place for everything, and everything in its place" may lead some theologians to mistakenly believe the goal is attainable. Though their thinking may be faulty, the pursuit, in and of itself, is not wrong; as the Chinese proverb says, "He who aims for nothing, will be sure to hit it." However, in the pursuit of truth, a modicum of humility is necessary. We should realise, at the outset, that, in theology, there are some things we will never know, that there are some conclusions, which will always remain tentative. God has given us "everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him" (2 Peter 1:3). He *does* want us to know (relationally and intellectually) what He has revealed of Himself, and He *has* revealed Himself, both through His Word, and through the natural created order of the universe. It is in this revelation that He has supplied us with all necessary knowledge for physical and spiritual well-being. To want to know what He has made known, to consequently live this life of faith to the fullest, and to have our faith be intelligent and rational, is not wrong. But to go beyond the intent of revelation, into the idle pursuit of satisfying intellectual curiosity and fancy, is foolish, firstly, because we humanly struggle against purposeful divine mystery, and secondly, because the conclusions reached will inevitably be distortions of the truth, if not outright erroneous. In the doing of theology, then, discernment is necessary to know what is speculative, and what is clearly taught.

It is with this underlying realisation, that we investigate what scripture has to say about sin. Unlike some of the more mysterious doctrines, the

concept of sin is rather clearly delineated. This is so, because what is known of sin – its origin, its activity, its consequences, and the means of dealing with it – comes, primarily, from either explicit statements, or objective word studies, not from philosophical conjecture. On the subject of vocabulary, B. A. Milne writes, "As might be expected of a book, whose dominant theme is human sin, and God's gracious salvation from it, the Bible uses a wide variety of terms, in both the Old and New Testaments, to express the idea."[18] It is because the doctrine of sin is conveyed by means of specific words, in the original languages of scripture, that the translator is responsible for finding a similar objective clarity in the receptor language at hand. What is mysterious in the original, should remain a mystery in the receptor language, but, what is clear to the original audience, should be clear in the minds of readers today. Since sin is a concept and doctrine, presented clearly in the original revelation, it must, therefore, be presented with equal clarity today. It is foundational to the overall biblical message.

Sin is not only a biblical concept, but, according to some, it is also a cross-culturally evident one. John Macquarrie says, "That sin [is] a 'separation', 'missing the mark', or 'falling away', with respect to one's relation to one's self, or one's neighbour, would, perhaps, be universally conceded."[19] Alexander Hodge concurs: "In the absence of all [written] supernatural revelation, [conscience] has led all heathen nations to the recognition of the authority of God, or of His exercising government, to a belief in rewards and punishments, administered (by the same), and hence to expiatory and propitiatory rites."[20]

Now, it is noted that Hodge is considering the subject from a purely Western viewpoint, specifically a culture, where there is a tradition of monotheistic belief, and a corresponding monolithic code of behaviour. But his cultural bias does not negate the truisms that (a) the concept of moral authority (be it tribal custom, a pantheon of gods, an ancestral spirit,

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[18] See B. A. Milne's article "Sin", in *New Bible Dictionary* J. D. Douglas, N. Hillyer, F. F. Bruce, D. Guthrie, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, and D. J. Wiseman, eds, Wheaton IL: Tyndale House, 1982, p. 1116.

[19] John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian theology*, New York NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966, p. 62.

[20] Alexander Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1949, p. 317.

or dictates of the elders) is a universal one, and (b) all peoples accept that a consequent penalty results from disregarding such authority. Hodge, too, is correct in stating that expiatory and propitiatory rites can be observed in all cultures, and that these rites flow out of some sort of understanding of "sin". All cultures, at least, recognise that there is a code of moral conduct, by which people are obligated to live, and they believe that breaking such a code is wrong. While the importance of this notion, for religious life and thought, varies to an extraordinary extent, an understanding of sin, in this sense, is found universally.[21]

In considering the various cultural views of sin, Louis Berkhof identifies two philosophical camps: (a) those who believe suffering and moral evil are a part of the natural constitution of things, and (b) those who believe sin results from free choice, either in the present state of each individual, or at a prior point in history. The latter view, he says, most closely aligns with scripture.[22] Meanwhile, Walther Eichrodt says that sin, from this biblical perspective, "can only be understood in the context of an unconditional ought; the seriousness of sin is inseparably tied to one's awareness of moral obligation".[23] This is the monolithic, monotheistic position, to which Western worldview and Christianity are necessarily linked.

But how does a translator communicate the biblical concept of sin, in a culture, where the moral tradition is vastly different? For instance, highly literate, Western-educated Hindus would say it is monotheists, not animistic or polytheistic adherents, who have a conceptual problem, regarding sin. Their reasoning is that polytheists have any number of storied alternatives, from which to choose (depending on the social context), as opposed to the very limited propositional, prescriptive, moral statements, typical of monotheism. Monotheists' prescriptive moral codes, they claim, distil to a mere two injunctions – "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not" – thus reflecting an impoverished and inflexible worldview.[24] Hindus

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[21] Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, J. A. Baker, tran., Philadelphia PA: Westminster Press, 1967, p. 380.

[22] Louis Berkhof, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1979, p. 219.

[23] Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 380.

[24] David Wakefield, an International Anthropology Consultant for Summer Institute of Linguistics, in personal correspondence, relative to this thesis (May 13, 1999). Wakefield

and others of similar religious persuasion, do not deny sin, as a reality; they simply define it differently from monotheists, and believe its parameters to be rather arbitrary. Indeed, except for a few short-lived philosophies, the view that humanity is sinful has been both attested, empirically verified, and accepted, for most of the course of history, and across most cultures, Western and non-Western, monotheistic and polytheistic, alike.[25]

Another non-biblical view of sin, we should consider, is that, as a concept, it has outlived its usefulness. For the Western world, traditional beliefs, regarding the existence of God, the authority of revelation, and the idea of sin, were first challenged during the Enlightenment. The novel idea that the sinful state could be overcome by reason was especially promoted. Advocates argued that, if the rational reason, as a tool for self's interest. Hence, man was still sinful, indeed totally depraved, whether with or without the benefit of reason. Freud was likewise pessimistic.[26] So, although bucking the trend, at least some modern secularists have found the idea of sin to continue as relevant, even in the age of reason.

Subtly different from the Enlightenment view is that espoused by the New Age "movement" during the past decade.[27] For almost all, under the New Age umbrella, sin is not only lacking in relevance now (i.e., a neutral construct), but is an idea that poses danger to society (a negative construct).

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notes also that "unlike Christian moral law, the law (*dharma*) of Hinduism is specifically NOT to be universally applied. . . . Rather, there is a different *dharma* for each caste, resulting in very different moral standards, dependent on who you are within the society." Cf. David S. Noss, and John B. Noss, *A History of the World's Religions*, New York NY: Macmillan, 1990, pp. 99-100, 106-110. In their discussion of modern Hinduism, the toleration of wide variation in Hindu religious belief and practice is noted – there are four differing, permissible life goals for the adherent; there are three separate means of achieving salvation; there are six acceptable systems for philosophical reflection. It is understandable, then, that Christianity is viewed by Hindus as an extremely rigid and intolerant code of morality, not as an appealing alternative of systematic, cohesive belief.

[25] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Sin", in *Handbook of Christian Theology*, M. Halverson, and A. Cohen, eds, Cleveland OH: World Publishing Company, 1958, p. 349.

[26] Ibid., p. 350.

[27] Admittedly, what is termed "New Age" encompasses a very broad range of belief, not unlike gnosticism of the 2nd century. See Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, vols 1 and 2, Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1970, p. 126, where he writes that "under the general title of 'gnosticism' are included several religious doctrines . . . whose main characteristic was their syncretism."

Past history and present experience, they argue, demonstrates the concept of sin to be merely a manipulative tool of oppressors. The Enlightenment philosophers had, at least, recognised the need for human passion and interest to be subjugated to a higher value, that of faculty could master the power of interest and passion, then the biblical concept of sin was no longer relevant. Not all secularists agreed, however. Hobbes, for instance, on the conservative end of the Enlightenment's philosophical spectrum, believed that self could be mastered by reason, but would then invariably use reason. But, in this postmodern era, there is no longer any such thing as objective rationality (reason unaffected by bias). Labelling something as sinful, then, is merely one individual imposing their personal values upon another.[28] Appeal to an outside authority (e.g., biblical revelation) is dismissed as a contrivance, by which one group is forced to submit to the biases of another group. All ethical values are, thus, reduced to being mere, relative, personal constructs, and sin (at least in the biblical sense) no longer exists. The only sin that remains is to judge another as being sinful, that is, to be intolerant. Furthermore, if an individual does act in a manner, which society, at large, still believes to be wrong (murder, for instance), the actual term "sin" is avoided as being too harsh. Instead, the action is labelled more gently (e.g., "abuse", or "ignorance", or "inappropriate behaviour") and, more likely than not, will be justified as having happened, because of poor education, bad parenting, the criminal justice system, or religious zeal. In postmodern thought, man becomes his own god, there are no absolutes, and individual responsibility is greatly reduced.

Regarding the effect the various human-centred perspectives of sin have, James Boice says that, whenever a personal theology is adopted, other than what the Bible articulates, a situation results, where, although the same biblical vocabulary may be being used, a totally different message arises in the minds of the hearers. "Thus, *sin* (if one still dares use the word) means, not rebellion against God and His righteous law, for which we are held accountable, but, rather, ignorance, or merely the kind of oppression, found in social structures. Since sin is located in the system, the way to overcome

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[28] Charles Misja, in a lecture, "Postmodernism and the Christian", August 7, 1998, at Huntington IN.

it is, clearly, not by the death of Jesus Christ, but, rather, by changing the structures."[29]

So, if communication of the concept of sin is difficult, even within the context of a single language (English), and the unity of cultural experience (Western civilisation), and if wrong communication enhances wrong theology, how much more is the problem compounded, when socio-cultural and linguistic boundaries are simultaneously crossed? This is the situation faced by a translator, working in an animistic, minority language situation. Encouragement is taken from the point already made, that the doctrine of sin in scripture is effectively communicated by means of specific vocabulary choices in the original languages. This gives hope for finding equal clarity in the receptor language, the translator works within, even if the message of what sin is ends up clashing with traditional views.

We opened by cautioning that doing theology does not lead to the answer of every question of belief. One more caution is worth mentioning, before moving on. If the oceans represent all the knowledge that could ever be acquired – all comprehension in the spiritual and natural realms, all that has happened for eons, even before time began, and all that is yet to happen, into eternity – the most a highly-intelligent individual could hope to collect in a lifetime would be a bucketful. Most of us would soak up a sponge or two. How is it, then, that, as human beings, those of us who gather three sponges of water look with such disdain on those who have but one or two? How easy it is to conclude that with my extra sponge of water, I, along with my culture, am better (i.e., more advanced, more spiritual) than you. So, it is good to remember that the Western-oriented, biblical approach to theology is actually just another ethno-theology, with a longer history than most. It also happens to be a written one, which, at least, in part, is the reason it has persevered and grown. But, even with our huge advantages of literacy, historical awareness, and advanced technology, we Westerners (just as much as all other peoples on the planet) cannot escape seeing the

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[29] James M. Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive and Readable Theology*, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1978, p. 674.

world, and interpreting scripture, through our own cultural grid. All human cognition bears the indelible imprint of culture.[30]

DEFINING SIN

What constitutes sin, from a biblical perspective? To answer the question, we will consider, and consolidate, the opinions of some who have invested their lives in scriptural study. Augustine, the greatest theologian of early church history, summarily explained sin as the "perverse desire of height". He saw human pride to be more than a bit of exaggerated self-esteem – pride is the general inclination of all men to overestimate their virtues, powers, and achievements; it is a continuing and inordinate affront to the God, who made us.[31] Reinhold Niebuhr says that, ever since Augustine, this basic view of sin has continued on in Christian orthodoxy, and notes that a parallel exists between Christian thought and the conception of sin, seen in the Greek tragedies.[32] Equating sin with pride, demonstrates that, at heart, it is an attitude, rather than an action.

Campejus Vitringa, a professor of theology in the late-17th and early-18th centuries, wrote that "sin is any and every want of conformity with the moral law of God, whether of excess or defect, whether of omission or commission".[33] This same idea is expressed, today, in the doctrinal

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[30] Wakefield. See earlier footnote 24 at p. 50. Cf. Daniel C. Arichea, "Taking Theology Seriously", in *The Bible Translator* 33-3 (1982), pp. 309-316. Arichea exhorts translators to be faithful to the theology of the text they work with, rather than theologising, from their own cultural worldview. He admits that the detection of "unjustified theologising" is especially difficult, when it is done at the subconscious level. Cf. Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1996, p. 100. Van Rheenen says that monoculturalists (that is, ethnocentrists) "equate their own perceptions of reality with reality itself. They make no allowances for different perceptions of reality." Cf. Charles Kraft, *Christianity with Power: Your Worldview and Your Experience of the Supernatural*, Ann Arbor MI: Vine Books, 1989, chapters 3-8.

[31] See Saint Augustine, "Confessions and Enchiridion", Albert C. Outler, tran., in vol VII in *The Library of Christian Classics*, Philadelphia PA: Westminster Press, 1955, pp. I.11.17, II.2.2. Similarly, in "Enchiridion" 28.108, he also speaks of "the necessity of human pride [sin] to be healed by the humility of God [the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus]."

[32] Niebuhr, "Sin", pp. 348-350.

[33] Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, p. 340.

confession for Presbyterian churches of Scotland,[34] and is echoed by both Gerhard Kittel and Walther Eichrodt, in their discussions of sin in the Old Testament.[35] A. Hodge, expanding on Vitringa's definition, says that sin is "not only any want of conformity of the human soul's actions with the law of God, but it includes the moral states and habits as well". He says, further, that "*law* is not an internal self-regulating moral principle of human nature . . . but it is an imperial standard of moral excellence. This standard is imposed on humanity from without, and above, by the supreme authority of a personal moral Governor, who rules over [His] personal moral subjects."[36] So, according to all these scholars, sin, in scripture, is not a mere violation of our cultural mores, nor is it a violation of the natural order of things. It is, rather, an offence against a personal Lawgiver, a Lawgiver, who vindicates offences against His law with penalties. Absolute moral perfection is demanded by the Lawgiver, because this is the nature of His own character.[37]

Rather than a violation of law, Charles Ryrie focuses on the wilfulness, and consequences, of sin. "Sin", he writes, "is absolutely a moral predicament, a deliberate declension of the will, which alienates man from God."[38] Macquarrie similarly defines sin by its consequences. Sin denotes the disorder and imbalance, basic to man's experience, that which results in alienation of a person from God, and others.[39] He says that, as a religious term, sin includes notions of guilt and wrongdoing, but goes beyond both

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[34] See A. B. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, S. D. F. Salmond, ed., New York NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926, p. 212.

[35] Kittel and Friedrich write that "across the Old Testament, sin is seen as a legal and theological term, for what is against the norm; it is an aberration" (*Theological Dictionary*, p. 45). Eichrodt, meanwhile, says, "Clearly contained [in all the Hebrew synonyms] is the unifying notion of action contrary to the norm" (*Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 381). He points out, too, that the word most frequently translated as "sin" is חָטָא, which means to go astray morally, to fail with regard to the norm of obeying prescribed commands (p. 380).

[36] Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, p. 340.

[37] Ibid., p. 317.

[38] Charles C. Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1959, p. 182.

[39] Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, p. 237.

these aspects, in that it includes a lostness from all being. This alienation operates against self, against others, and, especially, against the Creator.[40]

Indeed, the Old Testament highlights this characteristic of sin. Within it, sin most basically refers to an offence against the person of God, rather than either His will, or His externally-formulated law. Davidson says that, while the Old Testament, at times, depicts sin as a want of conformity to the law of Yahweh, even more basically, it views it as a defection from allegiance to Him.[41] Eichrodt agrees: sin in the Old Testament is perceived as "a conflict between two wills, the human and the divine. It is a conscious, and responsible, act of rebellion against the Creator."[42]

From a purely New Testament perspective, Rudolf Bultmann describes sin as a turning away from the Creator to the creation. It is essentially trusting in one's self to procure life, by use of the earthly, and temporal; it is trusting in one's own strength and accomplishments. This is what Paul refers to as "fixing one's mind on the things of the flesh", or alternatively, "being at war with God" (Rom 8:6, 7).[43] So, if Bultmann, Eichrodt, and Davidson are right in their perspectives, the Old and New Testaments, in their basic understanding of sin, do not differ significantly. Both consistently emphasise the characteristic deliberateness of sin, and the hostility, which it engenders. Throughout the scriptures, claims Milne, the most characteristic feature of sin, in all its aspects, is that it is directed against God (Ps 51:4; Rom 8:7).[44]

We may conclude, then, that any conception of sin, which does not have, in the forefront, the contradiction that it offers to God, is a deviation from the biblical representation, found in either half of the canon. Sin is far more serious than mere human selfishness. Sin is a violation of that, which God's glory demands. This is further borne out, if we consider the origin

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[40] Ibid., p. 62.

[41] Davidson, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 213.

[42] Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 383.

[43] Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament, Complete in One Volume*, Kendrick Grobel, tran., New York NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955, pp. 246-248.

[44] B. A. Milne, "Sin", in *New Bible Dictionary*, Douglas, J. D., with N. Hillyer, F. F. Bruce, D. Guthrie, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, and D. J. Wiseman, eds, Wheaton IL: Tyndale House, 1982, p. 1117.

of human sin in Gen 3. It is apparent that the meaning of sin, here, "ought not to be sought so much in an overt action, but in an inward, God-denying aspiration, of which the act of disobedience was the immediate expression".[45]

This observation brings us full circle, back to Augustine's characterisation of sin as a "perverse desire for height". In choosing receptor language forms, suitable for translating sin, then, deliberate affront to the majesty of God, and prideful attitude, should, ideally, be linked. At the same time, the translator must not lose sight of sin's other definitive aspects – any lack of conformity to God's moral law, and any action, or attitude, that results in alienation from Him.[46]

THE THEOLOGY OF SIN

Besides providing a basis for defining sin, what else does scripture reveal about it? The essential issues, for the translator, seem to deal with sin's origin, its power, its universality, and its penalty. It would be a grievous mistake to unintentionally misrepresent any of these concepts, in the forms selected for the receptor language.

First of all, God cannot be the author of sin. This is stated explicitly (Job 34:10; Is 6:3; Ps 92:16), but is also drawn logically from the teaching that He created man perfect (Gen 1:26), that He does not tempt him to sin (James 1:13), and that He hates sin (Deut 25:16; Ps 5:4; Luke 16:15). Sin originated, not with God, but in the angelic world, and, from there, it was subsequently chosen by humanity (Gen 1:31; John 8:44; 1 John 3:8; Jude

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[45] Ibid.

[46] It is interesting to note here Davidson's observation (*Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 203-204) that the concept of sin in the OT is the obverse to the idea of God. In Amos, Yahweh is the supreme righteous ruler; sin is unrighteousness and injustice. In Hosea, God is unchanging love; sin is alienation of the community from Him. In Isaiah, Yahweh is the sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel; the sin of mankind is pride and insensibility to His majesty. So, he concludes, all sin is rooted in false conceptions of God. For additional biblical support, he cites Hos 4:1, where the prophet traces all evil to a lack of knowing God. Does this mean that attempts to successfully communicate the biblical concept of sin, then, should focus on nomenclature for deity, rather than on sin itself? The answer is beyond the scope of this paper, but the translator should not forget that the biblical idea of sin is inextricably linked to the character of God.

6). It was Adam, the representative head of the human race, who sinned for all who would come after, thus introducing both sin and punishment to the rest of humankind (Rom 5:12).[47]

The Bible also teaches that sin's power is in deception (Rom 7:11). It deludes people to think that, if they follow personal desires, life will be gained, but, in doing so, death is found instead. This is because, in pursuing life, we fundamentally desire or strive in the wrong direction; in our natural pursuit, and we trust the temporal creation, instead of the eternal Creator.[48] This pursuit of life (a pursuit, which arises, naturally, from all existence), becomes the most basic of sins, what scripture calls idolatry. Idolatry is not just a lack of knowledge; it is more than bowing down before carved statues. More accurately, it is a perversion of faith, a misplaced commitment.[49] Idolatrous pursuit of life is manifested by two extremes. On one hand, there is unthinking recklessness, the problem of the secularist, who ignores divine Law (Eph 2:1-3); on the other hand, there is considered busy-ness, the problem of the moralist, who is excessively zealous for Law (Gal 3:3). All humanity gets caught up in one or the other of these sinful delusions. It is noted that, according to scripture, the moral and religious self-effort of man is just as much sinful as the pursuit of sensual passion. Neither results in the acquisition of life.[50]

The Bible underscores that sin is a universal human experience. As people, our character and conduct show both our nature and actions to be continually wrong (Rom 3:9-20). While the secularists' condemnation is proven by their wilful ignorance (Rom 1:18-32), the moralists prove their guilt by failure to live up to the truth they know (Rom 2:1-16).[51] Paul uses universality of sin to preface his entire thesis that righteousness comes by faith, that it can never be attained by human effort. All people need the righteousness, available in Christ, because all are guilty of the proto-sin of

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[47] Berkhof, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p. 220-221.
[48] Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 248, 250.
[49] Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, pp. 238-239.
[50] Ibid., p. 239.
[51] Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 186-187.

apostasy, which is they have turned away from the Creator, in pursuit of life. From this, each and every one has been given over to further sin.[52]

Death is also universal to the human experience, and the Bible links it with sin. In the New Testament, death, relative to sin, is either juristically conceived of as punishment (Rom 7:11), or, elsewhere, as a fruit, which grows out of sin (Rom 6:21).[53] The idea of death being a punishment for sin, while foundational for Pauline doctrine, is first seen in the Old Testament. God, in giving the first prohibition, warns that death will be the consequence of disobedience (Gen 2:17).[54]

As already suggested, scripture teaches that people are responsible for sin, yet, at the same time, unable to contain it. Sin's power invades individual lives, grows within, and, in the end, totally enslaves (Gal 5:13). Once the sin process begins and escalates, a person can no longer break its power, nor can they escape from the fact that the process was initiated by them, and them alone. Against the never-ending escalation of evil, both the individual, and the small group, indeed, the whole mass of humanity, are helpless.[55] Life in this situation is grievously disabled; it becomes one of fear (Rom 8:15), as well as powerlessness (Rom 7:14). The essence of existence under sin is to be inwardly divided, at war with one's self. While a person's true intention is the preservation of their life, in reality, all their striving continuously undermines the goal.[56]

While scripture teaches humanity to be impotent before sin, it also teaches that sin is always under God's sovereign control. One instance is seen, when God commissions the prophet Isaiah. He warns His servant that, in spite of faithfully speaking the message, Israel's heart will be hardened. Paradoxically, it is Yahweh Himself, the very One commissioning the prophet, who will effect the hardening. He will cause the people to be insensitive, dull, unperceptive, and lacking in understanding. God sovereignly ordains unbelief, for a certain time and generation, all as a part

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[52] Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 250.
[53] Ibid., p. 249.
[54] Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, p. 244.
[55] Ibid., p. 241.
[56] Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 244-246.

of accomplishing His redemptive work later on (Is 6:9-13).[57]   In the New
Testament, Paul refers similarly to God hardening Pharaoh's heart, in order
to fulfil His divine purpose (Rom 9:16-18).[58]

We can summarise the Bible's teaching on sin, then, in five statements: (1)
it originated in the choices of rational created beings, (2) its power lies in
deception, (3) all people have succumbed to it, (4) its penalty is death, and
(5) while humanity is powerless before it, it has never been outside of
God's sovereign control.

OLD TESTAMENT VS NEW TESTAMENT

It was said, earlier, that the Old and New Testaments, in their basic
understanding of sin, do not differ. Since this is not acknowledged by all
scholars, and since there, admittedly, are differing theological emphases
between the two halves of scripture, an attempt will now be made to
resolve the tension.   Firstly, we intend to identify what theological
differences are actually discernible. Secondly, we intend to show that, in
spite of these differences, a unified understanding of sin, nevertheless,
exists across the canon.

Discernible Differences

Much has been made of Israel's shift in thinking, regarding sin from the
early patriarchal years, through the time of national identity, and on to the
post-exilic period. Early on in Israel's history there is an equating of sin
with breaking taboos of various local gods which then respond with harsh,
unremitting retribution (Gen 15:12-17; 17:10-14; 28:16-21; 31:19-20). As
Yahweh began to reveal Himself, and His purposes, to the patriarchs, this
appears to be the view they had of offending Him.[59]   Understandably, the
worldview of polytheistic peoples, from which they had emerged
(Chaldea), and subsequently encountered in their journeys (Canaan and
Egypt), continued to affect their personal belief and actions.   This

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[57] Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol 2, D. M. G. Stalker, tran., New York
NY: Harper & Row, 1960, pp. 154-155.
[58] But, in the Old Testament account itself (Ex 7:1-14:18), it is interesting to note that the
text alternates between God hardening Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh hardening himself
against God.
[59] Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 382-383.

conceptualisation of Yahweh, as a powerful, and somewhat-capricious tribal deity, whose taboos must be strictly observed, carried over into Israel's early history as a nation.

In contrast with this juristic, tribal-taboo perspective, later in the Old Testament, the offender's restoration within the faith community becomes central. Restoration was accomplished by means of the complex system for equivalent reparations and atonement, detailed within the Sinaitic covenant. A gentler (though not less serious) understanding of sin is thus evidenced. During the period of Israel's emergence as a nation, sin is increasingly viewed as breaking the exclusive covenant agreement with Yahweh, the One who has established not only the code of conduct, but also a means of atonement for when violation occurs. Yahweh has a vested interest in preserving the relationship between Himself and the Israelite community – His reputation. For the community's well-being, He desires that its internal relationships remain healthy as well.[60]

Finally, in the Old Testament, the view of sin completes its 180 shift, from the earliest focus on external performance (not breaking tribal taboos), to emphasising the inner attitudes of loyalty, necessary to maintaining a right relationship with God. The understanding of sin being rooted in inner disloyalty is reflected, especially, in prophetic literature.[61] Yahweh doesn't want the sacrifices of His people; He wants their hearts (Is 1:11-15; Jer 7:22-23). His relationship with them is more and more viewed as Father to

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[60] Ibid., p. 385.

[61] With regard to Israel's shift in thinking about sin, the Wisdom literature is not dealt with in the body of this paper. In these books, sin is considered from the standpoint of folly, rather than religion. The righteous are those who are superior in knowing how to relate to God, and apply this knowledge to life situations (Ps 14:1; Prov 1:7; Ecc 8:12-13). Some have said this evidences that a theological concept of sin developed later. In response, Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary*, pp. 44-45, say that firstly, knowledge of what life ought to be, and secondly, that digression from the norm of God's revealed plan necessarily results in censure, were both firmly fixed concepts in ancient Israel. Violation of the norm, God established, was the substance of sin. Furthermore, human failure in sin is even seen to serve God's sovereign purpose of validating His declared norm. The Wisdom literature then, does not show any further shift in Israel's thinking regarding sin, but, rather serves more as a bridge between the later, gentler concept of God (which includes His desire to show His people the right way in life) and the earlier concept of an angry tribal deity, who exacts vengeance.

children (Ps 103:13; Hos 11:1), or husband to wife (Ezek 16:7-8; Hos 3:1) – powerful metaphors of unbounded love, which should evoke a reciprocal response. But the characteristic response of the people, during the period, leading up to the exile, and beyond, was not to return love. Eichrodt writes that "despite all warnings . . . all lessons of history . . . the daily experience of the destructive effect, which the rejection of God has on life . . . the prophets see the people continuing on [their wilful apostate way] to perdition".[62]

But others have considered such analyses of sin's semantic development in the Old Testament to be highly exaggerated. Davidson, for instance, stresses that, from the very beginning of the Old Testament, and throughout, sin is always viewed as affecting covenant relationship; it is an offence against the author of the covenant, as opposed to the covenant itself.[63] He grants that the prophets unanimously make personal appeals to the people, on behalf of Yahweh, more than demanding mere observance of external laws, but says this understanding of sin represents nothing new, theologically. It is well understood, early on, that Yahweh's presence among His people made all sins to be actions done directly against Him. Two examples are Joseph's reasoning for avoiding liaison with Potiphar's wife (Gen 39:9) and David's actions of adultery and murder (Ps 51:4).[64] It is because sin is viewed as a personal affront to God, who has joined with His people in covenant, that the Old Testament writers are concerned with its seriousness, not because they were affected by tribalistic notions of breaking taboo.

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[62] Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 389.

[63] Davidson, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 217, says that there *is* a noticeable development of the idea of sin in the Old Testament, but this is not in terms of redefining what it is, but in understanding its locus of operation. More and more, it is seen to be inwardly operational in the attitude and mind of the individual; less and less, is it viewed as mere external actions. Cf. Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary*, p. 47, where they note a somewhat-different development. They say that, because Israel, early on, viewed every transgression of the Law as sin, two trends emerge: (1) to level down (i.e., minimise the seriousness of all offences); and (2) to differentiate levels of infraction from flagrant acts of rebellion (especially idolatry), at one extreme, to unwitting ritual offences, at the other. The former extreme category is seen to be mortal, perhaps, to the point of cutting off covenant relationship, but the latter category can be expiated by good works, purifications, and sufferings.

[64] Davidson, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 213.

Eichrodt counters, however, with examples where objective offence alone is obviously in focus: unwitting adultery will bring guilt, punishable by death (Gen 20:3ff), a breach of a holy vow by one individual places the whole community under the curse of God (Josh 7:11), an unwitting ritual offence causes immediate death (1 Sam 14:43ff). In these cases, he says, the supreme norm of action is the inviolability of the taboo.[65] It seems only fair to conclude that, yes, polytheistic cultures around Israel did influence their understanding of sin, especially early on, and that this is reflected in scripture. Equally true, however, is that God's view of what constituted sin has remained unchanged from the beginning. As one would expect, this consistency, too, can be observed in scripture; there are always examples from among God's people of those who understood His heart, independent of prevailing cultural opinion.

Variation in the Old Testament emphases regarding sin is not restricted to gradual chronological development over the canon; it can also be noticed within the writings of a single author. Firstly, differing aspects of sin are, at times, emphasised from one passage to the next (often by means of changing synonyms). Secondly, not all sins are accorded equal significance (motive, especially, is determinative). Kittel and Friedrich say that, while every violation of Law was considered a transgression, the focus shifts from passage to passage, between the offending action, itself, the attitude behind it, and the resultant state of the sinner (i.e., guilt).[66] Eichrodt categorises references to sin slightly differently – those, which focus on psychic state (before or after committing offence), as opposed to those focusing on the specific act.[67] Regarding the severity of particular sins, he adds, each situation was carefully weighed, according to legal casuistry, intention, and circumstances. When all sins were thus analysed, idolatry was established as the most grievous, the reason why previous generations had been judged.[68]

Old Testament theology concerning sin has engendered at least two more controversies. Firstly, some have argued, wrongly, that sin was perceived,

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[65] Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 382.
[66] Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary*, p. 47.
[67] Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 381.
[68] Ibid., pp. 391-393.

primarily, as the community being alienated from God. Teaching does abound to the effect that national calamity will result, when loyalty to Yahweh is abandoned.[69] But Judaism, in spite of recognising the general effect sin has on the entire community (e.g., Jos. 7:1-12), clearly sees sin as an individual, rather than a collective, problem (Ezek 18:2ff).[70] Gerhard Von Rad points out that both Jeremiah and Ezekiel defend the faithfulness of God, in this regard, countering the popularly-expressed view that God would angrily judge the nation, as a whole, without regard for individual righteousness (Jer 31:29f; Ezek 18). The two prophets are concerned to balance the truth that sin effects the entire nation with the truth that God is a righteous judge, to whom each created individual stands in direct relationship.[71] Even as far back as the patriarchal period, this is evident – Sodom ends up being destroyed, not because of its sin alone, but because 10 righteous people were not found there (Gen 18:20-32).

Secondly, there has been disagreement as to whether the Old Testament teaches that all humans are sinful. Eichrodt says that the doctrine of evil impulse, innate in all people, is clearly upheld,[72] and, elsewhere, that "behind particular sin, stands the entire sinful human nature, whose will is perverted against the wishes of God". Sin, accordingly, must be universal. Gentiles sin by breaking the Adamic and Noachic covenants, and by refusing the law, when it is offered to them; Israelites sin by breaking the law.[73] But then, Eichrodt (along with Kittel) says the Old Testament suggests that a few saints, like Moses, Elijah, and Hezekiah, avoided sin, entirely, by free will and the gift of the Law.[74] How then are scriptures like Ecc 7:20 explained, which says, "There is not a righteous man on earth, who continually does good, and never sins"? Davidson disagrees with Eichrodt and Kittel's opinion, claiming that "the Old Testament teaches [as does the New] that *all* individual men are sinners".[75] The only exceptions

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[69] Davidson, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 221.
[70] Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary*, p. 47.
[71] Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 266-267.
[72] Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 392. Eichrodt also notes, Ibid., p. 384, that sin is perceived in the OT as growing, once it takes hold of an individual (e.g., King Saul in 1 Sam 17-20).
[73] Ibid., p. 387.
[74] Ibid., p. 393; cf. Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary*, p. 47.
[75] Davidson, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 217.

would be references to Messiah, who is expected to be sinless, and who, during His reign, will establish sinlessness for the rest of humanity.

Conflict or Complementarity?

So, in what way, if any, does the New Testament conflict with the Old Testament understanding of sin? One scholar states that, whereas the Old Testament, alternately, emphasises sin being a transgression of law (offence against God), and sin being the resultant psychical state (guilt, which necessitates reparation), the New Testament concept of sin purposefully joins these two ideas together. His argument notes the different words, used in the Matthean and Lukan accounts of the Lord's prayer – the former uses "forgive us our debts", the latter "forgive us our trespasses".[76]

Without suggesting that the overall definition of sin changes from Old to New Testament, Kittel and Friedrich observe far greater complexity than this, in their treatment of the New Testament's understanding. What is being emphasised about sin, they say, changes from author to author, and from one section of scripture to the next. In the synoptic gospels, for instance, Jesus does not speak much about sin, but acts in awareness of it; He is conscious of being the victor over it. In ministry, Jesus proclaims His divine lordship over sin, in both word and work. He came to call sinners to repentance, to accept solidarity with them, and to victoriously offer them forgiveness, by His death and resurrection.[77] In contrast, John focuses on Jesus' carrying away the burden of humanity's sin on the cross (John 3:14-17; 1 John 3:5). His atoning work for all rests on His own sinlessness. Sin is action that contradicts the divine ordinance, brings servitude to demonic power, is universal, involves sin against others, and brings guilt and separation from God. To reject Jesus, is to die in sin; to receive Him, and confess sin, is to find forgiveness (John 8:23-24; 1 John 1:9; 5:16-17).[78]

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[76] Kenneth E. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1980, p. 13.

[77] Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary*, p. 49.

[78] Ibid., pp. 49-50. Cf. Kenneth Grayston, "A study of the word 'sin', with its correlatives: 'sinner', 'err', 'fault', 'guilt', 'iniquity', 'offence', 'malefactor', 'mischief', 'perverse', 'transgress', 'trespass', 'wicked', 'wrong' " (Pt. 2), *The Bible Translator* 4.4 (1953), pp. 149-152. Grayston explores the verb and noun for "sin", in the context of the synoptics, Paul, Hebrews, and the gospel of John.

Pauline focus, though, is on God's work in Christ. Sin's specific reality is made clear in conjunction with emphasising that Christ, alone, rescues us from its power. At its root, sin is hostility to God, whether in zealously pursuing self-righteousness, through law, or conversely, in ignoring law, and pursuing fleshly impulse. Sin fails to acknowledge God (Rom 1:21); it begets more sin (Rom 1:24ff.); it enslaves (Rom 7:14); it has a demonic quality (Rom 7:13);[79] it brings guilt before God (Rom 2:1-3); and it hands us over to death (Rom 7:15ff). Into this universally-experienced human predicament, came the sinless Jesus, with the purpose of judging and destroying sin (2 Cor 5:21). He became humanity's sin, in vicarious atonement, through crucifixion and resurrection, in order that all who believe can freely receive remission from sin (Eph 1:7). Those who believe, die to sin, and become free of its power (Rom 6:2, 7), but tension remains between the somatic life, and pneumatic life, up until the time of Christ's return, at which point He will absolutely abolish both sin and death (1 Cor 15:26).[80]

A. Hodge notes such differing emphases among New Testament writers, but argues against any notion that Pauline and Johannine beliefs,

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[79] Cf. Lonny Matsuda, "Personification in Paul's Letters", in *Notes on Translation* 1-105 (1985), pp. 19-34. Paul's highly-developed imagery of sin, as an animate being, is described at some length. Matsuda's main point is that translating this personification, literally, in what he describes as situations of "extreme degree of distinction", results in zero meaning being communicated. For our purposes, here, we simply note that personification of sin, in scripture, is a commonly-used literary device, characteristic of Paul, and one, by means of which, he emphasises sin's power to invade, control, grow within, and eventually destroy, a human life. In Matsuda's words: "Paul indicates, through the use of personification, the great degree that 'sin' . . . influences man."

[80] Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary*, p. 50. Cf. William Barclay, *The Mind of St Paul*, New York NY: Harper & Brothers, 1958, pp. 183-185. Barclay sets out, in greater detail, the Pauline view of sin. He identifies nine theological distinctives as: (1) sin is the universal problem of humanity; (2) the Law both defines sin, and produces sin (as soon as something is forbidden, it becomes more desirable to human nature); (3) through sin, humanity fails to measure up to the standard of God's glory (the image of God, which He intended to display through people is marred); (4) sin grows like a cancer, and cannot be contained by human effort; (5) sin leads to death – in the present, morally and spiritually (Rom 7:11; 8:10), but, later on, physically (Rom 5:12, 21; 6:23); (6) sin does not remain an external power, outside a man, but takes up residence within him; (7) sin hinders the work of Christ, and the spread of the gospel; (8) sin is the opposite of faith; and (9) God's grace (which works through faith) is sin's only antidote.

concerning sin and law, are contradictory. He points out that, while Paul says law must exist for there to be sin (Rom 4:15), John says that sin is rebellion against conscience, the organ of God's law, written on every human heart (1 John 3:4). So, instead of contradiction, he sees the arguments of the New Testament building upon one another. In the mind of both Paul and John, conscience is equated with law, regardless of how badly the conscience has become warped by the filter of human experience and rationalisation.[81]

A common criticism, concerning Paul, is that he was obsessed with the idea of sin and guilt, that he saw all natural desire as evil. Purportedly, he thus distanced himself theologically from other biblical writers. But Kittel and Friedrich remark that Paul's view of the flesh, or natural desire, is not sinful, "in the sense that sin is equated with the body, but in the sense that we are determined by sin in our carnal being".[82] William Barclay describes Paul's understanding of flesh as "human nature divorced from God, not as the physical body".[83] Regarding Paul's critics, he says, "Paul saw, with intensity, the seriousness of sin, but it would be quite wrong to say that he had a morbid obsession with the idea of sin". He cites the example of Philippians, where Paul does not even once use ἀμαρτία, the most common Greek word for sin. Furthermore, of the 62 times he does use the word, 48 times (over 75 percent) are in Romans, where he focuses on the theology of the Christian faith, a subject, which, necessarily, includes treatment of sin, and salvation from it, in some detail.[84]

Critics have, alternatively, claimed Paul distanced himself from other writers of scripture, not because he was laden with guilt, but because he was heavily influenced by Greek philosophy. But Ryrie, in explicating the Pauline view of sin and salvation, declares it to be Hebraistic, not Hellenistic. In the 1st century, the dominant Greek view was that sin is undeveloped good, a necessary stage in the upward progress of men toward God. The material world is sinful, within which, man can, and must,

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[81] Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, p. 317.
[82] Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary*, p. 50. Note that they refer to "flesh" as "carnal reality".
[83] Barclay, *Mind of St Paul*, p. 190.
[84] Ibid., p. 183.

gradually move away from attachment, to higher and higher states of perfection.[85] So, from this perspective, a mistake is not really moral, but intellectual, a failure to contemplate our true end, and the One, from whom we originated. Sin is but a temporary unfortunate episode in our journey back to true wisdom and knowledge. This view, however, is very much at odds with Paul's writings. To him, sin is absolutely a moral predicament, a deliberate declension of the will, which alienates man from God. A definition, which we have taken note of, earlier. Paul believed in moral depravity, that is, that sin is more than the sum of our evil actions, it represents our human condition.[86]

We have already noted Hodge's opinion that Paul does not differ from John in his understanding of sin. We have also seen Ryrie's comments, concerning Paul's theology arising out of Hebrew, rather than Greek, thought. There are numerous other scholars, who, likewise, see the writers of scripture complementing each other's theology, rather than undermining it. Many deny that there is any real tension even between the Testaments in this regard. Barclay says, for instance, that Paul's argument that, in Adam, all sinned, is not strange to the Jewish mind, because of their strong sense of an individual's solidarity with the (tribal) community. A person's identity is bound up with that of the group, to which a person belongs. For Paul, that "tribal" group is the entire human race.[87] Niebuhr agrees that Paul's doctrine, here, is not essentially different from traditional Judaism. The subtle difference is over whether sin, itself, is inherited, or merely the inclination to sin. He denies, therefore, the assertion of modernists that the Old Testament theology of sin is "optimistic", in contrast with "Pauline pessimism".[88]

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[85] Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 180-181. Later Bultmann remarks, however (p. 251), that Paul *is* under the influence of popular philosophy (gnosticism), when he writes of the Adamic curse. But, he adds, Paul avoids going too far into gnosticism, by his insistence that man was, and is, responsible for his own sinful predicament. For an excellent summary of the main streams of Greek philosophical thought in the 1st century, see Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, pp. 50-52, 127-129.

[86] Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 182.

[87] Barclay, *Mind of St Paul*, p. 184.

[88] Niebuhr, "Sin", p. 350.

What is more significant, says Niebuhr, than differences over how, or in what degree, sin is inherited, is "the agreement between Old and New Testament believers on the resultant affect of the inheritance – man is universally corrupt because of undue self-regard".[89] Kittel and Friedrich also tie the New Testament doctrine of sin to the Old, remarking that the Law (which, in Judaism, is determinative for sin, because it reveals God's holy will) is equally sacred to Paul, in that it "discharges its holy function, by unmasking sin".[90] Similarly, Bultmann regards Paul's teaching on sin and death as coming out of Jewish traditional thought.[91]

Rather than emphasising differences, it is possible to see much that the Bible presents, regarding sin, to be unified. In both Old and New Testaments, sin is defined primarily as an offence to God, which is rooted in prideful attitude; in both, the result of sin is alienation of relationship; in both, sin is pictured as lack of conformity to God's holy standard; in both, sin arises out of the free choice of created beings; in both, sin grows, and enslaves, within individual lives; in both, each individual is held accountable for their own sin; in both, there is a view of sin's universality; in both, there is an understanding that sin's consequent punishment is death.

So what are the ramifications for the Bible translator? Do we conclude that every reference to sin, across the canon, can be translated by a single word or phrase? On the contrary, it is important to remember that, while the essential concept remains unchanged in scripture, the focus on particular aspects of sin will shift from one passage to the next, and, furthermore, that, whenever this shift in attention is purposeful, it must be communicated. The shift in semantic emphasis sometimes results from context alone, but, more often than not, it is accomplished, at least in part, by employing

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[89] Ibid. Niebuhr goes on to say that this tendency of self-regard arises at every level of culture and moral attainment. It is seen in the vanity of saints, as well as in the atrocities of Hitler and Napoleon. Self-regard may manifest itself in forms of egotism, or in beneficial creativity, but it still is fundamentally focused on the temporal creation, rather than the eternal Creator, and, as such, is sin. The presuppositions, lying at the heart of modern man's actions towards one another, and how they conduct their relationships, belie that they truly believe that universal sin does not exist.

[90] Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary*, pp. 47, 50.

[91] Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 246.

different vocabulary. So, in conclusion, even after the translator has established a biblically-accurate (but general) term for sin in the receptor language, he or she must still remain carefully observant of these shifts in focus, and find suitable ways of expressing each of them.

BIBLICAL VOCABULARY FOR SIN

Having acquired a basic understanding of what defines sin biblically, and having shown that the Old and New Testaments do not appreciably differ, theologically, on their understanding of sin, we now turn to the specific lexical data of the scriptures – the words actually used to denote sin in Hebrew and Greek.

In the Hebrew language, pictorial power is used to convey the various aspects of evil or sin. "Each word", says Robert Girdlestone, "is a revelatory bit of philosophy, a philosophy, in which sin has caused the relationship between mankind and the Creator to become obscured."[92] As to the New Testament, Richard Trench writes, "[Sin] may be regarded, under an infinite number of aspects, and . . . is set forth, using a variety of images in Greek." He also says that the diagnosis of sin is more contemplated in scripture than anywhere else, but believes all languages are capable of conceptually grappling with the subject.[93] It is noted that word pictures, in any language, promote good communication, at least, if used rightly.

In order to facilitate a comprehensive translation solution, the following pages present all Hebrew and Greek words, translated in English as "sin", or a synonym of "sin", in conjunction with any information, helpful to understanding them. For ease of comparison, all possible renderings have been given in singular, nominalised (including gerund) forms, even though many of the occurrences in scripture are verbal or adjectival.[94] Also, where

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[92] Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, p. 76.

[93] Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, p. 239.

[94] Barnwell, et al, in their introduction to *Key Biblical Terms in the New Testament* [CD-ROM], write, "For some terms, the sense [of a single lexical item] may vary, to some extent, according to grammatical class. For example, the noun form may have certain senses, while the corresponding verb has some senses that are the same as those of the noun, and other senses that are different." But, in the article "Sin/Sinner", they then note that the verbal and nominal forms for the various sin words in scripture have identical semantic fields. For

key words have the same root, but differing lexical forms, or where those words have phrases closely associated with them, the key word has frequently been used to represent all the different forms and phrases. For example, instances of *bearing sin*, *committing sin*, *sin*, *sinfulness*, *sinned*, *sinning*, and *sins* would all be represented by the noun *sin*, as a single group.

Due to the volume of information reviewed, and the complex nature of the task, the data will not be overly punctuated with footnotes. In general, the information was assembled from the works of Kittel, Girdlestone, and Trench; from a few other respected Old and New Testament scholars; from translation resources, made available by SIL; and from Bible dictionaries and concordances.[95] The word groups for each language are ordered, according to frequency of occurrence, rather than alphabetically. English spelling of Hebrew words (including addition of vowels) follows the convention observed in the *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Finally, Appendices A and B show the various ways each of the Hebrew and Greek words for sin have been translated into English in the New American Standard version of the Bible, with a few alternative vocabulary choices of the New International Version occasionally being indicated.

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instance, "sin" is the act of offence, but "to sin" is defined simply as the action of committing offence; "perversion" is the moral twisting of God's standard, but "to pervert" is simply the action of committing perversion.

[95] The abbreviated bibliographic data for the word studies are as follows:

Barclay, *Mind of St Paul*, pp. 183-193.
Barnwell, et al, "Sin/Sinner", in *Key Biblical Terms in the New Testament* [CD-ROM].
Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 203-214.
Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 380-393.
Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, pp. 76-86.
Goodrick and Kohlenberger, eds., *The NIV Exhaustive Concordance*, pp. 1359-1809.
Grayston, "A Study of the Word 'sin' " (pt 1), pp. 138-140.
Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary*, pp. 18, 22-24, 34-35, 44-53, 391-394, 646-655, 772-773, 846-848, 912-915, 1010-1013.
Milne, "Sin", pp. 1116-1120.
Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 180-187.
Thomas, ed., *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, pp. 1477-1694.
Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, pp. 239-400.

The Old Testament Synonyms for Sin

1. חָטָא, חֵטְא, חַטָּא, חֲטָאָה, חַטָּאת – 341 occurrences[96]

The meaning is, essentially, an individual human being, or the entire human race, coming short of God's intended aim or goal. The word implies blameworthiness, even if the wrong action was not wilful. Furthermore, a specific wrong deed, word, or thought, is in focus, rather than a general condition. Milne says that "this root does not address the inner motivation of wrong action, but concentrates more on the formal aspect of deviation from the moral norm".

Kittel describes this word as metaphorical, with the sense of missing the way (Prov 19:2), missing what is sought (Prov 8:36), or missing the mark (Judg 20:16). But *sin* is not the word's primary sense; it is used legally for violation of custom, law, obligation, or treaty (e.g., Gen. 43:9). The shift, from the legal to a secondary religious sense, indicates that in the spiritual realm, too, dealings with God must follow a pattern.

The Septuagint translation usually used ἁμαρτία (to miss the mark); English translations mostly use *sin*, the most general word available. In piel (intensive voice), the verb's meaning alters to that of reconciliation, an offering for sin, or the act of purification. One example is David's plea to God for forgiveness (Ps 51:7). The intensive voice occurrences were not analysed as to how they were translated into English. For unmarked voice occurrences, there is a broad range of semantic meaning, centred on the central idea of "sin". NIV translates חָטָא by using nearly 20 different English words or word groups. NASB uses 16 word groups, but 94 percent of the time has *sin*.

2. רַע, רָעַע, רָעָה, רֹעַ – 745 occurrences[97]

The essential meaning is that of moral evil, or wickedness, linked to resultant ruin, or break up. This is explicit, in many biblical passages, where the word is used to bind a particular wicked deed with its moral

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[96] Piel (intensive voice) occurrences were not counted.

[97] Though, numerically, רָשָׁע has far more occurrences than חָטָא, it was placed second, because חָטָא is the most generic word for "sin" in Hebrew, and semantically includes all the other terms which follow.

consequences. Davidson suggests the word is etymologically linked to the violence of breaking, or the noise associated with it. In NIV, 53 percent of occurrences are translated as *evil*, *wicked*, or *bad*. Elsewhere, one finds a wide variety of words being chosen: *wrong*, *harm*, *trouble*, *disaster*, *wildness*, *ugliness*, *poverty*, *ferocity*, *malice*, *pain*, *ruin*, *criminality*, *displeasure*, and *immorality* are all used, as the translators saw them suiting the context. To this list, NASB further adds *calamity*, *defamation*, *destroying*, *defect*, *discomfort*, *distress*, *grief*, *injury*, *misfortune*, *sadness*, *selfishness*, *treachery*, *ugliness*, *unpleasantness*, and *wretchedness*. Note: many of the less-frequent English renderings parallel the Tabo concept of *kuba* (generic bad). The Tabo people traditionally believe unpleasant circumstances come about, specifically because a taboo was violated.

3.　　רָשָׁע, רֶשַׁע, רִשְׁעָה – 342 occurrences

This is the most-general term for wickedness in Hebrew. Etymologically, it refers to tossing and confusion; its usage implies that evildoers find themselves in a restless state. NIV and NASB correctly follow the above description in translating רָשָׁע and its forms; the Septuagint, however, usually used ἀσεβής (ungodly), which Girdlestone claims to be less satisfactory. NASB translates רָשָׁע as *wickedness* over 90 percent of the time.

4.　　עָוֹן – 230 occurrences

This word very much carries the idea of a person being held accountable for wrongdoing. At times, the context demands it must be translated as *guilt*, that is, with the focus on the resultant psychic state of the offender, as opposed to the offence itself. It is translated, in NIV, most commonly as *sin*, *guilt*, *wickedness*, *iniquity*, or *punishment*. For NASB, the most-frequent translation is *iniquity*, a choice used over 80 percent of the time.

5.　　פָּשַׁע, פֶּשַׁע – 134 occurrences

The essential meaning is revolt, rebellion, or refusal to submit to rightful authority. The word can be used non-theologically, as with Israel *rebelling* against the house of David (1 Kings 12:19), but, when used theologically, it is the profoundest Hebrew word for conveying the idea of defiance against God's holy lordship. Accordingly, NIV translates 35 percent of the

occurrences with a specific mention of rebellion: *offence* and *sin* are also fairly common. In contrast, NASB uses *rebellion* only 20 percent of the time, and *transgression* almost exclusively elsewhere. Without looking at specific contexts, it would appear that NIV, more so than NASB, tries to capture the generally-agreed-upon meaning of פֶּשַׁע, whenever context permits.

6.   אָשַׁם, אָשֵׁם, אַשְׁמָה – 101 occurrences

This Hebrew word, more than any of the other synonyms for sin, has invited controversy in translation. Some scholars have claimed the word describes sins of omission; others claim it refers to particular sins of breaking the Mosaic covenant; others say that it has (like עָוֹן) a focus on the resultant psychic state of the offender, rather than on the offence. Regardless of the word's particular focus (which admittedly could vary with context), all agree that it connotes having a lack of excuse before God. The Septuagint translated it with πλημμέλεια (mistake), a word, which Trench describes as meaning "being in discord with the harmonies of God's creation". KJV translated with *trespass* or *guilt*; NIV variously uses *guilt*, *condemnation*, *penalty*, *conviction*, or *punishment*; NASB adds *offence*, *sin*, and *wrong* to the NIV list.

7.   אָוֶן – 86 occurrences

Girdlestone identifies the meaning as vanity, emptiness, or nothingness; he says the root is connected with "desire". Many of the references are within a context of idolatry, in which case, the usage implies that the worship of idols is vain, empty, and purposeless. NIV only once opts for the meaning of *emptiness*; it has chosen renderings of *evil*, *wickedness*, or *sin*, instead. Likewise, NASB usually translates with *wickedness* or *evil*, and only once uses *vanity*.

8.   עָוַל, עַוְלָה, עָוֶל, עַוִל – 81 occurrences

Essentially, the meaning is a lack of integrity, or moral rectitude. The Septuagint usually translated it by using ἀδικία (unrighteousness). NIV translated it with 18 different word groups, indicating that context has a large bearing on the particular sense of this word group. The most-frequent renderings are *evil*, *wickedness*, *wrong*, *dishonesty*, *ruin*, *perversity*, and

injustice. NASB chooses similarly, but uses *iniquity* and *unrighteousness*, where NIV, respectively, has *evil* and *wickedness*.

9. מַעַל – 67 occurrences

The essential meaning is a breach of trust between man and God. NIV captures this idea by rendering מַעַל as *unfaithfulness* or *guilt* (*of unfaithfulness*). Besides variations of *unfaithful*, NASB uses *acting treacherously*, *breaking faith*, *falsehood*, and *trespass*.

10. עָמָל – 54 occurrences

The primary meaning is that of trouble, travail, and trial, each of which may suggest moral overtones, but not necessarily. In a number of scriptural passages, however, there is explicit linkage of this word with sin, as the origin of human struggle. In these cases, it is translated into English by a word carrying appropriate moral force, for example *perversity* (Num 23:21), *iniquity* (Hab 1:13), *wickedness* (Job 4:8), and *mischief* (Job 15:35). In more neutral contexts, NIV uses *misery*, *suffering*, *bitter labor*, *oppression*, and *distress*. To the NIV list, NASB adds *anguish*, *labor*, *misery*, *sorrow*, and *injustice*.

11. שָׁגַג, שִׁגְגָה, שָׁגָה – 46 occurrences

Girdlestone does not mention this, because it describes unintentional, or accidental, sin, unlike the previous words discussed. However, instances, where the word is used in the Old Testament, still occasioned God's wrath; atonement was requisite. Accordingly, Eichrodt includes it in his discussion of Old Testament synonyms for sin. Milne describes the word's basic sense as "straying from the correct path . . . indicative of sin, arising from ignorance [or] sin against unrecognised ritual regulations". NIV uses *unintentional sin*/*wrong*, *accident*, *mistake*, *error*, *deception*, *wrong*, *straying*, *staggering*, *captivating*, and *wandering*. NASB most-typically uses *unintentional sin* or *error*, but, elsewhere, adds *misleading*, *reeling*, *intoxication*, and *exhilaration* to the NIV choices.

12.   עֶבֶר – 18 occurrences[98]

The meaning (in moral contexts) is essentially to cross over a forbidden boundary, either purposefully, or unintentionally.   It also has many occurrences, where the literal non-moral sense is intended.   The piel (intensive voice) form results in a meaning more akin to sacrifice, forgiveness, or appeasement.   For NIV, moral sense renderings are extremely varied, often with only a single occurrence of the following – *violation*, *disobedience*, *breaking (a rule)*, *transgression*, *exceeding*, *turning aside*, *disregard*, *failure*, *fall*, *knowing no limits*, *moving beyond*, *overstepping*, *overrunning*, and *missing (a necessary goal)*. NASB uses similar choices.

13.   עָוַת, עַוְתָה – 12 occurrences

The meaning is, essentially, to pervert or distort the Creator's natural plan by evildoing.   The Septuagint translated this word using ἁμαρτία, ἀνομία, and ἀδικία, none of which really parallel the original meaning, according to modern scholars.   Most English versions use either *wrongdoing* or *perversion*.   Besides these renderings, NIV, at times, translates with *cheating*, *frustrating*, *twisting*, *making crooked*, *stooping*, *deprivation*, and *warping*, according to the suitability of these words to particular contexts. NASB adds *bending*, *defrauding*, and *subversion* to the NIV list.

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[98] Only unmarked voice occurrences, in which moral sense is indicated by context, are counted.

The New Testament Synonyms for Sin

1.   ἁμαρτάνω, ἁμάρτημα, ἁμαρτία – 219 occurrences[99]

According to Trent, in classical Greek literature, the word group is used with little of the severity, connoted in later religious texts. For instance, Homer uses the word over 100 times to describe a warrior hurling a spear, and missing his intended target. Apart from this military sense, it was also used by Aristotle to describe missing a valid point in formal debate (Poet, 25), and elsewhere, of a person, who goes beyond the limit of his natural abilities (Poet, 13). Plato and Xenophon were the first to use the word with ethical/moral connotation.

Kittel says that, by the time it was used in the Septuagint, it carried the full sense of moral guilt, and conscious opposition to God. Here, it was used as a general term for sin, but also was used to translate the specific sin of arrogance. Milne adds that, in the Old Testament, it can also convey the idea of going on the wrong road. Kittel says that, in the New Testament, the word group generally refers to offence against God, concomitant with guilt, in which there are three recognisable senses: (1) an individual act of sin (either the offence, or the remission by God may be in focus, as in Acts 2:38; 1 Tim 5:22; Rev 1:5 and Mark 2:5; Acts 7:60); (2) human nature, set in opposition to God (John 9:41; 1 Cor 15:17; Heb 4:15); and (3) sin, personified as poetic imagery (Rom 5-7; Heb 12:1). Barnwell, Dancy, and Pope identify four senses for the nominal form, by adding the sense of an accumulated record of wrongdoings (e.g., Matt 1:21; Mark 2:5; John 9:41)

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[99] The Greek words for "sinner" are not dealt with here, because, in the Tabo language, nominalisation of an agent is accomplished rather simply by adding the suffix *-dawa* (singular agent) or *-pi* (plural agent) to the verb or verb phrase. Once appropriate verbal forms are determined for each necessary word group or biblical context, there should be no difficulty in subsequently deriving forms for agents. The issue for this paper remains limited to how the various synonyms of sin (the verbal action, or its nominalised counterpart) should be translated best for Tabo. It is noted that, for one special use of "sinner" in scripture, the above nominalisation process is not appropriate. This is the sense, seen in a number of contexts in the gospels, where "sinner" refers to men or women, whose occupation or trade was itself sinful, for example, moneylenders (who broke the law of Moses, by charging interest), tax collectors (who cooperated with the ungodly Romans), and prostitutes. Pious teachers of the Law thought it inappropriate that Jesus, a teacher sent from God, should mix with such people. See Barnwell, et al, in *Key Biblical Terms in the New Testament* [CD-ROM] for more on this special usage.

to Kittel's list. They note that this sense is sometimes translated in English as *guilt*. NIV translates it as *sin*, 95 percent of the time; otherwise NIV uses *guilt*. NASB uses *sin*, in all but one instance, where *committing offence* is found.

2. κακὸς, κακόω, κακία, κακοήθεια, κακοποιέω – 88 occurrences

Ryrie defines the word group as referring to intense, or grievous, wickedness. Milne says it is a general term for depravity. Kittel, however, describes the word less severely, saying it is first to be regarded as the outworking of the principle of evil, but that it can also denote incompetence, guilt, or simply trouble. Barnwell, similarly, considers it as the generic word for "moral badness", and adds that it has reference to anything judged wrong in the eyes of men or God. NIV renders six of 12 nominal occurrences as *malice*, with *evil*, *wickedness*, *depravity*, and *trouble*, elsewhere. NASB translates these exactly the same as NIV, except for substituting NIV's use of *depravity* with *wickedness*. NASB translates verbal occurrences with *doing evil/wrong*, *mistreating*, *harming*, and *being embittered*. For the remaining adjectival occurrences, the senses of *cruelty*, *loathing*, *wretchedness*, *wrongness*, and *sickness* are commonly used.

3. πονηρία, πονηρός – 85 occurrences[100]

Milne says the moral sense of the word conveys depravity, or intense wickedness. Kittel says it describes either persons who are evil, due to self-willed apostasy (Mark 10:18, 2 Thess 3:2), or things and concepts, which exist in opposition to God and His plan (Matt 15:19; John 7:7; James 2:4). Barnwell describes its meaning as very similar to κακὸς (generic "bad"), but perhaps even stronger. In the more severe cases, she says it means wicked, morally worthless, or degenerate. It is sometimes used in the title "the evil one", to refer to Satan. The non-moral sense is also frequent in the New Testament, and conveys the idea of being harmful, unserviceable, or useless (Gal 1:4; Eph 5:16; Rev 16:2). The word was also used by the Roman consul Gallio, in the secular sense of legal wrongdoing (Acts 18:14), but this usage is infrequent.

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[100] Non-moral instances of usage were not counted.

NASB translates it as *evil* or *evil one*, 70 percent of the time, with *malice*, *wickedness*, *bad*, *crime*, *envy*, *malignance*, *viciousness*, and *worthlessness*, elsewhere. NIV translates the word as *evil*, less frequently; other NIV renderings, not used by NASB, are *guilty conscience*, *pain*, *seriousness*, *sinfulness*, and *demon possession*.

4. ἀδικία, ἀδίκημα, ἀδικέω, ἄδικος, ἀδίκως – 69 occurrences[101]

The basic meaning of the word is to lack righteousness, but different contexts yield different emphases. In the Septuagint, the word group was used, primarily, to represent the idea of impiety. But, says Kittel, to this Old Testament sense, the New Testament adds three others: (1) the meaning of violating divine law, or to be in the wrong, a contrast of the character, and actions of the wicked, to that of the righteous (Matt 5:45; Acts 25:11); (2) injustice or dishonesty (Rom 3:5; Luke 16:10); and (3) gain, which is unlawful, or value that is illusory (Luke 16:9; 18:6). If the verbal form is used with an accusative, there is a resultant meaning of personal injury being inflicted (Luke 10:19; Rev 9:10). This is probably why Ryrie says that, more than any other Greek word for sin, ἀδικία connotes injustice done against a fellow human being.

The most common NIV renderings are *wickedness*, *evil*, *crime*, *harm/hurt*, *wrongdoing*, and *mistreatment*. NASB, most typically, uses *unrighteousness* and *injustice*.

5. ἀνομία, ἀνόμως, ἄνομος – 27 occurrences

Barnwell says the term characterises either: (1) any action that is contrary to a law, or (2) the quality of being disobedient to the law. The latter case can be considered as the condition of being alienated from the law, as

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[101] For the remaining eight synonyms, Barnwell describes them as all semantically fitting into the first two senses she identifies for ἁμαρτία – either a wrongful action, or the general sinful human condition. She says that "all the other words . . . have the same shared meaning [with ἁμαρτία] of doing something wrong in God's sight. In many contexts, no distinction can be made." This seems over-simplistic, considering that all the resources consulted (including Barnwell, herself) describe very definite distinctions in how the synonyms are used. Perhaps Barnwell is intending, rather, to say that the general term ἁμαρτία (with its broad range of sense) semantically covers the particular nuances of all the other synonyms. Barnwell also notes, regarding the remaining eight synonyms, "often they are used in doublets, one word emphasising, and reinforcing, the meaning of the other".

opposed to a specific sin (Rom 6:19). Besides the sense of non-observance of the law, it can also denote plain sinful acts, in contexts, where the law is not in focus (e.g., Heb 10:17). Gentiles are frequently characterised with the adjectival-form meaning that they pay no heed to the Law, or, even more strongly, that they intentionally oppose it. Sometimes the adjective is applied with no reference to Old Testament law (1 Tim 1:9; 2 Peter 2:8), but this is infrequent. NIV translates all but four occurrences to suggest, if not explicitly state, that law has been violated. Usually NASB's choices are similar, if not identical.

6. παράπτωμα – 20 occurrences

In classical works, the word referred to an error of measurement, or a blunder. Josephus used it, only in the general sense of befall. By New Testament times, a moral sense had definitely been acquired, but what that sense exactly is, has engendered much controversy. Jerome suggested the word referred to sins of the mind, as opposed to actual deeds. Augustine described it as a negative omission of good, in contrast to a positive doing of evil. Trench disagrees with both church fathers, arguing that there are instances of the word's usage, where sin is contextually both deliberate and heinous, for example Eph 2:1 and Heb 6:6. According to Ryrie, the word denotes a falling away, or a deviation from truth.

Kittel's explanation says that, as a verb, it means to stumble on something, while the nominal form means error – in both cases unintentionality is reflected. But Kittel also notes its usage in severe, purposeful contexts, as when it marks the totality of human sinfulness (Rom 5:20), or when it refers to Israel's rejection of the gospel (Rom 11:11-12). His conclusion is that "it is best to consider παράπτωμα as a general word for sin whose degree of seriousness is dictated by immediate context." Barnwell says rather simplistically that sense of παράπτωμα is identical to that of ἁμαρτία (i.e., general sin). NIV and NASB both translate it as *sin*, *trespass*, or *transgress*.

7. ἀσέβεια, ἀσεβέω, ἀσεβὴς – 17 occurrences

This is the profoundest term for severe rebellion against divine majesty, paralleling the Hebrew פֶּשַׁע. Kittel describes the word group as

demonstrating impiety, or having an attitude of contempt for God. This contempt, or disregard, could be towards any established religious, or civic, order. The word group is distinguished from ἀθεοτης (denial of the official gods), which was important for early Christians, who acknowledged themselves as atheists, with respect to the Greek pantheon, but who defended themselves against being characterised as transgressors of civil ordinances (e.g., 1 Peter 2:12). NIV translates the word group with variations of *ungodliness*, except for one time, where *unrighteousness* is used. NASB translates similarly, except for one rendering as *godless*.

8.   παραβαίνω, παράβασις, παραβάτης – 15 occurrences

Barnwell says this word group refers to disobeying a law or custom. Trench says it refers to where breaking a law, or crossing a restricted line, is intentional. As such, there is a connotation of far more serious offence than instances, where the more general ἁμαρτία is used. Kittel adds ὑπερβαίνω to the word group, a word used only once in the New Testament (1 Thess 4:6), where the meaning, in context, suggests *overreaching*, rather than *sin*. It is translated by NIV as *breaking a command*, *transgression*, *violation*, or simply, *sin*. NASB chooses similarly.

9.   παρακοὴ, παρακούω – 5 occurrences[102]

Kittel describes the moral sense of the word as a disregard of God's expressed desire or command (Matt 18:17; Acts 7:57). Trench comments that, in the Old Testament, disobedience is frequently equated with refusal to hear, even in situations, where a contrary act was not specifically carried out. NIV and NASB translate the first word as *disobedience*, and the second as *ignoring* (truth), or *refusal* (to listen).

10.   ἀγνόημα, ἄγνοια – 5 occurrences

These two words mean ignorance, or sins committed ignorantly. In the Septuagint, where there are numerous more occurrences of this word than in the New Testament, the meaning is especially obvious. For instance, Lev 4:13-19 shows the word focusing on sins committed heedlessly, out of a lack of circumspection, or out of imperfect understanding of the law. In the NT, however, the actual verb ἀγνοέω, from which these words derive,

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[102] An additional three occurrences have a sense that is decidedly non-moral.

has no essential moral connotation. It simply means to not know, or to be ignorant. It is in the nominal form that, for some contexts, disobedience and ignorance are linked (e.g., Rom 10:3). In these cases, ignorance, theologically, is not just pardonable lack of information. The failure to understand what one should have understood necessitates forgiveness.[103]

11.   ἥττημα – 2 occurrences

The word refers to a dereliction, or fault of moral consequence. In Rom 11:12, Paul says that the Jews' ἥττημα (moral failure) has resulted in gain for the Gentiles. And later, in 1 Cor 6:7, he says that Christians, who enact lawsuits against other believers, already have experienced ἥττημα (i.e., they have suffered loss, become derelict, and/or they have demonstrated personal failure).

In his discussion of words dealing with sin, Milne also mentions ἔνοχος (a legal term, connoting guilt), and ὀφείλημα (the word for "debt"). These were not dealt with here, however, because, although each word could be used with reference to sin, in the New Testament occurrences, they almost exclusively bear the legal sense. Although ὀφείλημα is used figuratively, in Greek, as an alternative to "sin", the word "debt" is not used this way in modern English.

Also, of the nine Greek words that Trench identifies as synonyms of sin, only eight were dealt with here. The ninth one, πλημμέλεια is found only in the Septuagint, where it was used consistently to translate the Hebrew אָשָׁם (and its variant forms). Since אָשָׁם was considered, along with the other Old Testament synonyms, it seemed redundant to deal with πλημμέλεια separately, again.

Finally, a group of Greek words, referrent to immorality, or specific sexual sins, also exist. Because of their more-limited context of usage, they are not included in the present study. The members of this group, which

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[103] Paul's teaching on sin may reflect Greek philosophy here. The Stoics especially focused on knowledge as the cure for societal ills. Ignorance of self, of the gods, and of evil, resulted in man's predicament; ignorance was the one true evil. See Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary*, p. 18.

Barnwell identifies, in her discussion of sin, as a key biblical term, are: ἀκαθαρσία (moral uncleanness, sexual immorality), πορνεία (an immoral act, or unlawful sexual intercourse),[104] and ἀσέλγεια (unrestrained indulgence in sexual excesses, a lack of restraint of any kind, or unbridled wickedness).

CONCLUSIONS FROM WORD STUDIES

With the task of translating "sin" for the Tabo language in mind, the following observations are made from the lexical data, on the previous pages. Some of the observations are not novel, but simply undergird well-known translation principles, concerning functional equivalence between languages.

1. Thirteen Hebrew words (or word groups), synonymous with sin, translate into 88 word groups in one modern English translation. This shows first that languages vary widely, in terms of vocabulary available for describing human experience. Kittel and Friedrich describe the Hebrew vocabulary for sin as "rich and flexible", especially in comparison with Greek.[105] English, though, while even richer than Hebrew, in terms of vocabulary, is arguably less flexible. With wider vocabulary, the choice of which word or words best fit a particular situation may, at first, seem more difficult. Paradoxically, the choice may be easier; because the semantic ranges of available words widely overlap, there is usually no one solution, which can claim outright superiority over others. Style and aesthetic taste become determinative. Conversely, in a language, where there is much more limited vocabulary, the choice, while initially appearing easier, is not necessarily so. What is more difficult, in this case, is, firstly, ensuring the semantic range of each available word is clearly understood, and, secondly, that, in translation, each choice is appropriately matched up with the contexts being considered. The Tabo

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[104] Barnwell, et al, *Key Biblical Terms in the New Testament* [CD-ROM], note that, in the book of Revelation, this group of words is often used figuratively to refer to idolatry.

[105] Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary*, p. 44.

language lies in this latter limited-vocabulary category of language.

2.   Old Testament words for sin in Hebrew have very broad ranges of meaning, such that the sense of individual words depends more highly on context than lexicality. One-to-one correspondence of Hebrew-to-English words is not found in any of the translations. This is not entirely due to the larger vocabulary, available to English translators, as evidenced by a number of English words (e.g., *sin*, *transgress*, *wickedness*, *iniquity*) being used to translate more than one of the core 13 Hebrew word groups analysed.

3.   For Old Testament passages, there is wider disagreement, than in the New Testament, regarding the choice of English synonyms, to represent sin and its consequences. The same English synonyms are used, but determination of which Hebrew words each represents, and in which contexts they are appropriate, is highly variable. Two reasons exist for modern translation committees hitting upon different solutions. Firstly, as already stated, with the great breadth of vocabulary available in English, semantic ranges of many words widely overlap, such that, at times, there is no one solution superior to others. This has provided translation committees with greater flexibility, in pursuing aesthetic taste, which is, of course, subjective, rather than scientific. Secondly, compared to Greek, much less extant Hebrew literature exists from the same period that the scriptures were recorded. As a result, the semantic range of some Hebrew words can be determined only from within scripture itself – noticing how the same word is used in a variety of contexts, in order to ascertain its full breadth of meaning. Therefore, there is, at times, a greater degree of uncertainty, as to what a word's particular sense is within certain contexts, especially if the context appears but once. Greater uncertainty begets greater controversy.

4. For the Greek synonyms, the word παράπτωμα, alone, seems to have engendered controversy, especially (but not exclusively) over the degree of severity it connotes.

5. The other 10 Greek words, which represent sin, have clearly defined semantic ranges. With greater precision, there is more consistency, as to the course major English translations have followed. But English, relatively, has a far larger vocabulary, from which to make semantic matches. In English translations of the New Testament, therefore, as might be expected, there is an increase in the number of word groups used to translate the Greek words for sin. In NASB, for instance, 11 word groups in the original have translated into 37 English word groups. (Even more synonyms are available to choose from, for NIV employs at least another 14 words, beyond the NASB list.) But, in translating the New Testament, this increase of vocabulary from the original language to English is still modest in comparison with the Old Testament (see observation #1). The higher degree of precision for the sense of particular Greek words comes, in part, from studying their use within the large volume of extra-biblical literature.

6. The data raises the question of how one can possibly match up less-rich vocabulary of a minority language with the dozen or so synonyms the biblical writers had available for treating the topic of sin, let alone the multitude of nuances, reflected in English translation choices. Certainly, the task is difficult, but it must still be attempted, just as for any other key religious term. Fewer receptor language words, with broader semantic range, will have to cover the same area of sense that a greater number of source language words did, initially. There will not be one-to-one correspondence. In some instances, phrases will have to be used, where no single lexical item is found suitable. Indeed, the need to translate with phrases in the receptor language increases exponentially with cultural and linguistic distance from the source. But, in using phrases, care must be taken that the end product is not overly wordy, that is, to the

extent that public reading becomes awkward, or that a text's overall theme is lost, within the exaggerated length of sentences.

7. Kittel and Friedrich say that the various Hebrew roots, which carry the idea of sin, cluster around the senses of sin/negligence, rebellion, guilt, and error.[106] One possible solution for translating Old Testament passages, then, would be to find four appropriate receptor language matches for these varied aspects of sin, using them as context dictates. Perhaps, an additional fifth match should be sought, if the receptor language, unlike Hebrew, sees a semantic divergence between "negligence" and generic "sin", based on the degree of intention in committing offence. Such a solution for translating Hebrew vocabulary could also be applied to the New Testament, but, since most Greek synonyms for sin have a high degree of recognised semantic precision, it may be preferable, in the majority of contexts, to translate them with equally precise words, or word phrases, of the receptor language.

A second possible translation solution is to find three alternative words (or phrases) to correspond with the three foci, for particular acts of offence against God – the inner attitude, the act itself, and the resultant state. Kittel and Friedrich point out that context (especially for the Old Testament) generally determines which of these three is in view. Regarding the resultant state of sin, they remark, "Often the terms for sin allude to it in such a way that the translation 'guilt' is justifiable, or [even] necessary."[107]

A third solution would be to follow Kenneth Grayston's division of the Old Testament references to sin into three semantic categories: (1) to miss a legitimate goal, or the right way; (2) to ascribe guilt, or indebtedness, to the instigator of a

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[106] Ibid., p. 45.
[107] Ibid.

deed; and (3) rebellion against a superior, or unfaithfulness to an agreement.[108] Again, depending on the receptor language's understanding of the terms "rebellion" and "unfaithfulness", a fourth term may have to be searched for, to adequately cover both semantic fields. Though Grayston uses different terms, his divisions roughly match up with those of Kittel and Friedrich, above.

Yet another possibility, is to follow Katherine Barnwell, and her colleagues, who, in their prepublication version of the CD-ROM, they are developing for SIL, focus on four New Testament senses, in which sin is used: (1) a specific act of wrongdoing; (2) the general condition of being sinful, in which human beings are trapped; (3) a personified force at work in people's lives to make them sin; and (4) an accumulated record of wrongdoings.[109] The first three senses on their list correspond exactly with those of Kittel and Friedrich for the New Testament, who for some reason, disregard the fourth.[110]

So, for our purposes, any of the above solutions, for dividing up biblical sin references, could serve to stimulate search for similar sense categories in the Tabo language, but none of them, in isolation, seems suitable. We are searching, if possible, to find a much broader paradigm for the Tabo language, one that adequately distinguishes each biblical synonym used to represent offence against God.

8. Finally, Davidson, in his studies of the Hebrew words for sin, wonders if, initially, they each had a non-moral connotation (e.g., miss the mark, crooked, uprightness, breakage, and crossing a line), which, only after a long period of time, accrued their present theological significance. If this is true, then, perhaps, the present effort being expended to find the

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[108] Grayston, "A Study of the Word 'Sin' " (pt 1), pp. 138-140.
[109] Barnwell, et al, *Key Biblical Terms in the New Testament* [CD-ROM].
[110] Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary*, p. 48.

"right solution" for Tabo is somewhat meaningless; the translator should just use whatever forms are available, regardless of their theological sense (or lack of it), and trust that, with sufficient passage of time, and good instruction, the proper meaning will be acquired.

But, after suggesting that Hebrew words may have only gradually acquired their moral sense, Davidson then goes on to deny the possibility. He reasons that (a) the Old Testament is uncommonly rich in ethical vocabulary, apart from synonyms of sin; (b) evil had existed in the universe, and been experienced by human beings, long before the first scripture was written; and (c) there are at least some Hebrew words, for which there is no non-moral associated sense or etymology (e.g., פָּשַׁע, which simply means rebel). He concludes that no real evidence exists to support the idea that ethical conduct, and thus the vocabulary necessary to speak about it, slowly evolved over human history.[111]

THE BEARING OF SIN ON OTHER DOCTRINES

If a person, or culture, ends up abandoning the biblical view of sin, the logical follow-through is to then redefine who Jesus is (no longer divine), what salvation represents (breaking free from social structures that oppress), and what faith is (confidence in one's human abilities).[112] In other words, one's view of sin is inextricably tied to other foundational Christian doctrines. To misapprehend God's perspective of sin, results in His character being distorted, the seriousness of sin being minimised, the logical sense of the atonement being lost, and, in its place, a human-based system for acquiring forgiveness, being developed. The system, devised to take the place of Christ's salvific work, ends up lacking genuine repentance, having a focus on keeping earthly relationships in harmony, propagating the idea of "no harm, no foul", and, most importantly, does not free individual men and women from sin's power. In the midst of theological confusion, it is usually the nature of God's character, and the

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[111] Davidson, *Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 207-210.
[112] Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, p. 674.

atoning work of Jesus Christ, which are most severely affected. The linkage of these doctrines will be considered, briefly, in the subsequent pages.

The Character of God

In defining sin, earlier, we noted that, throughout scripture, one of the most characteristic features of sin is its personal opprobrium before God. In this regard, Davidson, Bultmann, Kittel, and Milne all expressed agreement.[113] Why sin is so personally offensive to God is explained by Alexander Hodge: "Sin, in scripture, is not a mere violation of the law of our cultural constitution, nor of the system of things, but an offence against a personal Lawgiver . . . who vindicates His law with penalties. His law demands absolute moral perfection, because that is the nature of His own character."[114]

So, the biblical understanding of sin is integrated with the Bible's teaching concerning God Himself.[115] And God's character is, in turn, linked to the doctrine of the atonement. Atonement is necessary, of course, because sin exists, but Berkhof also argues its necessity, from the standpoint of who God is: He is absolutely just (Ex 34:7; Nahum 1:3; Rom 3:25-26); but, simultaneously, completely loving and good (Lev 11:44; Ps 5:4; Luke 24:26; Heb 2:10); He is immutable, and cannot lie (Num 23:19; Mal 3:6; Heb 6:18; 13:8); He is sovereign over all affairs that concern creation (Ps 2:1-5; Acts 4:24-27).[116] Out of God's love, and righteousness, and omnipotence, arises the resolution of humanity's insurmountable problem

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[113] See earlier discussion, pp. 55-56.

[114] Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, p. 317.

[115] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol 1, pt 1, G. T. Thomson, tran., Edinburgh UK: T. & T. Clark, 1936, pp. 7-8. Barth strongly argues that theology is an autonomous discipline, because of six criteria, of which the first two are significant to our present discussion: (1) that theology must be free from internal contradiction; and (2) that theology must display a coherence in the sum of its propositions. Now, while we have earlier argued that one cannot expect theology to answer every question (pursuing this type of goal flows naturally from our Western cultural presuppositions), at the same time, we would assert, with Barth, that there is a logical orderliness and consistency in the revelation of God. So, in no way, do we celebrate divine disorder in either God's character or His revelation, but, simultaneously, we do not let go of recognising that much remains a mystery. Tension and mystery are acceptable in theology; contradiction and chaos are not.

[116] Berkhof, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p. 370.

of sin. Sin, necessarily, leads to penalty from a holy, truthful, offended, and righteous God; if such sin were simply to be ignored (as would be the case, if God had not provided a means of resolution), this would result in the abrogation of His character, His very being.

The problem is often that, as humans, we tend to see God in our own image, rather than the other way around. The God of scripture is the "I Am", the great Creator and Sustainer of all; He is not just one of a multitude of similar spirit beings, all competing with one another, and wielding roughly the same level of power. The God of scripture has only those limitations, which are at odds with His own character, so totally unlike us, who are filled with internal contradictions and conflicting impulse; He is so extraordinarily different from us, whose functioning is limited by time, by the availability of material resources, and by being trapped within the confines of a physical body. More than anything, it is the nature of God's character, which distinguishes Him from the other beings, which He created. He alone is absolutely just, absolutely good, absolutely true, infinitely holy. Though this understanding of God inevitably conflicts with any human-centred perspective of life, it is, with the animist view of the spirit world, that there is special dissonance. Among the spirit beings, conceived of in animist tradition, none are conceived of like the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, we have come to know in the pages of scripture.[117]

Anthropomorphism is not entirely detrimental to faith. After all, it is often by means of human metaphors that God reveals Himself to us – He is a father (Matt 6:8, 32; 7:9-11), a shepherd (Ps 23:1), a warrior (Rev 19:11-15), a king (Ps 45:6), and even a mother (Is 49:15). Viewing God from out of personal experience is helpful, when it creates understanding of ourselves as free rational spirits, created in the image of God. However it *is* harmful, when it leads to conceiving God as having our human limitations, imperfections, and foibles. This, in turn, leads to misconstruing the reality and seriousness of sin – excusing it, minimising it, explaining it

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[117] Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, pp. 153-163.

away. All cultures do this, to a certain extent, but animists, in particular, have formalised the concept, in their religious beliefs and practice.[118]

Biblical Atonement

Atonement, which we have already mentioned, is most simply defined as the act of covering sin, by expiatory sacrifice. As to why expiation for offence is requisite, two answers are observed cross-culturally. The model, held by most animist groups, is that expiation is a means of averting retribution. The second model (the one closest to the biblical view), is that expiation restores a desired relationship.[119] Charles Hodge (among others) prefers the term "satisfaction" to "atonement", because: (a) it more correctly describes the entire process of Christ's work for sinners, rather than the end result alone; (b) the word "atonement" is ambiguous, because, in theology, and everyday usage, there is difference in the sense being stressed; and (c) in church theological tradition, "satisfaction" was the original term of choice.[120] Regardless of labelling Christ's work as atonement or satisfaction, His activity, on our behalf, makes logical sense, only when there is, firstly, an understanding of sin, from God's perspective.

The scriptures communicate several important truths, regarding this work of Christ. Firstly, scripture teaches that the atonement was grounded in God's good pleasure, a perfect demonstration of His justice and love (Ps 89:14; 103:6-14; Prov 3:3; John 1:14; 3:16-21).[121] Secondly, the atonement was purposeful. Its objective was, primarily, to satisfy God's righteous character, and, secondarily, to reconcile us to God.[122] Thirdly, the

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[118] Ibid., pp. 131-132.

[119] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol 2, New York NY: Scribner, Armstrong, 1877, p. 478.

[120] Ibid., pp. 469-470. Cf. Anselm's theological perspective, as recorded by Gonzalez, *History of Christian Thought*, pp. 165-167. Gonzalez writes: "The treatise by Anselm [on the satisfaction view of atonement] was epoch-making. Although they did not follow it at every turn, most later medieval theologians interpreted the work of Christ in the light of this treatise. After them, most Western theologians have followed the same path."

[121] Berkhof, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, pp. 367-368.

[122] Ibid., pp. 382-383. Berkhof also says, here, that the reconciliation aspect of the atonement may be more prominent in scripture, but only because this is the human side of Christ's work, to which we have an obligation to respond. Cf. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 482-484, 563.

atonement was vicarious, thus demonstrating the very highest form of mercy. Mercy, which is bestowed on the offender by the offended, cannot be surpassed. Personal human effort, whether individual or collective, could never have accomplished true satisfaction, the reason being that humanity's debt of sin, relative to the status of the One offended, was simply too great.[123]

How does the biblical representation of Christ's atoning work intersect with animist beliefs?[124] For most animist groups, sin is considered as an irritant within community life, one, which must be resolved, to allow peaceful coexistence. The Bible, however, regards sin as that, which brings about divine dishonour. From this basic difference of regard for sin, comes also a difference as to how sin is resolved. Rather than trust in the efficacy of an external divine solution, the animist looks to internal solutions, either personal ritual, or community activity. Offended spirits are appeased; taboos, which control behaviour, are reinforced; group harmony is maintained. But, in the very actions, whereby animists believe themselves to be dealing with sin, they merely heap further dishonour on the One, to whom satisfaction is really due.[125] Why? Because they are looking to the creation (themselves and the spirit realm) for life, rather than to the Creator of all.

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[123] Berkhof, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p. 383. Obviously Berkhof's few comments, mentioned here, form a very abbreviated view of all that he says, regarding the atonement in scripture. For a more complete discussion, see Ibid., pp. 367-383. Also see Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 468-543, for a thoroughly exhaustive, but less recent, treatment, and Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1985, pp. 798-858. Erickson's treatment is not only comprehensive, biblically and historically, but is highly readable, and takes into account the full spectrum of modern scholarship and opinion.

[124] See John Driver, *Understanding the Atonement for the Mission of the Church*, Scottdale PA: Herald Press, 1986, pp. 15-36, 243-253. Driver's thesis is that the atonement can be understood cross-culturally, if the evangelist makes use of the plural images, which the scriptures offer, as opposed to locking in to one particular view that satisfies the Western, logically-oriented mind-set. He proposes that scripture presents the atonement, variously, by means of at least ten separate motifs; evangelists, seeking to communicate outside their own culture, must discover the motif that is best understood by their audience.

[125] See Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 445, where he says that atonement is part of God's free forgiveness, directed toward the penitent, but it is not one and the same with forgiveness. Nor does atonement have inherent objective value; it is not a human performance that automatically buys off the anger of an offended god.

Even after such a community has been introduced to the gospel message, the tendency remains to hold on to old habits of belief, regarding satisfaction. Among the Tabo people, for instance, the following examples are typical. The whole village will attend church services for several Sundays, if there has been a widespread illness going around; but when general health returns, church attendance drops back to the sporadic, unenthusiastic norm. An old man, who fears death, sleeps with a copy of the gospel of Mark as his pillow; but local villagers apparently see no irony in the fact that that he is illiterate, that he has never made a Christian commitment, and that he has recently gone to the local shaman for succour. In the church, group prayer is both cultural, and a regularly-observed part of services; but, listening carefully at such prayer sessions, reveals that, for many, the same words and phrases are simply repeated over and over, almost as if they were magic incantations. Animists believe that the repetition of certain verbal formulae (including calling on the secret names of superior spirits) will release power to accomplish desired results. The real power in prayer, for the animist, is manipulative; it is in the knowledge and words of the speaker, rather than external to him.[126] In conclusion, it appears that, at the root of these biblically-incorrect animist ideas and practices (which continue to be observed even among "Christianised" groups), is a failure to comprehend who the Creator God truly is, and that all sin, because it is directed against Him, is a highly serious matter, one which our own internal resources will never be able to resolve.[127]

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[126] See Peter Lawrence, *Road Belong Cargo*, Manchester UK: Manchester University Press, 1964. This classic anthropological work provides an excellent treatment of the subject of Christianity and animism being syncretised in and around the Madang/Rai Coast area of Papua New Guinea during its colonial history, especially during the years before and after World War II. Chapter I: "The Native Cosmic Order" (pp. 9-33), and Chapter III: "From Paganism to Christianity" (pp. 63-86), are especially pertinent.

[127] It is interesting to note sociological similarities (yet theological differences) between animist groups and the Hebrew nation of the Old Testament. Both are collectivist, in terms of social awareness; the group has equal, if not greater, importance than individual members within it. See Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 483, where he says that, while, at times, the Hebrews conceptually linked unpleasant consequences with judgment for unpardoned sins, the connection was not an inseparable one, as is the case in animist circles. The OT reveals many examples, where misfortune is not because of sin, but is simply concomitant with the nature of the universe. In these instances, the right response of man is not guilt, but, rather, wonder at the mysterious greatness of the Creator, in contrast to the

Eichrodt states, rather emphatically, that forgiveness cannot be thought of as God's personal dealing with men for the restoration of fellowship, unless man is personally committed to this action, on the part of his God. He goes on to say, "What might be possible in the case of magical purification, or legalistically-conceived remission of punishment, is unthinkable, when it is a matter of . . . God [having been] injured by man. Here, man must be involved in his most-inward self, if there is to be a real renewal of fellowship. [One] must humble oneself before God, acknowledge . . . unrighteousness, and have an earnest will to turn away from sin."[128] But, even though man is involved in the process, forgiveness, biblically, only exists because of, and through, God, never man. The process of atonement (including the complicated, yet ordered system, detailed in the Mosaic covenant) is initiated by God's grace, and is only brought to successful conclusion by the same.[129] In the scriptures, atonement and forgiveness are always personal in nature; they are always without limit (1 Sam 3:14; Ps 103:3, 9-11).[130]

Looking Through a Keyhole With Both Eyes

To conclude this rather lengthy treatise on the Bible's perspective of sin, we return to its definition. For any definition of sin to be true, Alexander Hodge says, it must "first include all that, either the Word of God, or an enlightened conscience, decides to be sin, and, second, must include nothing else. To fail either criterion, leaves the definition with an inevitable degree of falsity." Furthermore, he says, when people do sin, their conscience is designed to point out such falsity, that is, to condemn individuals for not coming up to a standard, intuitively recognised as

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creature's limited understanding. But, balancing this, for the Hebrews, was a strong sense of collectively existing as a nation before God; even if one could be absolutely pure from sin, one knew, with certainty, that someone somewhere in the community must be living in violation of God's revealed will. Suffering in individual lives, therefore, did not necessarily lead to doubts concerning God's goodness, nor to the conclusion that one had obviously sinned, but, neither did it exclude that suffering could, and did, arise as a consequence of sin. When the whole nation suffered calamity, the conclusion that judgment was being served was more of a possibility.

[128] Ibid., p. 465.
[129] Ibid., p. 475.
[130] Ibid., p. 444.

obligatory.[131] Why then does this not always happen? The answer is that cultural worldview is distorted; accumulated generalisations, as to what is right and wrong, are not always done well. Such generalisations are always based on some sort of acquired human knowledge – ancestral lore, personal and collective experience, scientific data – as opposed to the unchanging truth of revelation. The Christian faith, while not denying the usefulness of these types of knowledge, for certain purposes, upholds revelation as supreme. It asserts that what the Bible has made known about sin (or any other doctrine) is paramount; all other human cognition must give way before it. Hodge summarises, therefore, that, regarding sin, only two competing means are available, to determine what it actually is – the Word of God, and popular intuitive judgments. The latter, of course, are not necessarily valid.[132]

Accordingly, ultimate reality can be found, only in biblical revelation. But Wakefield, whom we referenced earlier, wisely cautions: "No one, regardless of culture, perceives reality directly. Rather, we see it through cultural grids, which act as filters, noting only those aspects of reality, which have significance for us, [a limitation, which affects even] theology from a Western biblical orientation."[133] Christians, worldwide, are united in accepting that God's Word is His personal revelation to us of who He is, who we are, and how we are to live and worship before Him. But, the knowledge, accumulated over centuries of studying that revelation – from the early church era, from the Middle Ages, from the Reformation period, and from modern scholarship – by its very nature, is yet another effort of human cognition, passed through a cultural grid, in this case, that of Western civilisation.

Recently, a missionary colleague described a mutual friend as "looking through a keyhole with both eyes". I laughed at the mental picture, yet,

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[131] Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, p. 315. Hodge also writes: "Intuitive judgments of men (regarding sin) are based upon concrete, individual experiences from which general maxims of right and wrong are produced for any culture. The generalisations thus made are as true or false as the process, by which they were arrived at. This leads to vast confusion and error over the nature of sin from culture to culture in spite of a universal moral code being evidenced."

[132] Ibid.

[133] See earlier footnote (n. 24), p. 50.

simultaneously, realised the metaphor characterises all of us. As Wakefield reminds us, even if our intentions in study are absolutely pure, there is inevitable distortion of reality; bias is inescapable. Our understanding of God, of ourselves, of sin, and of the spirit world, will always suffer the limitation of personal history and experience, whether we be animists in the jungles of Papua New Guinea, or seminarians studying in the United States. As theologians and translators, then, we must consistently be careful to discern our own cultural prejudices, those that we, unwittingly, allow to wiggle their way into our work.

The solution is not to abandon efforts of interpreting and communicating God's Word to others, despairing that, to do so accurately, is humanly impossible.[134] Yes, God is, ultimately, the one responsible to reveal truth; and yes, He can accomplish this, totally apart from human agency. But God, in His sovereignty, has chosen, from the beginning, to work through fallible human beings. As such, we have a definite and unavoidable responsibility in the dissemination of truth, but this effort is one, which begins, first and foremost, with self. We must seek to correctly identify, and leave behind, our own personal baggage, before we can help others to do the same.

One may argue that, to leave behind one's baggage, is to be bereft of both language and cognition; nothing remains, by which anything can be understood or communicated! Not necessarily so. After all, Jesus Himself took the form of a human being, who lived in a particular culture, for a particular time in history, and within a particular geographical location. And He communicated with other human beings, both friend and foe, by means of particular human languages. But, while encumbered with the constraints of human language and culture, He, nevertheless, always spoke with absolute truth. Now, for the remainder of the human race, complete accuracy, in thinking and speaking, is, admittedly, a utopian ideal, but it is, nonetheless, a goal, for which we must consistently aim. Although we,

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[134] See Paul Ellingworth, "Exegetical Presuppositions", in *The Bible Translator* 33-3 (1982), pp. 317-323. Ellingworth states that the presuppositions of the writer, the intended reader, and the translator can never be removed from the process of communicating through a text, but illustrates, with eight scriptural examples, why this is not necessarily always negative.

unlike Jesus, will never achieve perfect freedom from distortion, it is possible to arrive at ever-closer approximations of reality, especially as we practise honestly contrasting our own cultural biases with those of others. It is by referencing the worlds of other languages and cultures, that we enrich our own legacy, and come to better understand what God has revealed of Himself, and the universe within His Word.

Cognitive distortion will never be totally eradicated, because, until history ends, sin will always be present. Being personally subject to distortion of reality (including understanding what sin is), is linked to the fact that each of us has wilfully experienced sin; each of us has yielded to its power. As people, we are a multiplicity of beings, each with our own centre of consciousness, and selfish interest; we naturally submit to the tendency, from the beginning, to view ourselves as the centre of everything. This is self-idolatry. In communal settings, where the group's preservation is accorded value above that of individuals, there is the equally-grave sin of group-idolatry. For modern secularists, man is the centre of his own universe, and is responsible for charting his own destiny; God (if He truly exists) is redundant. The situation for animists is minimally different – man is the centre of the universe; the spirit deities are recognised to be present and powerful, but are manipulable, if the right rituals are followed. In both cases, regard for being has replaced worship of Being.

So, who we are, whether our focus is individual or communal, results not only in making sin possible, but inevitable, and along with inevitable sin, is inevitable distortion of reality. This is true for Westerners and non-Westerners alike; for people living in Christian societies, as well as those in animist groups; for members of cultures that are formally educated, just as much as those that are preliterate. There are no exceptions. With our understanding skewed, and with collective conscience seared, the only remaining hope is that the Word of God can restore sensibility and sensitivity to truth. Therefore, once we have taken honest steps to minimise our own cultural biases, and once we have maximised our comprehension of sin, from God's perspective, how we then translate "sin", in its various aspects and contexts, can be significant, in helping to alter the

worldviews of others to a more-correct perspective.[135] A good translation, by communicating, accurately, how God both defines and regards the predicament of sin, can challenge, and change, previously wrong belief. On the contrary, if poor choices are made, the distorted human view is unintentionally reinforced, at the expense of divine truth; the calloused state of human conscience remains unchanged.

SIN AND THE ANIMIST WORLDVIEW

In the introduction of Joseph Grimes' classic treatment of translating "sin" for minority languages, he writes:

> To transmit a message accurately, one must phrase it in terms that do not mislead the receiver. The Bible translator, as a transmitter of messages, must, therefore, be aware of how his readers react to the forms he employs. If he is not, the difference, between his ideas about what the forms mean and his readers' ideas, can result in confusion for them. Thus, it is not enough that Bible translators be at home in the biblical languages; nor is it enough that they understand the workings of the target language's linguistic system. They must,

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[135] Dye, "Toward a Cultural Definition of Sin", p. 27. Dye also says that, if an expatriate worker relies too much on his own cultural forms and prejudices in communicating biblical data, the receptivity will be skewed, or confused. Accordingly, an ethno-theological approach, alone, will successfully communicate God's perspective of sin. Dye goes on (pp. 30-36) to give several excellent illustrations of how the idea of sinfulness shifts cross-culturally, even, at times, when the same biblical passages are considered. Papua New Guineans, for instance, see leaving elderly to the care of the state as a violation of the fifth commandment. Western missionaries see taking a second wife as adultery, but third-world Christians (in some situations) see the practice as a protective measure for women in societies, where unattached women have no status at all. Non-Western believers frequently are critical of Western Christians lacking hospitality, and refusing to give away their amassed wealth, because they contrast Western "stinginess" to their generosity – it is not uncommon for villagers to use the equivalent of three months' wages to lavish upon guests; furthermore, any acquired resource is immediately divided among the entire extended family if not the whole village. Finally, ancient Jews could pick and eat fruit as they walked through another's vineyard, while today's Western culture would consider such activity as theft.

in addition, know the *background* their readers bring to the understanding of each form they use.[136]

To Grimes' point of linguistic knowledge, alone, being insufficient for the task of translation, we could add that theology, too, while critical, is but a part of the whole, rather than the summation of all, especially since we have just concluded a section on doctrine. As Grimes reminds us, there is another piece of the translation puzzle, absolutely essential to unconfused communication – that of understanding the receptor language culture. For this reason, we now devote an entire section of this thesis to understanding, firstly, what animists believe concerning the spirit world, and sin in general, and, secondly, how these beliefs have been specifically held, and practised traditionally, by the Tabo people.[137]

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ANIMIST BELIEF

Gailyn Van Rheenen has noted that, between extreme animism, and Western secularism, a continuum exists, one created by their respective tendencies to either spiritualise or naturalise human psychic experience and natural phenomena.[138] Examples of cultural dissonance between Western mind-set, and animist worldview, abound. Westerners dismiss dreams, as merely the exercise of an unconscious human mind. To the animist, however, they are journeys of the spirit, during which, the body is left behind; great significance is attached to their interpretation. The Westerner, typically, disbelieves in the spirits of dead people continuing to live, and interact with flesh and blood. While those of a religious

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[136] Grimes, "Sin", p. 11.

[137] Cf. Beekman, "Anthropology and the Translation of New Testament Key Terms", p. 32. Beekman writes: "Every culture, and, therefore, every language, carries with it a distinct way of looking at the world. It is important, therefore, that the translator knows the worldview, and thought forms, which are held by the speakers of the receptor language. To do this, involves him in anthropological research – questions concerning the social structures, authority patterns, and religious beliefs of the receptor language culture. His aim is to arrive at an integrated understanding of the receptor language culture."

[138] Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1991, p. 95. Also take note of Van Rheenen's ensuing discussion (pp. 95-102), which is applicable, not only to understanding the difference between Western culture and animism, but also to seeing how the biblical view contrasts with both these cultural extremes. She observes that each extreme is convinced that its perceptions alone have validity.

persuasion may acknowledge life after death, such life is in a far-distant realm, and, for many, the concept is more hopeful fancy than firm conviction. In contrast, all animists believe in the presence and activity of spirits; frequently the spirits they encounter are believed to be ancestors, who, because of being neglected by family and neighbours in their former life, have lingered in the present world, to exact revenge. One further example, is that the Westerner thinks sickness happens, because of the right combination of germs and low immunity, but the animist believes that failing to observe an interdiction, that is, committing an offence against other humans, or the spirit realm, is causal. Van Rheenen remarks that, even Africans, who have been Western-educated, while acknowledging the role of germs in sickness, will still maintain the role of microbes to be secondary, and superficial.[139]

Van Rheenen goes on to characterise animist worldview with four distinctives: it is spiritualistic, group-oriented, fatalistic, and maintains a past-oriented (often-cyclical) perspective of time.[140] But the Western worldview holds the exact opposite emphases – it is naturalistic, individualistic, optimistic, and regards time as present-oriented, and linear. Westerners, for instance, make distinctions between the natural and supernatural, the physical and spiritual. The spiritual world (if it is even acknowledged) is thought to have little contact with the physical. Some go so far as to deny all spiritual powers, because they are beyond perception, thus leaving the physical world to be a closed universe. Their belief in a closed material world leads to the idea that it can be manipulated to the human race's advantage, a task accomplished by means of ever-accumulating scientific knowledge and discovery. This thinking, in turn, leads to the, typically, positive regard Western societies have concerning the future.[141]

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[139] Van Rheenen, *Missions: Biblical Foundations*, pp. 100-101, 125.

[140] Cf. Kraft, *Christianity With Power*, p. 87, where he summarises the difference between Western and animist worldviews, in terms of what is perceived as manipulable. Western cultural focus is to conquer and manipulate the material world; non-Western focus is to conquer and manipulate the spiritual world.

[141] Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ*, pp. 53-57; also Van Rheenen, *Missions: Biblical Foundations*, pp. 120-128.

Although these characteristic tenets of Western worldview are no more biblically correct than those of animists, they have, nonetheless, thoroughly permeated Western-dominated mainstream Christianity of the present day. As such, among Western Christians, these cultural beliefs are seldom questioned; at times, they are even assumed to be biblical in their foundation. Looking through our culturally-biased cognitive filters, we fail to recognise that the scriptures are, essentially, a non-Western collection of documents, written within cultures, much closer to the animist tradition, than to our own. The scriptures reflect an understanding of a universe, where the natural and supernatural are closely entwined. Miracles (the intervention of the divine into the natural order) are expected, and frequent. Spirit beings interact, regularly, with humankind. God is not only transcendent over the creation; He is immanent within it, personally involved, and concerned.

Regarding the other differences between Western secularism and animism, the scriptures present more of a balanced viewpoint than either cultural extreme. For instance, while the cultures, prevalent in biblical times (especially for the Old Testament period), are predominantly *group-oriented*, and while this is reflected in numerous texts (Gen 15:13-21; Josh 9:3-27; Jonah 4:9-11; Matt 13:54-58), God is consistently revealed as dealing with people, according to their *individual* faith and actions (Gen 6:8; Josh 6:25; Jonah 1:3-15; Matt 8:5-13).[142] Secondly, though there is avowed *pessimism* for the human race being able to improve themselves morally (all are totally and wilfully depraved, and, thus, headed for certain destruction), there is an equally strong *optimism* that God, and those who trust in Him, will prevail (Is 59:1-8 and Rom 3:9-23; cf. Ps 22:23-31 and Rev 19:11-21). In spite of the present-age contest between good and evil, being played out, the ultimate victory has already been secured (Rom 8:31-39; 2 Cor 2:13-15). It is in this later-to-be-realised victory that one sees a *linear perspective* of history. Besides this teleological focus on the eventual consummation of God's plan, logical linear thinking is evident, too, in the organisation of content, especially (but not exclusively) in Lukan and Pauline writings. Here, then, is a third area, in which the biblical presentation is culturally balanced, because, by way of contrast, other

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[142] God sometimes *did*, however, punish the whole community, because of the sin of an individual. Note the earlier related discussion, p. 64.

scriptures reflect *cyclical views of time* (e.g., Eccles), and, for some texts, organisation of content is accomplished by circular reasoning (e.g., James).

While it would certainly be possible to show, in greater detail, the many points, at which Western thought has exaggerated one side of the biblical message (and carried along much of Christian practice and theology with it), that is not the purpose of this paper. That such skewing has occurred, for Christians of a Western heritage, is important to acknowledge; if nothing else, it keeps us humble, and, perhaps, gives us greater tentativeness in making theological pronouncements. But, the fact that Western Christians have often reinterpreted the Bible, according to their own cultural prejudices, does not, in any way, excuse deviation from scriptural truth in an opposite cultural direction. Any theological imbalances, arising in traditionally animist areas, must also be acknowledged and addressed. So, while admitting that Westerners are equally capable (and guilty) of distorting reality, we leave concern for our own distortions behind, and focus, instead, on animism. We intend to outline the basic areas of conflict between animist belief and the scriptures, especially where the conflict regards an understanding of sin.

Now, during the course of the previous section, we already touched on a few of the differences between the biblical perspective of sin, and that, typical of animism. We said, first of all, that animists conceive of God as but another, albeit very strong, member of the spirit world, who, like the other spirits, is subject to limitations, imperfections, and foibles. There is no spirit being conceived of, in the animist tradition, like the Lord of heaven and earth, revealed in scripture, who, besides being omnipotent, is absolutely holy. Secondly, we said that, logically following this diminished view of God, is a tendency to excuse sin, or minimise its seriousness. Thirdly, we stated that, from this basic difference of regard for sin, comes also a difference as to how sin is resolved. Rather than trust in the efficacy of an external divine solution, the animist looks to internal solutions, either personal ritual, or community activity. Finally, we noted that, for the animist, the real power of prayer (be it confession or

supplication) is manipulative, either by calling on "secret" divine names, or by resorting to repeated "magical" formulae.[143]

Beyond, but including, these previous generalisations, six key areas of difference can be established: (1) social behaviour being controlled by shame, rather than guilt; (2) subjective versus objective determination of right and wrong; (3) belief in plural, polytheistic, oral traditions, as opposed to a unique, monotheistically-inspired, written revelation; (4) blaming outside forces for sin, in contrast to individual responsibility; and (5) conception of God being manipulable, rather than sovereign. We now consider each area of difference, in turn, but, while isolating these beliefs for the purpose of discussion, we do well to remember that, in the cognition of the animist, they are necessarily integrated.

Animist Cultures are Shame Based

Joseph Grimes, to identify the types of society, common to human experience, develops a matrix, in which he coordinates the characteristic of being "closed" or "open", simultaneously with that of change – being "stable", "shrinking", or "growing". In doing so, six sets of characteristics result, two of which are pertinent to the present discussion.[144]

Grimes describes the typical animist group, with which Bible translators work, as being a closed-stable society.[145] In this closed-stable situation, contact with the outside world has already been established, but the society, as a whole, is coping with the inevitable changes the contact brings. Since cultural change, and human cognitive development, are far too complex to

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[143] See earlier discussion, pp. 92-95, where we drew these conclusions from A. Hodge, Lawrence, and Eichrodt.

[144] Grimes, "Sin", pp. 11-16.

[145] See Grimes' entire discussion in "Sin". Besides typical animist, closed-stable societies, he also refers to examples in Latin America of animist tribes, which he labels as closed-shrinking, and which are characterised by apathy and depression. Among these are Auca, Zuni Pueblo, Bororo, and Nambiquara. In closed-shrinking cases (as with closed-stable ones), there is a marked contrast with the biblical context (open-growing societies), in which revelation, regarding sin, is presented, and in which guilt is the expected response to violating the external principles, which God established. The deeper needs of these depressed societies, though, are such that they require far more than a clarification of God's view on sin by the translator.

be entirely uniform, while some parts of the culture are growing, other parts are, undoubtedly, uninvolved in the growth process, or even resistant. So, there is a mixture of forward- and backward-looking ideas, with all members of the culture not necessarily being in agreement on the changes that confront them. In this type of society, the primary means of bringing pressure to bear on those who step out of line is based, firstly, on the weight of past precedent, and, secondly, on the responsibility everyone in the group has to preserve unity. The past traditions (even with outside changes encroaching) are still accepted by all as normative. So, in these cases, the one who does transgress against the accumulated wisdom of the past feels greatly ashamed. Shame, here, is defined as a sense of intolerable regret that comes from failing to comply with past precedent, to which the entire group has agreed. It is felt, to some degree, by the entire group, rather than by the offender alone.

In contrast to this, the scriptures were written primarily against the background of an open-growing society. Open-growing societies, unlike closed ones, look to the future, rather than the past. They seek external guiding principles, which will help individuals within society to continue to advance their status in life, or, if not their own, that of their children. When these external principles are disregarded, the individual feels guilt, a sense that potential, which could have been seized, has been lost. Guilt is focused on an external standard, it has concern for the future, and it is applied individually. In these aspects, guilt is the opposite of shame.

Grimes notes that the agricultural revolution in the fertile crescent, while postdating the time of some of the patriarchs, perhaps, had been realised long before the Pentateuch was compiled. As such, basic supply problems, for city and empire building, were already solved, enabling societies to be both open and growing. So, from the Exodus on, there is awareness of guiding principles to be worked out by the individual, and by the nation. This awareness is seen in the Sinaitic covenant, and in the penitential Psalms; it is sharpened in the ethical preaching of the prophets. In the New Testament, it is observed in Jesus' strong criticism of the Pharisees; it is noted in Paul's forensic discussion of law and righteousness. In conjunction with the evidence of these guiding moral principles, it is taken

for granted, throughout scripture, that the person who sins, reacts in terms of guilt.[146]

So, while animist groups concentrate on avoiding anti-social behaviour, because it would bring shame upon the whole group, the typical biblical society strives to live up to external principles of moral conduct, because this will result in a better future for each individual member. Guilt is the recognition that one has failed to live up to the expected standard, in which case, there are necessary consequences, and reparation. The Bible, rather than presupposing an orientation toward tradition, in which transgression brings shame, builds its doctrines upon the idea that there are fixed moral principles, the transgression of which, incurs this kind of guilt. Here, then, is one reason that translating "sin" for a closed-stable society is problematic – the terminology, with which the animist is familiar, describes an entirely different societal situation.[147]

Animist Cultures Subjectively Determine Sin

Animist belief recognises no monolithic code of behaviour, dictated from above, by a Supreme Being. In place of such a code, is the determination of the cultural group, in which the opinions of those who are older, and more experienced, carry greater weight. Right and wrong is, thus, subjectively determined. Opinions may change from one generation to the next, or even within a single generation, for outside pressures may dictate that change in the internal code is necessary for the group's survival. By way of contrast, biblically, God's law originates from His own holy character, such that His code of conduct is above and outside the realm of human experience.[148] Because of who He is, His law justly determines what is morally appropriate, and acceptable, for those whom He created.

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[146] Ibid., pp. 12-13.

[147] Cf. Beekman, "Anthropology and the Translation of the New Testament Key Terms", p. 32, where he writes: "Theologically, technical terms constitute a problem for the translator, because he has to take the vocabulary, already in use in the receptor language, and impress it into the service of a different system of thought from the one, for which these vocabulary items are customarily used, i.e., he faces the challenge of correctly representing the message of Christianity, by utilising a vocabulary that has only, or largely, been used to represent a non-Christian system of thought. This involves not only bridging differences in linguistic systems, but also in the thought systems conveyed by the linguistic structure."

[148] Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, p. 319.

Furthermore, His law is immutable, just as He is;[149] there is no room for situational ethics, or compromise.

Emile Durkheim, from his lifework of studying Aboriginal Australians, notes that animist religious practice becomes, essentially, a balance of avoiding negative taboos,[150] and performing positive rituals. The internal subjective code of each particular culture dictates behaviour for both areas. But the taboos, while rightly considered, as a list of negative prohibitions, serve a definite positive societal function as well. The deeper, indeed primary, purpose of taboos, says Durkheim, is not to merely avoid sin, and consequent shame, but to separate out the religious life from the ordinary or profane. Spiritual life can grow, only where it has been given special disposition, and where other influences are purposely excluded. The observing of interdictions, therefore, allows a man to have equal footing with more-powerful religious forces that he has become aware of in his world. The negative observances open up a means of positive control for life situations, which would, otherwise, be frightening, and potentially destructive.[151]

But, from the perspective of the animist, who regularly practises ritual, and carefully avoids interdiction, there is a sense, not of deep societal purpose,

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[149] It is important to note that, while the scriptures generally reveal God as constant and unchanging (Num 23:19; Mal 3:6; Heb 13:8; James 1:17), and that, while the very notion of change logically implies some original lack or imperfection, at times God is shown to "change His mind", or be capable of changing His mind, at least from a human perspective (Ex 32:14; Jer 18:8; Jonah 3:9-10). Additionally, Jesus, who came to fulfil the Law (Matt 5:17-19), at times, acted in ways that seemed contrary to it (Mark 2:23-28; 7:14-19). So, when we speak of "law", here (and stress its unchangeableness, as being related to God's unchanging character), we are referring to a higher law of moral principle, from which God never deviates in His action and thought. This "law" is reflected in the abiding commitment He maintains towards His people, and their welfare; this "law" is also what He expects people to be ruled by in their relationships with one another (Mark 12:28-31; Rom 8:2; James 1:25; 2:12).

[150] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life: a Study in Religious Sociology*, Joseph Ward Swain, tran., New York NY: Macmillan, 1915, p. 300. Durkheim explains that "taboo" is an adjective, Polynesian in origin, which describes certain things, or activities, withdrawn from common use. Although he personally prefers the more technical term of "interdiction", he says, to prohibit the use of the more customary word, shows an excess of purism.

[151] Ibid., pp. 308-309.

in his religious activity, but, rather, of apprehension and fear. Instead of feeling that life is positive, and controlled, there is a lingering dread that, in spite of best intentions, an oversight may have occurred. The animist is never certain that he has avoided breaking every taboo, nor that the rituals to appease the spirit community are entirely satisfactory. In the journey of life, shame within the community, and disaster at the hands of nature, are ever lurking just around the next bend of the river. Mircea Eliade, also an authority on Aboriginal Australians, writes accordingly: "Should sacred ceremonies be neglected, and the social customs despised, the world will regress to darkness and chaos."[152]

Tragically, for much of the Aboriginal community, this disintegration has, indeed, happened, not in the form of the physical cosmos self-destructing, as presaged by the myths, but in terms of producing a broken, dying, frustration-ridden, cultural entity, lost to its past, and failing to meet the challenges of the modern world's onslaught. Acculturation to Western civilisation has been inevitable, but not successful; pathetic, purposeless existence has become the norm. Aboriginals, who continue to hold to traditional belief, see the present situation as both a judgment for failing to preserve past cultural practices, and as a fulfilment of the prophetic predictions of their forebears.[153] Such traditionalists, however, fatalistically acknowledge that there is no hope of either persuading the current generation to return *en masse* to the former way of life, or of averting the wrath of spiritual forces, who have been so greatly offended.

So, aside from presenting problems for the Bible translator, the culture, which has a subjective view of right and wrong, while having the advantage of adapting community ethics to survival needs of the moment, has the distinct disadvantage of never being certain the group's internally-devised code will actually suffice. Along with the flexibility of a system, based on group opinion, comes increased disquietude regarding eventual consequences of decisions, which the group might make.

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[152] Mircea Eliade, *Australian Religions: an Introduction*, Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1973, p. 65.
[153] Ibid.

Animist Cultures Believe in Plural Oral Traditions

Animists do not believe that revelation from a Supreme Being of a foreign culture is, necessarily, superior to their own accumulated cultural experiences, and natural lore. In areas that are newly exposed to the Christian message, there is acknowledgment that the ancestral spirits of the foreign evangelists must be greatly powerful. After all, their power is evidenced by material and technological wealth. Accordingly, the message, brought by the evangelists, is regarded with respect, as another valid body of traditional knowledge. This is seldom to the degree that their own traditional lore is rejected, or abandoned, for those traditions have proven useful to their society over generations of time. Prevailing attitude becomes one of "both/and" rather than "either/or", which, accompanied by the sentiment "let's wait and see", sometimes results in the emergence of curious mixtures of syncretistic belief and practice. The question remains as to whether the powers of the evangelists' ancestral spirits will continue to have an advantage in a territory that is foreign to them.[154] Animists also wonder whether these ancestral spirits will bestow favours only upon those of their own race (the foreign evangelists), or whether material abundance will be extended to all, who embrace the new rituals and taboos. These speculations are the seeds of Melanesian millenaristic thinking, and cultus.[155]

Charles Kraft, out of his own cross-cultural experience, introduced the idea that, when Christian belief interacts with traditional animism, a power encounter must take place, in which the superiority of the new system over the old is clearly demonstrated. Without superiority being proven (not through logical argumentation, but by means of spiritual power), the message, if accepted at all, is inevitably syncretised. To illustrate, Kraft points to Western missionary colleagues in Nigeria, who, because of their own cultural biases, were essentially practising deists, the result being that they were powerless before the activity of demons. The local people were quick to perceive that the missionaries' behaviour and words lacked congruity, and, hence, rejected the gospel message as inapplicable to, and

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[154] Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, p. 318.
[155] See Lawrence, *Road Belong Cargo*, all of chapter IX, "The Cargo Movement: Motivation, Means, and Effects", pp. 222-273.

powerless within, their territory.[156] The new message was said to be superior, but the local people remained unconvinced. As expected, the animist, in this kind of situation, will continue to rely on what his particular culture's traditions have, long ago, determined to be right or wrong. If part of the Christian message ends up being accepted by him, it is simply patched into the quilt of pluralistic religious data he is already comfortable with.

It is impossible, cognitively, for people to change their entire worldview. Yet the various paradigms, which make up worldview, *do* change as people are confronted with sense data that cannot be assimilated by previous belief. For those attached to a pluralistic, polytheistic tradition, new revelation must demonstrate its superiority, or else be relegated to simply another of a long list of storied alternatives.[157] While the Bible translator cannot do much, in terms of setting up power encounters, to demonstrate the Christian message's superiority, he can ensure that unambiguous forms are used to communicate its key terms. The view, a culture has of sin, is an extremely important paradigm, one, which must shift to the biblical perspective, rather than risk syncretisation with previous tradition.

Animist Cultures Blame Outside Forces for Sin

Animists do not believe that individuals are responsible for anti-social activity that is not purposely committed. Furthermore, even when offence is consciously perpetrated, this does not necessarily mean it was purposeful, for blame is often ascribed to outside spiritual forces.[158]

In my own experience, growing up among the Nipa people of Papua New Guinea, I recall an incident, where a young man named Komeb stole clothing, which had been hung out to dry. When challenged, in the midst of his thieving, he took off, running, holding onto the shirt he had coveted. After being chased down, and after having relinquished his prize, he explained, in all sincerity, that he had not stolen anything. He had been admiring the shirt, and it stuck to his hands. Who could fault him for that?

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[156] Kraft, *Christianity With Power*, pp. 37-42.
[157] Ibid., p. 82.
[158] Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, p. 318.

In addition, he pointed out that the shirt was no longer stuck to his hands, but was back with its proper owner.[159]

For animists, being able to ascribe blame externally, for potentially volatile situations, serves to stabilise the group's internal harmony. Earlier, we said that animist cultures concentrate on avoiding anti-social behaviour, because it would bring shame upon the entire group. But it is, perhaps, more correct to say that they simply concentrate on avoiding shame, sometimes, by directly avoiding anti-social activity, sometimes, by rationalising it away. Explaining why an offence was really not as it appeared, allows an individual, or a family, or even the whole community, to save face. This is accomplished, by either blaming an evil spirit (the group's common enemy),[160] or by showing how the blame for a particular action is more largely shared. The latter defence includes the argument that lack of knowledge, on the part of the offender, indicates that another, too, must be at fault – someone else, obviously, failed to clarify, in advance, that the particular offence would be offensive.

In contrast to human rationalisation and blame-shifting, God's Word teaches that each person is responsible for their own choices, and that an individual's *ability* to know right or wrong determines accountability, rather than knowledge itself.[161] While scripture frequently acknowledges

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[159] Similar examples abound, in my experiences among the Tabo people. Monege took his axe to the door of a local trading post, because, through an innocent error of computation, he had been short-changed the equivalent of a few pennies. He had not done anything wrong, he reasoned because (a) the wrong began with the sixth-grader, who had sold him the soap, and (b) his anger had simply overcome him. As another example, Kaewale, in a moment of pique, destroyed her husband's canoe, their garden crops, and his clothing. Her explanation was that she was not at fault, because an evil spirit had overcome her, causing her to act destructively. We were expected, by local villagers, to feel sorry for her, and demonstrate compassion, by replacing what she had destroyed.

[160] See Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, p. 281. Durkheim adds that for animists "all unpleasantness in life is traced back to spirits, which are acting with evil intent – nightmares, illnesses, storms, accidents. Evil comes from the spirits, not from man himself".

[161] Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, p. 318. Hodge goes on to say (p. 319) that, since animists believe sin to be an external force, if it does invade a person, in the form of an evil spirit, they think it will reside there only temporarily. The Bible, however, describes sin as invading a person, and then taking up permanent residence, being abetted, in the process, by the willingness of that person's flesh, which is human nature, divorced from God.

demonic involvement in human sinful activity, man is never held any less responsible for its perpetation.[162] Since the scriptural view, here, is in direct conflict with animist belief, once again, care must be taken, in the translation process, to use forms that, if possible, communicate the consequent liability for individual sin.

Animist Cultures Believe that Gods Are Manipulable

Animists believe that, appeasing God, depends on humans doing just enough to distract His attention, so that His anger is averted.[163] In this, they judge God, according to the nature of the spirits, they are accustomed to serve. These spirits are not omniscient, they are easily duped, can be cajoled and manipulated, and are subject to petty swings of mood, in either a beneficial or malevolent direction. From this understanding of the spirit world, the animist reasons that God, being a Spirit, too, can similarly be distracted from human foibles and follies. In this reasoning, the gravity of sin is negated. Durkheim, for instance, in the context of Aboriginal Australian belief, writes that "before his gods, a man is not always in . . . a state of inferiority; it frequently happens that he exercises a veritable restraint upon them, to obtain what he desires".[164] And later, he adds, "If it is true that man depends upon his gods, this dependence is reciprocal. The gods also have need of man; without offerings and sacrifices, they would die."[165]

Within this generalised view of spirit beings, and the power and relationship they have with respect to humanity, a variety of organisational systems, for the spirit world, have been observed in animist cultures. Scott Moreau identifies three types, for the continent of Africa. The first, he labels as the Bantu type, where various categories of spirit beings (some powerful, others relatively weak, some beneficent, others malevolent) interact with humans, on different levels, and with different motives. Second, is the Nilotic group, where a pantheon of spirit beings are divided into opposing good and evil camps, which carry out their divine struggle, in the arena of human affairs. Good is the normal order of nature and human

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[162] Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, p. 242.
[163] Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, p. 318.
[164] Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, p. 38.
[165] Ibid., p. 346.

affairs; evil is the violation of the norm, and humans, while influenced by the gods to do good or evil, in general, retain their own free will. The third type, is the West African one, where minor deities (limited local power, neither totally good nor evil) exert control over specific locations, natural phenomena, and human activities.[166] We note that the Tabo people of Papua New Guinea have a concept of the spirit world's organisation, which includes characteristics of both the Bantu and West African models.

To the African animist, the spirits are ubiquitous. Within the spirit world, five categories of being can be discerned: actual divinities, nature spirits, evil spirits, guardian spirits, and human spirits. Moreau asserts that, among these beings, there is no equivalent to either Satan or God, as the Bible portrays them.[167] In animist tradition, the spirits (at least the non-human ones) are active in perpetrating medical and social ills, in making appearances to the living, in giving power to inanimate objects, and in taking outright possession of people or animals.[168]

Humans, who use spiritual power to affect other humans, do so by either witchcraft or sorcery. In both cases, the power employed perpetuates adverse circumstances: witchcraft, by means of the user's own personality, and sorcery, by means of external magic. It is possible for witchcraft to happen, with the agent being totally unaware that an outside spiritual force is overwhelmingly urging their activity. In contrast, sorcery is always conscious and deliberate, on the part of the agent. Because of this distinction, the sorcerer is not baffling in actions and purpose, as is the witch. Additionally, the sorcerer's action has only temporary consequences, but the witch acts in ways that will permanently affect others.[169] What Moreau describes for African animist belief is generally

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[166] A. Scott Moreau, *The World of the Spirits*, Nairobi Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1990, pp. 100-101.
[167] Cf. Doug Priest, Jr, *Doing Theology with the Maasai*, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1990. In contrast to Moreau's assertions, Priest suggests that the nomadic Maasai have a traditional view of a Supreme Being, who, at least in some aspects, is similar to the Creator and Sovereign Lord of scripture. Some of his comments will be considered shortly, in this same section of the thesis.
[168] Moreau, *World of the Spirits*, pp. 102-105.
[169] Ibid., pp. 116-123. Cf. Lucy Mair, *Witchcraft*, Toronto Ont: World University Library, 1969. Besides detailing the animist worldview in this book, Mair has, elsewhere, written

similar to that observed among the Tabo people. They have two separate terms for people, who use spiritual power to affect others – *pakanipi* (sorcerers) and *giwalipi* (workers of magic).

For Aboriginal Australians, a distinction is made, linguistically, between the living human soul and other spiritual entities, which are not tied to a physical body. Spirits, in general, are closely attached to particular objects, such as, houses, rocks, or trees, but they are free to move away, whenever they so desire. They exert a great degree of influence over any who come into the territory they influence. In contrast, human souls affect only the bodies they belong to, and are not free to move away, until the person dies. At this time, the soul acquires characteristics of a spirit. While free to go anywhere, the spirit of the deceased generally lingers to benefit the clan or family, from which it came. But these spirits can, alternatively, be malevolent and cruel, especially if some in the clan had mistreated them during their lifetime.[170]

It is interesting to note, especially because Tabo belief is parallel, that Aboriginal tribes consider their mythical ancestral personages to be both soul and spirit. These ancestral beings are believed to still have, in their possession, the physical bodies, in which they once lived. Unlike living humans, these ancestors frequently separate from their bodies, in order to freely move about. There is usually one such mythical ancestor for each linguistically-separate group, an ancestor, who is highly honoured, and simultaneously feared, by the living members of the clan. Because of this, and because he has powers superior to all other beings within the clan's territory, he is, essentially, a tribal deity. He is concerned to meet the group's immediate physical needs, but, in addition, he is the one responsible for the group's longevity, in that he controls fertility. In the process of conception, he does not reincarnate himself, in entirety, but duplicates a portion of his being inside the female's womb.[171]

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extensively on the traditional political systems, the former tribal kingdoms, and the resultant affects of colonialism, in sub-Saharan Africa.

[170] Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, pp. 273-274.

[171] Ibid., p. 275.

Durkheim labels these mythical ancestral personages as High Beings or Gods. Though, originally, they were highly-regarded spirits, among others of the deceased, over time, growing respect demanded a supreme, preeminent distinction. Status grew, in conjunction with the associated myths, concerning their living heroics. While these tribal deities are known by different names across several territorial, or linguistic, boundaries, they are frequently conceptualised identically.[172] The ancestral deity is generally regarded as a "good god", the "life source of the people, and creator of the homeland".[173] He is the first cause, at least, for all that is important to men – creatures to be hunted, boomerangs, and spears, musical instruments, and language. His power, at least, within clan territory, is infinite, and can be acquired by young men, through secret knowledge, imparted at initiation. He has established the rites and practices, by which men can control other spirits and natural forces, thus ensuring clan survival.[174]

The nomadic Maasai of East Africa have an understanding of the spirit world, similar, in some respects, to that of the Aboriginal Australians, one which does not coincide with any of the African systems, previously described. Due, in large degree, to their unique lifestyle, the Maasai have always held a traditional disdain for education (knowledge obtained from foreigners), and for sedentary agriculture.[175] Consequently, they, unlike the vast majority of other African cultures, have resisted change, and been much slower to syncretise their own beliefs with outside religions. This, in turn, has led to them being favourite subjects for anthropological study. As with Aboriginal Australians, the Maasai worldview holds that there is a Supreme Creator, one who has a personal vested interest in a particular people, in this case themselves. For the Maasai, this Being is almighty and omniscient; He controls both life and death. His character is generally

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[172] Compare this with the Tabo situation, where they call their tribal ancestor by the name *Galegae*. Practically identical legends, among their Gogodala neighbours, identify the same personage as *Ugu*. Meanwhile, Tabo people, of the Fly River dialect villages, use the name *Monoi*.

[173] Ibid., pp. 285-295.

[174] Eliade, *Australian Religions*, pp. 22-24.

[175] Doug Priest Jr, ed., *Unto the Uttermost*, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1984, pp. 201-203. By way of comparison, Priest has also studied tribal groups of Kenya, Ethiopia, and Tanzania.

benevolent, yet He is subject to moods of great wrath. The two sides of His nature are evidenced in the colours of nature and the seasons – the black skies and earth, of the rainy season, demonstrate His providence; the red earth, during the time of drought, shows His anger. The Maasai consider themselves to be God's chosen people, nearer to His care than other peoples, who do not live as closely to the land. The cattle and earth have been given to the Maasai as special gifts.[176]

One could conjecture that the concept of a supreme being, for animists, develops, primarily, in groups, which have nomadic traditions. Whether one considers the High Being of the Aboriginals, or the Supreme Creator of the Maasai, in both cases, the conceptualisation of such a Being happened for groups, which traditionally covered vast areas of territory, in the course of their annual journeys. The Tabo people, too, had a nomadic tradition, at least up until 60 years ago, when the Australian colonial government forcibly resettled them in villages on the banks of the rivers surrounding their tribal homeland.[177] Interestingly enough, the Tabo people have traditionally believed in a tribal ancestral deity named *Galegae*, whose

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[176] Ibid., pp. 202-204. Priest also discusses at length (pp. 204-212) a special purification ceremony of the Maasai, which shows that their tribal theology, in a number of aspects, resembles biblical doctrine. In the ceremony, a man can be cleansed of all wounds and injuries he has inflicted on society or on individuals. Purity from sins, and unity with God, are the expressed intent of the ritual. But the Maasai, in recognising that sins have separated them from God, stress that it is God alone, who can remove the sins, not the ritual sacrifice of an ox, which occurs at the end of the proceedings. As a secondary benefit of the ceremony, the participating man's primary relationships (family) are also strengthened. Indeed, the whole community ends up encouraged by their joint participation in the event. If God is forgiving the celebrant's sins, they recognise that they, too, have the same obligation. Priest then speculates (p. 213) as to whether the theology of this ceremony actually concurs with biblical teaching. If the parallels are as close as they seem, he asks, is it wrong for Maasai Christians to continue its practice? Additionally, many other sacrifices are performed, not for purity or sin removal, but for thanksgiving. If the God, to whom these ceremonies are directed, is, indeed, the same as that of scripture, then these traditional practices should be continued and encouraged, in the light of the gospel. In the body of this paper, however, we do present evidence that, in at least some fundamental respects, the God of the Maasai people is conceptually different from the God of the Bible. Since this is the case, any associated theology is also suspect. So, for a group like the Maasai, if biblical key words are translated, using familiar animistic religious terms, care must be taken to ensure that context makes any past theological errors clear.

[177] For a more complete account for this event, see "Recent Tabo History", pp. 119-124.

characteristics and relationship with the people essentially parallel what was noted earlier for the Aboriginal High Gods. Is there really a thread of continuity here, and, if so, what is the reason? One possible answer is that, for animist groups, which are traditionally nomadic, it is psychologically necessary to conceive of a stronger spirit than what non-nomadic groups generally believe in. Belief in an omnipotent Spirit, one who is both a personal protector of His people, and who exerts influence over the entire range of territory, in which they travel, is far more comforting than belief in a myriad of less-dependable beings, all with roughly equal, but limited, power in their specific habitats.

But it is important to underscore that, regardless of some similarities between Supreme Beings, conceived of by nomadic animists, and the God of Judeo-Christian scriptures, there are a number of fundamental differences. Eliade points out that the High Beings, of the Aboriginals, are accorded powers of creation, yet they were once a part of the material creation themselves. No attempt is made, in Australian animist tradition, to resolve this discrepancy. Also, in the various legends, the High Being typically produces a son, by means of a human consort; this son is then responsible to continue the procreative process, until the entire tribe is populated.[178] In contrast, the God of scripture is spirit, rather than material flesh, or a mixture of the two; He is without beginning and end; He is the God of all peoples, not just the nation of Israel. Perhaps, most importantly, the God of scripture is never subject to human manipulation, but He sovereignly acts in the affairs of all peoples, according to His divine purposes.

Furthermore, the Bible, while clearly teaching the existence of created spirit beings, categorises them much differently from any animist system of thought. Spirit beings inhabit one of three realms: that of God's throne, where the obedient angels still worship and serve Him; the realm outside of heaven, in which fallen spirit beings typically reside; and the realm of humanity, in which people are comprised of both a spirit and physical body.[179] Within this world of the spirits, Satan has established himself, in opposition to God, His plan, and especially His people. Satan has his own

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[178] Eliade, *Australian Religions*, pp. 22-24.
[179] Moreau, *World of the Spirits*, p. 35.

trinity, church, ministers, system of theology, system of sacrifice, communion, gospel, throne, and worshippers.[180] One of his names is ἀντίδικος, which can be translated as "Adversary", but, literally, means "against the righteous". While especially hateful of the righteous, he desires to mar the image of God, evident in any human, and thus, he attacks them morally, seeking, if possible, to enslave and possess. Ground is yielded to Satan through sin, through ignorance, and through fear. While the Bible reveals that Satan is active and powerful in the universe, it also teaches that he is an already-defeated foe.[181]

In all these respects, then, any animist view of a Supreme Being, of the spirit-world's organisation, of the spiritual conflict, which humans are caught up in, and of the ultimate outcome of that conflict, is in marked contrast to the biblical understanding. Besides failing to understand that God cannot be manipulated, the animist also fails to understand that sin is both a personal offence against the Creator of humanity, and, simultaneously, a tool, used by the adversary of humanity, to gain advantage.

A JUSTIFICATION FOR CHRISTIAN INTERVENTION

Wayne Dye, in concluding his paper on a cross-cultural definition of sin, says that the Bible translator must seek to communicate the concept, by means of forms, which result in conviction.[182] From conviction, comes necessary change, not the systematic erasure of traditional practices, in favour of the translator's cultural heritage, but deeper cognitive-level changes, which enable the leaders of the receptor group to make wise choices, concerning their society's future.

In spite of attempts by well-meaning individuals, in recent decades, to avert the inevitable, outside encroachment, for all tribal groups, has, nonetheless, taken place, in many cases, by persons or organisations, who had no interest in the long-term welfare of the group being invaded. But, more often than not, it was empathetic Christian evangelists, who first made contact with the tribal enclaves. If these Christian missionaries had not

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[180] Ibid., pp. 35-36.
[181] Ibid., p. 92.
[182] Dye, "Toward a Cultural Definition of Sin", p. 33.

come, what has happened elsewhere demonstrates that, sooner or later, the international oil and timber conglomerates would have come, in their stead, not to help, but to exploit the hidden peoples' vulnerability, often with the full cooperation of national governments. Yes, the foreign Christian workers have frequently been guilty of cultural insensitivity, both intentionally, and unwittingly, promoting a host of cultural changes that are neither biblical nor beneficial. However, the damage that such non-profit workers have done, pales in comparison with the destruction of individual tribal cultures, accomplished by those greedy for money. The moral constitution of entire groups has been wantonly torn apart, being replaced with no other authority, by which group, or individual, decisions can be reached. Besides taking the natural resources of developing nations for a fraction of their true worth, the multinationals have replaced the moral and cultural stability of tribal groups with the vices of alcohol and gambling, with a bombardment of Western videos, depicting scenes of sex and violence, with prostitution, and the break up of once-stable families, with the deterioration of traditional linguistic forms, and last, but not least, with the broken promises of economic prosperity. The currencies of countries, thus exploited, are ever devaluing, such that the minimum wage, tribal workers earn, has ever-less buying power for the material goods they are enticed to pursue.

The Christian worker sociologically justifies his own intervention in the tribal culture on the grounds that, firstly, change is inevitable, and that, secondly, the endangered culture must be equipped to understand what the God of all cultures has to say to their specific situation. If they are not so equipped, the outside influences will ultimately destroy them, starting with individual morality, but ending up with the entire culture. The Christian worker believes that the message of the Bible (the pure one rather than a culturally-distorted version) is universally applicable. He believes that the message will enable the receptor culture to better cope with the imminent destructive forces and change. His concern for the tribal group, along with the conviction that the biblical message will provide needed salvation, hope, and cultural stability, results in his seeking the most-effective way to communicate the message to an audience, for whom it is initially strange.

Sin, from a biblical perspective, is one of the critical issues within the message, and one that the culture in crisis must learn to deal with, especially when moral fabric begins to unravel, under the relentless pull of outside corruption. To effect necessary cultural change (i.e., the positive changes, which will help the group cope with negative ones), the forms used to translate "sin" must deal with the issues already troubling the consciences of the receptor audience.[183] To this end, says Dye, the translator must learn well the ethical system of the culture. Where are there traditional points of conviction, or, in other words, when and why is offence committed? When is exploitation felt within the group? What motivates one member of the group to exact revenge on another? What are the reasons, especially among animist cultures, for sickness?[184] These are the questions we seek now to address for the Tabo people.

RECENT TABO HISTORY

None of the current Tabo population remembers the era prior to World War II, the last point, at which traditional customs and belief were practised by the entire group. Within the present generation, however, many elders (both men and women) recall details of Tabo history and mythology, which their parents had passed down to them. From numerous conversations with these folk, and from earlier discussions with a few, who remembered traditional childhood days, but who have since died, the following details have been pieced together.[185]

Up until the mid-1930s, the Tabo people lived as semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers in a section of swampland between the lower Aramia and Fly Rivers. Their tribal territory covered a scant 1,000 square kilometres, being bounded on the north and south by the two rivers, and on the west and east by two larger, language groups, both traditional enemies. Before they

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[183] Ibid.

[184] Ibid., p. 38.

[185] Though there have been many informants, I have spent hours with three principal ones, who deserve special mention, and who are no longer with us. Gigaewa, Daelila, and Mulu were all teenage boys, conscripted as army carriers by the colonial government during the war years. They saw action on the Kokoda Track (Daelila was even wounded by Japanese small-arms fire), and served until the end of the war, before being shipped home. Among all whom I interviewed in the past 11 years, they, alone, were old enough to actually remember childhood incidents from the time their parents lived in the swamps.

settled in their currently-recognised homeland, it is believed that they migrated across the Torres Strait, an Aboriginal Australian group that became separated from the mainland, perhaps, as a result of severe weather, and prevailing ocean currents, perhaps, for reasons of survival.[186] At some point during the 1930s, the Australian colonial government forcibly resettled the Tabo people from out of the swamps into villages on the banks of the two rivers.[187] They desired to put an end to the head-hunting forays, the Tabo frequently practised on their more-peaceful, and already missionised, tribal neighbours. Besides putting an end to tribal fighting, the Australians ostensibly had an equal desire to provide these "uncultured" semi-nomads with access to rudimentary health and education services. This, of course, is easier to accomplish, when people live in a fixed place, when they are not isolated within a remote swampland, and when they are

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[186] The reasons for this conjecture are both physical and cultural-linguistic. Medical workers, who have served, both in Aboriginal Australian communities, and have conducted clinics among the Tabo people, have remarked on the similarity of facial characteristics and physical form. They have noted that the neighbouring Gogodala and Bamu tribes have a markedly different appearance. Linguistically, the Tabo people are classified as a language isolate; although they have, over the years, picked up aspects of both Gogodala and Bamu verb systems, their own underlying system is distinct from any other nearby group. There has been speculation of linkage with other language isolates of the Trans-Fly region, but these have not been proven. While most Papua New Guinea groups migrated in three identifiable waves across from the Asian mainland and from Polynesia, it is extremely likely that a few isolated groups originated from the Aboriginal Australians, whose history, in that continent, greatly precedes human habitation of Papua New Guinea. Most of these language-isolate groups, not surprisingly, are found in the southwest corner of the country. One peculiar feature of the Tabo language (which is also seen in some Aboriginal Australian systems) is a daytime/nighttime distinction in the historic past tense. To date, I have not heard of any other Papua New Guinean language having this feature. Culturally, the Tabo people, like the Aboriginals, are, by tradition, hunters and gatherers. They did not live in permanent villages, but wandered around from camp to camp within their limited swampy homeland, a land area, which admittedly is much smaller than those covered by Aboriginal Australian groups, during their annual walkabouts. I suspect the reason for discrepancy here is that the Tabo people, being such a small group, and being surrounded on two sides by powerful enemies, had to greatly reduce traditional nomadic behaviour, as a matter of survival, once they were established as a people in Papua New Guinea.

[187] An exact date has been elusive, due to a combination of poor record-keeping by some Australian patrol officers, of the colonial days, as well as some records being lost in the transition to an independent national government in 1975. The date must have been during the 1930s, because boys, who were teenagers during the war years remembered childhood incidents, from the time their parents lived in the swamps.

no longer hostile. Because the government used the neighbouring Gogodala to subdue the Tabo people, and teach them a more-sedentary lifestyle, the Tabo consequently look back on this period as a time of slavery and humiliation, a time when they were forced to carve canoes, plant gardens, and build permanent long houses, according to the dictates and practice of their former enemies. Ironically, they talk about the resettlement in very negative terms, even while, simultaneously, acknowledging that their current lifestyle is superior to the rough, nomadic existence of their forebears.

In spite of the Australian government's intention to provide the Tabo people with better services, almost nothing was done to help them, medically or educationally, over the next 50 years. Christian missionaries, too, while concentrating on ministry to the larger, adjoining Gogodala and Bamu tribes, largely ignored the Tabo people's spiritual needs.[188] From the 1930s on, for instance, over 100 full-time Christian workers served among the Gogodala, in a variety of ministries – medical, educational, agricultural, church planting, Bible teaching, and translation. While having frequent contact with the Tabo people, none of these mission personnel troubled to learn the Tabo language. Admittedly, the language was extraordinarily difficult, the missionaries were overwhelmed with meeting the needs of the already-developing Gogodala church, and the prevailing opinion was that fringe groups, like the Tabo, could be helped at some later date.[189] In

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[188] Asia Pacific Christian Mission and Unevangelised Fields Mission worked among the Gogodala; Harry and Eva Standon broke off from APCM to start a separate work among the Bamu, which they called the Bamu River Mission.

[189] Four APCM missionaries should be recognised for short periods of ministry, during which they did concentrate on reaching the Tabo; in each instance, however, the Gogodala language, and bilingual interpreters, were used. Meriwether Lewis, in the 1950s, spent a number of months among the Kenidibi and Ulio villagers of the Fly River, including time at the headwaters of the Segero River, where some of these Tabo people continued to maintain campsites from the earlier semi-nomadic days. Second, was Pat Christon, who taught Gogodala literacy classes for a group of young men from the villages of Saiwase and Galu, in the 1970s, an effort, which proved foundational for later efforts to teach reading in the Tabo language itself. Third, was Graham Martin, who spent some weeks of itinerant ministry among the Tabo people in 1986, during which he especially endeavoured to learn and record Tabo history and belief; as far as I know, the first and the only attempt by an APCM worker to do so. And, finally, Russell Briggs (also in 1986) initiated a houseboat ministry at the Tabo village of Saiwase, and was instrumental in establishing the first

general, the Mission, as did the majority Gogodala tribe, among whom they concentrated their effort, considered the Tabo people's peculiar background as backward and uncultured. Additionally, they were labelled, by both missionaries and Gogodala pastors, alike, as resistant to the gospel, a label, which was, essentially, correct. The resistance arose, perhaps, because of thinly-veiled attitudes of condescension on the part of those ministering, perhaps because nomadic traditions have a more difficult time adapting to certain Christian practices, perhaps, because the Tabo resented former enemies telling them, once again, that they had to change, or, perhaps, because the message was never heard in their own heart language. Most likely, lack of receptivity was due to a combination of these factors.

When I first toured the Tabo villages in early 1988, a rough population count resulted in a total of only 2,400. The group was materially destitute, sociologically depressed, and, most tragically, dying out. They were disease-ridden, in part, because of untreated tropical illnesses, in part, because of genetic abnormalities, caused by inbreeding within a small population, and, in part, because of dietary deficiency. With basic health services being made slightly more available in the past 11 years, and with growing awareness of the benefits of both medical treatment, and a balanced diet, some of the worst suffering has been alleviated. Today, primarily because of the changes in their thinking, the Tabo people are more willing to paddle (in some cases for several hours) to receive treatment for malaria, tuberculosis, yaws, parasitic worms, and diarrhoea.

As a consequence, the population is currently approaching 3,500, and villages are full of youngsters, who, although still malnourished, are, on the whole, healthier and happier than the generation of 10 years ago. No reliable statistics are available, but my own estimate is that the average lifespan, for a Tabo person, has risen by at least 10 years; whereas, the child survival rate used to be only a shocking 50 percent, up to age 10, that figure today would be cut in half.

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medical aid-post for any of the Tabo people there. (Unfortunately, for political reasons, the government, after eight years, relocated the aid-post to a Gogodala village upriver.)

TRADITIONAL TABO BELIEF ABOUT THE SPIRIT WORLD

Moreau, in discussing the African cultural situation, says that there are 800 identifiable cultural and linguistic groups, each of which are unique, and each of which are in a state of flux. Because of several centuries of colonial and neo-colonial influence, it is almost impossible, today, to isolate "pure" traditional belief; in almost all cases, there is a current syncretistic mix of traditional underlying religious forms with Christian (or Islamic) belief.[190] Similarities between the African and Papua New Guinean situations can be noted. Although the African land mass is a huge 30 million square kilometres, in contrast with Papua New Guinea's size of under half a million, and although Africans number over 640 million, in comparison to Papua New Guinea's modest four million, the two have a nearly-identical number of discrete people groups and languages.[191] Furthermore, just like the African situation, when Papua New Guinean groups are studied, anthropologically, it is increasingly difficult to identify pure underlying religious traditions, because of the high degree of syncretisation with Christianity. This is true, even though European colonisation of the island began, in earnest, only a little over a century ago.

As already noted, the Tabo people have been affected by a number of outside influences in recent times, all of which have had the tendency to dilute the purity of cultural traditions, if not obliterate them altogether. Chief among these (because of chronological primacy), would be the colonial government's decision to resettle them in permanent villages. In subsequent years, though, it has been the influence of other neighbouring tribes, and the missionaries, who worked among them, which have most affected Tabo cultural practice. Some of the effects were arguably beneficial – exposing the Tabo people to modern medicine, conducting literacy classes in the Gogodala language, teaching about planting gardens, and better nutrition, and introducing the people to the gospel message. At the same time, however, the Tabo people's language and heritage were

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[190] Moreau, *World of the Spirits*, p. 100.
[191] Clark, "Minority Languages' Status, and Attitudes Towards Bible Translation", p. 342. In his argument for the necessity of Bible translation for many smaller languages, Clark mentions the island nation of PNG, as the extreme example – four million people and over 800 indigenous languages, of which the largest has only 100,000 speakers, the smallest about 200.

repeatedly denigrated. Implicitly and explicitly, they were told that their way of life was inferior, and that the road to success lay in them becoming more like their Gogodala neighbours. Most recently, as an outside influence, has been the arrival of a Singaporean logging company, based two days' journey towards the headwaters of an adjacent river system. Many Tabo men and youth abandon their families and villages for relatively long periods of work for the company. While the company does provide an opportunity to earn wages for necessary material goods – kerosene lanterns, cooking pots, axes, and clothing – the many disastrous moral effects, its presence brings on the culture, seemingly far outweigh any benefit. So then, after 60 years of being pressured into a radical cultural, shift from these varied sources, it is not surprising that isolation of "pure" traditional belief is somewhat difficult for the Tabo people.

Galegae (*Galega:*)[192] is the ancestral spirit, from whom the Tabo people, and their homeland, came into being. Like one of the High Gods of Aboriginal Australians, *Galega:*, while once having been an actual person, is, today, believed to be in possession of both a spirit, and a physical, body, one which he can access, and move about in at will. (In contrast, all other humans, who die, relinquish their physical bodies, and live on only as spirits.) *Galega:*'s physical body is half-wild-pig and half-human, for which reason, certain wild pigs, which especially resemble his presumed appearance, are used in sacrificial rituals of appeasement. In terms of present power, *Galega:* is the ruler of all lesser spirits, which inhabit, or dare to enter, Tabo tribal territory. He imparts his secret powers to select Tabo men, who, alone, possess the correct manipulative and ceremonial rituals.

Galega: is also similar to the Aboriginal High Gods, in that, while being concerned to meet the Tabo people's immediate physical needs, he, especially, takes responsibility for the group's longevity, by controlling

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[192] The spellings of Tabo names and terms will, from here on, follow the convention of their established phonetic alphabet. As such, the symbol "a:" whenever it appears represents the English vowel sound in the word "c*a*t". This sound is distinguished from the five other pure vowel sounds used in Tabo, which are represented by the unmodified English vowel symbols: "a" as in "f*a*ther", "e" as in "h*ey*", "i" as in "*I*an", "o" as in "t*o*ll", and "u" as in "r*u*le".

fertility. In the course of human sexual activity, he is the one, who conceives new members of the tribe, by duplicating part of himself inside the female partner's reproductive system. But, while *Galega:* has a vested interest in the welfare of his people, he is also subject to unexplained moods of wrath towards them. He is especially fearsome to the uninitiated – children and women – for whom he is a terrorising spirit, and harbinger of death, should his physical being ever be glimpsed. Even initiated men must live cautiously, for failure to observe traditional taboos will result in death if *Galega:* (who is not omniscient) should happen to witness, or hear of, the offence. *Galega:*'s infrequent appearances are not predictable, and neither is his behaviour towards humans, be they his own descendants, or total strangers. While he is basically considered as good to the Tabo people, in his activities of provision and procreation, he is, paradoxically, greatly feared. He is the source of life, yet he brings death to the unwary. He can be manipulated by ritual, but one can never be sure of why his anger arises, or, at what point, his anger has truly subsided.

Appeasement ceremonies were held approximately once a year to stave off potential disaster, to dispel any present misfortune, and to gain spiritual power. Only the men gathered, of course, with the women and children, meanwhile, fleeing to the sago-making places in the swamps, or staying well-hidden in *iyaba genama* (ceremonially-impure birthing huts near the village). In their gathering, the men participated in singing songs, beating drums, making ritual wild pig noises, calling on their tribal god, by each of his six secret names, and waiting for his arrival. A respected central place was left vacant for him. One of the chief men, previously chosen to be *Galega:*'s representative, costumes himself with mud paint, cassowary feathers, fern fronds, *pata:* (a grass covering for the genitals), pig tusks, and a cloak of pig hide. Under the power of *Galega:*'s spirit, he enters the ceremony, at an appropriate moment, and takes his seat. The assembled men then worship him, and eat *gane* (sago grub delicacies) in his presence. They, thus, all receive of *Galega:*'s power for yet another year – power over sickness, power over feminine weakness, and power over other spirit forces, including neighbouring enemies, and the animals of the jungle.

Among the Tabo men, are *pakanipi*, who parallel Moreau's description of the African sorcerer. *Pakanipi* are continually in touch with *Galega:*'s

power. They claim to see his appearance on regular occasions, and they hear his voice. As such, they are able to give guidance to others, who seek it. Also, among the men, are *giwalipi*, or magic workers, a category that parallels Moreau's African witch. These men are controlled by spirit power (not necessarily *Galega:*'s), and the power may affect others unintentionally. Whereas sorcerers can use their powers of divination beneficially, the work of magicians is almost always harmful. Only a few men possess the above special powers, but all of them, at initiation, are given the power of secret knowledge – *Galega:*'s six names, special taboos of eating, hunting, and sexual activity, and the ceremonial rituals. In contrast, other less-sacred taboos, related to everyday communal life, and the legends of Tabo ancestry, such as, how *Galega:* created the Tabo homeland, are common knowledge to the whole tribe.

The general term for spirit, in the Tabo language, is *gobogobo*. As we have stated, *Galega:* is *gobogobo*, but he also possesses, and can manifest himself within, a physical body. Human beings also possess a *gobogobo*, which, during life, manifests itself in the form of a shadow, or a reflected image. During dreams, the human spirit may leave the body temporarily, as it visits others in the spirit realm. The human spirit leaves the body permanently at death, but, before passing on to permanently reside in the spirit habitation called *Adili Haba*, it lingers around the community, from which it departed.[193] The more respected a person was within the community, during life, the longer the spirit waits to journey on. If family and neighbours had treated the deceased kindly in life, the spirit will act

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[193] The Tabo people, traditionally, did not bury their dead, but laid the bodies on racks, near enough to the family home, to be observed during the process of decomposition. Offerings of food for the departed spirit were daily placed on the funeral rack. The feast, in honour of the departed, was held a respectable time after the forces of nature had completed their work. Of course, for reasons of health, this was one of the practices that the colonial government insisted on changing. But, even as late as 1988, I visited a village, where a corpse was rotting not far from the house, to which I was welcomed. Today, the most common practice is a Christian burial for the departed, usually after a day, during which friends and relatives are summoned from all nearby villages to mourn the occasion. The Christian burial is officiated by a local pastor, and is conducted, regardless of the deceased's actual participation in, or relation to, the church community in life. Months later, at the conclusion of the feast of honour, a final ceremony of planting a cross on the gravesite is performed. Most people believe that the spirit lingers to both partake of the feast food, and observe this final ritual act.

beneficially towards them, but, if the deceased had been treated poorly, the spirit will use its power to exact revenge. After an appropriate number of months, a feast will be held in honour of the departed one, during which, some of the food is ritually shared with the spirit. The spirit, thus contented, passes on to its final home. At this point, official mourning by the family is concluded; widowed spouses are free to remarry.

Apart from human spirits, the most-frequently encountered *gobogobo* are *ida:da:li*. These are the spirits, which inhabit specific locales (caves, holes, trees, whirlpools), or which, on wilful occasion, possess large animals, snakes, birds, and even the occasional human being. These spirits are generally malevolent and capricious, except for those, with which one has become familiar. For instance, in one's personal sago-making place, or section of the jungle, the local *ida:da:li* provide protection from other invading spirits that might cause a tree to fall, or an attack by a poisonous snake. Additionally, the *ida:da:li* protects against trespassers, or thieves, by causing accidents or sickness to befall them. To preserve this beneficial relationship, the owner of the ground periodically leaves the spirits presents of his own food; he also ritually pours out the blood of any pig, which he successfully hunts. As long as he is, thus, careful to placate them, the *ida:da:li* will not molest either him or his family; they will strengthen his *kukala*, the personal taboos, which he has publicly announced over his property.

When someone gets extremely angry, the *ida:da:li* can come and possess him temporarily, but it is not clear whether anger precedes possession, or vice versa. Regardless, once such a spirit is present, it will do damage to others, or to the person it inhabits. For this reason, offences, committed during a fit of temper, are often not held to an individual's account.[194] Besides, the *ida:da:li*, itself, causing harm, while under its influence, a person's human spirit may leave its proper body, and go seek revenge on the one who caused grievance. The departed spirit may go and enter a poisonous snake, so that it will attack the offender; it may push them, causing a serious fall; it may take the form of a large wave, which capsizes their canoe; it may cause a tree to fall and crush them; it may aggravate a crocodile into a deadly assault. After revenge is thus accomplished, a

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[194] See earlier footnote (n. 159) p. 109, for examples from among the Tabo people.

person's anger subsides, their spirit returns, and the *ida:da:li*, which temporarily took its place, likewise, goes back to its own habitation.

While the previously-described spirit beings – *Galega:*, human spirits, and *ida:da:li* – are neither totally good nor evil, in their motives and actions, the remaining two categories of spirit beings are decidedly evil. They are determined to torture and kill those, whom they encounter; they cannot be appeased.

The *alaili* (also called *muluwapo*) are the spirits of women, who died in childbirth. Because of the distressing way, in which they departed this life, they are unable to pass on to the peaceful spirit world of *Adili Haba*, doomed, instead, to forever wander on earth. Appearing in the bodies of the women, who died, they are unequivocally bad, and horribly terrifying. Their screams of bitter rage can be heard in the jungle at night. They will kill any human they find alone, one solid reason for always travelling in a group. The heads of victims are severed, and the bodies are mutilated. *Alaili* especially delight in the flesh of young children, but will eat anyone; when human victims are unavailable, they feed upon their own breast milk. Regarding their function in the natural order, the *alaili* initiate the changes in the moon's appearance; they control women's hormonal cycles.

A final category of spirit beings, for the Tabo people are the *duwa:ga:*, who, like the *alaili*, are totally evil, terrifying, and beyond appeasement. Unlike the *alaili*, however, *duwa:ga:* never had an existence as human beings. They are ghouls of the spirit world, who seek isolated human beings; finding such a one, they will grab them with their long claws, kill them, and feed on their flesh. Victims are left as piles of naked bones.

TRADITIONAL TABO MORALITY

From our consideration of the Tabo people's view of the spirit world, we have seen that no being, whether human or non-human, would be considered as totally good. This being the case, what is ethically right or wrong must be subjectively determined by the group. While *Galega:* is the provider for, and spiritual protector of, the group, he can, inexplicably, also strike out against them. As their common ancestor, he has established precedent regarding cultural taboos and customs, but, lacking omniscience,

he is not always aware when violation has occurred. The entire group (especially the elders) then, must determine, for a host of smaller issues, what is the right course of action. Traditionally, their greatest concern was how to keep *Galega:* content. But, since *Galega:* is not the only powerful or terrifying spirit, with whom the people have to deal, issues of morality are not only subjective, they become highly complex. *Alaili* and *duwa:ga:* are beyond appeasement, so they do not enter into the moral equation; people just hope they successfully avoid contact with them. But, as regards relationships with their tribal god, with all other humans in their community, with all recently-departed human spirits, and with the host of *ida:da:li*, whom they daily contact, keeping them all satisfied is a never-ending juggling act, which, in essence, defines the group's sense of right and wrong.

In Tabo religious terminology, the word *kuba* is used to signify what is morally unsatisfactory, or, at least, what creates disharmony in one of the significant relationships with other spirit beings. Where disharmony arises, undesirable circumstances are sure to follow, certainly for individuals, but, very likely, for the entire group as well. For this reason, *kuba* practices are to be avoided.[195] If there is anger in the community, as evidenced by sharp words, or violence, or if accident or sickness arises, to show that a spirit is displeased, *kuba* has surely been committed by someone. It is interesting, here, to note that the one who gets angry is not at fault, but the one who perpetrated the anger.

Kuba does not occur, if there is no human or spirit witness to a particular deed, even if a well-known tribal taboo has been violated. It may be extremely unlikely that, among the multitude of spirits, none witnessed a human action, but some law-breakers are known to have been fortuitous. What is more difficult to get around, is the fact that, out of fear, people never travel or work in solitude. As such, it is almost impossible to conceive of sinning alone. If accomplices to a crime, however, all remain silent, and if no spirit force was troubled, by witnessing the deed, then, in essence, no *kuba* was actually committed, for no anger or disharmony resulted in the community. As such, it may be possible to steal, have an

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[195] At present, only the moral sense of *kuba* will be dealt with, but, in a later section, we will explore a wide range of non-moral senses, which the word also possesses.

extra-marital liaison, or utter bad words, without actually committing *kuba*, just so long as the deed never comes to light.

Traditionally, there were seven basic attitudes, or actions, which the community always regarded as *kuba*. The first was coveting another man's wife, a situation described by the term *walu*. When *walu* becomes known, the offended man will naturally be subject to jealousy and great anger. The second is what Tabo speakers of English label as "swearing", but the indigenous term *mela* has nothing to do with using a deity's name disrespectfully, or in anger. Rather, *mela* refers to mocking, insulting language, directed at another human being. *Mela* words typically involve derisive comments about a person's facial characteristics, their feet, their sexual organs, or personal hygiene, but, sometimes, the words are simply a slanderous accusation. Such words are not necessarily spoken in anger, but they certainly produce it.

Third, fourth, and fifth in the *kuba* list are three terms, which have to do with violating known prohibitions. The most severe of these offences is covered by the term *agoe*. Women perform *agoe* by venturing upstream to where the men perform their toilet; men do so by engaging in homosexual acts. *Talona* is the general term for "taboo", under which a large variety of communal prohibitions (theoretically traced back to *Galega:*) are covered. Examples include a law against men entering the women's bathing and toilet area downstream, a prohibition against males becoming contaminated by menstrual blood, or the birth of a child, and a reciprocal prohibition on contaminated women approaching a male. Perhaps, surprisingly, considering the restrictions noted for *agoe*, sexual activity between females is a non-issue.

Performing *agoe*, or breaking *talona*, will surely invite the wrath of spirits, who have established all customary tribal practice. This is not to say that human anger will not also be aroused, for displeasure of the spirits is a highly serious matter. *Kukala*, however, even though spiritual forces are involved, are a different matter, in that they are temporary, private prohibitions, established by humans themselves. In order to protect a personal trail, hunting place, sago-making camp, house, or garden, the owner utters magic incantations over his property, and then marks it, in an

observable way, as spiritually protected. Any violator of the *kukala* will end up coming into conflict with the spirit summoned by the incantation. His skin may break out in gaping tropical ulcers; he may cut his foot with an axe. Thus, by help from a friendly spirit, the one, who established *kukala*, can discern when offence has occurred, and who the offender is. Reparation can be exacted for any property damaged or lost.

The sixth traditional *kuba* is known as *kuiha waliwalilatele*, an attitude or action, which refuses to respect, or show deference, to one's elders. This wrong can be manifested by being overly loud or aggressive, and by not bowing the head, as one walks past, or sits, in the presence of a superior. Most importantly, the offence is committed, when one has repeatedly been a source of trouble to the community, has been severely punished, and charged to change behaviour, and yet, has continued to be unrepentant. The special power of *Galega:*, which resides with the elders, will end up killing such a one, most likely through suicide. The offender will become so fearful of the severe beatings he publicly receives, so ashamed of the disgrace, thus brought on self and family, and so discouraged with his inability to change behaviour, that he will take his own life.

The final category, traditionally regarded as *kuba*, by the Tabo people is rather generic. The term *kalakala uluhukuti komo* literally means "taking away happiness", and is a catch-all, referring to any action that disrupts community togetherness. Indeed, the ethical importance, which the Tabo people attach to maintaining group harmony, can hardly be stressed enough; psychologically, they reason that, once unity is lost, their vulnerability to outside forces, whether these be human or spirit, will greatly increase. In this context, then, group preservation becomes the ultimate determiner of ethics. It is here that the subjective standards of Tabo traditional morality become most evident, and it is here that the greatest potential conflict with biblical teaching lies – anything, which ends up promoting group happiness, is right; anything, which divides or discourages, is wrong.

FINDING SIMILAR POINTS OF CONVICTION

After considering specific details of Tabo belief about the spirit world, and, after investigating their traditional view of morality, we can safely conclude

that, in respect to each earlier generalisation, made concerning the conflict of animist belief with scripture, the Tabo culture is rather typical. Firstly, Tabo culture can be described as shame-based; it easily fits within Grimes' closed-stable society categorisation. Secondly, the Tabo people have a tradition, where right and wrong behaviour, while determined, often, by customary practice, handed down from the ancestors, is, nonetheless, for most issues, determined, subjectively, by the group. Thirdly, the Tabo people believe in the oral tradition surrounding their forefather *Galega:*. While this does not keep them from rejecting the oral or written traditions of outsiders, they believe, in general, that each tradition is powerful, only within its separate geographic or cultural sphere. Since there are many different peoples in the world, each group, logically, has its own separate deities, which must be appeased, and each group possesses different storied traditions, by which they must abide. Fourthly, the Tabo people, in many instances, attribute blame for an offence to outside spirit forces, rather than accept personal responsibility. And fifthly, most categories of spirit beings, of which the Tabo are aware, are subject to manipulation by those who perform the right rituals, or who possess secret knowledge.

Earlier, we noted Dye's suggestion that, to successfully translate "sin" for an animist culture, one must first discover the moral issues already troubling their consciences. To fail to do so, was to fail in giving the receptor audience necessary moral tools for coping with societal change.[196] But what is the translator to do, when he finds that the points of conviction for a particular culture are an entirely different set of convictions from what the Bible addresses? This strongly appears to be the case, when the traditional Tabo meaning of *kuba* is considered. Traditional wrong, for the Tabo people, can be summarised as any action that displeases a spirit, or that produces strife within their community. According to their belief, an angry, violent response cannot be wrong, since it is provoked. This is linked to yet another unbiblical idea that a person, committing an offence, is not responsible for it, if he was simply following strong, uncontrollable spirit urges within. The blame ends up being ascribed to an external spirit's temporary possession, rather than to the human being. Further Tabo beliefs, contrary to scripture, include that an action is not wrong, if it

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[196] See p. 87.

remains a secret; an action is not wrong, if the elders declare it to be right; and an action is not wrong, if it produces general happiness. Indeed, aside from Tabo tradition, and the Bible agreeing that homosexuality and adultery are wrong (if one happens to get caught, that is), little else can be seen as common. For these reasons, *kuba* seems woefully inadequate as a suitable translation for either "sin", or any of its biblical synonyms.[197]

From our analysis of the Tabo cultural situation, then, it appears that Dye's hope of always finding similar points of conviction is not well founded. Instead, what Alexander Hodge said earlier, concerning the severe distortion of conscience by some groups is correct. He claimed that God's design for the conscience is that it condemns individuals for sin, when they fail to come up to standards, intuitively recognised as obligatory. The conscience fails in this prescribed task, when cultural worldview has become warped by successively-accumulated moral generalisations, which are poorly made. Over generations of time, the initial God-given sense of right and wrong, thus becomes replaced by acquired human knowledge, which, for the animist, is the group's present daily experiences, in combination with ancestral lore.[198]

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[197] Cf. H. Van der Veen, "Difficulties of Translating the Bible into the South Toradja Language of Southwest Celebes", in *The Bible Translator* 1-1 (1950), pp. 21-25. The author, in one section, discusses the problems of translating biblical terms of high spiritual significance for the South Toradja language of Indonesia, a group with a distinctly animist tradition. In particular, he addresses the difficulties associated with the translating of "God", "sin", and "soul". Cf. Leonard Beecher, "Christian Terminology in the Vocabulary of an Animist Society", in *The Bible Translator* 15-3 (1964), pp. 117-127. Here is another valuable article, which deals with specific translational problems associated with communicating Christian belief (one centred on relationship and commitment) to a people, whose background religious vocabulary is fundamentally animist. Beecher's discussion addresses, in particular, translating the names (and attributes) of God, "sacrifice", and "worship", plus several other terms, which do not relate to the topic of this thesis. The nature of animist sacrifice is that its ritual accompaniments of invocation and incantation are designed to be propitiatory, that is, to calm the vexed spirits, who had been aroused by violations of the tribal code. Beecher notes (pp. 123, 126-127) the similarity here with early Semitic (Canaanitic) ritual motives, which the Israelites were called to be separated from, both theologically and practically. If syncretisation is to be avoided, this is a concept the Bible translator, working in an animist culture would do well to keep in mind.

[198] See related earlier discussion, and footnote (n. 131), p. 94.

While not a common point of conviction *per se*, a similarity between Tabo tradition and scripture can be found in that the Tabo people have extremely high regard for avoiding offence of any spirit, especially *Galega:*. This then, is perhaps the best track to follow, in order to adequately communicate what the Bible regards sin to be. Sin, for the Tabo, could be understood as an offence against a spirit being, who is far greater than *Galega:*, the one who supposedly made, and protects, their homeland. Sin could be construed as a violation of the unchanging *talona*, and personal *kukala*, that the omniscient Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, long ago, established. If sin is thus comprehended as personal offence against the very greatest of all spirits, then conviction for wrongdoing (which is necessarily prior to moral change for any culture) may actually be gained. In a later section, we will return to the viability of this solution, and its application to translating specific biblical vocabulary for the Tabo.

APPENDIX A: OLD TESTAMENT WORDS FOR "SIN"

Comparison of Hebrew Words with English Counterparts in NASB

For ease of comparison, all possible renderings in English are given in singular, nominalised (frequently gerund) form, even though many of the instances of usage are verbal or adjectival. Also, words with the same root, but differing lexical forms, and associated phrases, have been placed together in single word groups (e.g., *bearing sin*, *committing sin*, *sin*, *sinfulness*, *sinned*, *sinning*, and *sins* would all be placed in a single group). The number of times the Hebrew was translated by a particular word group is included in the parentheses immediately following.

HEBREW	NASB RENDERINGS
1. חָטָא, חֵטְא, חַטָּא, חֲטָאָה, חַטָּאת[199]	bearing blame(2), bewilderment(1), error(1), fault(1), forfeiture(1), indicting(1), loss(2), missing(1), not reaching(1), offending(4), penalty(1), punishment(1), sin(323), wrong(1)
2. רַע, רָעַע, רָעָה, רֹעַ	adversity(14), affliction(4), bad(29), calamity(54), damage(1), deadliness(1), defamation(2), defect(1), destroying(1), disaster(22), discomfort(1), distress(4), evil(391), grieving(2), hardness(2), harm/hurt(48), hostility(3), illness(1), injuring(2), misery(3), misfortune(8), pain(2), ruin(3), sadness/sorrow(5), selfishness(1), seriousness(1), severity(2), soreness(2), sternness(1), (sure) suffering(3), threatening(1), treachery(1), treating badly(4), trouble(14), ugliness(7), unpleasantness(19), wickedness(71), wildness(5), wretchedness(2), woe(1), wrong(6)
3. רָשָׁע, רֶשַׁע, רִשְׁעָה	condemnation(16), evil(6), guilt(5), ill gain(1), offence(1), punishment(1), ungodliness(1), wickedness(311)
4. עָוֹן	blame(1), guilt(22), iniquity(189), punishment(18)
5. פָּשַׁע, פֶּשַׁע	breach of trust(1), offence(1), rebellion(20), revolting(7), transgression(105)
6. אָשַׁם, אָשֵׁם, אַשְׁמָה	condemnation(2), desolation(1), guilt(87), offence(1), (not) punishing(1), sin(1), suffering(1), transgression(1), wrong (6)

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[199] Piel (intensive voice) occurrences have not been included in this analysis, because the change of voice alters the primary sense of the חָטָא word group from "sin" itself to meaning "reconciliation" or "an offering for sin".

7. אָוֶן	affliction(1), distress(1), evil(4), falsehood(1), harm(1), idol(1), iniquity(37), misfortune(1), mourning(2), sorrow(10), trouble(2), unrighteousness(1), vanity(1), wickedness(21), wrong(2)
8. עָוֶל, עַוְלָה, עֶוֶל, עַוֶּל	bending(1), bewilderment(1), crookedness(1), distortion(1), iniquity(19), injustice(21), perversity(4), ruin(3), unrighteousness(10), violence(1), wickedness(9), wrong(10)
9. מַעַל	error(1), falsehood(1), perpetration(1), treachery(5), trespass(2), unfaithfulness(56), violation(1)
10. עָמָל	anguish(1), labor(20), mischief(9), misery(1), sorrow(1), toil(4), trouble(14), unjust decisions(1), wickedness(2), work(1) (NIV also uses "distress", "iniquity", and "suffering")
11. שָׁגַג, שְׁגָגָה, שָׁגָה	error(9), exhilaration(1), intoxication(1), misleading(3), reeling(3), sin(1), straying/leading astray(6), unintentional/unwitting sin(15), wandering (4)
12. עֲבַר	Is used almost always in the non-moral primary sense of crossing over to the other side. Of 18 instances where there is a clearly moral context, it is translated as "transgression".
13. עָוַת, עַוָּתָה	bending(1), cheating(1), crookedness(1), defrauding(1), oppression(1), perversion(3), stooping(1), subversion(1), thwarting (1), wrong(1) (NIV also uses "deprivation", "frustrating", "twisting", and "warping")

APPENDIX B: NEW TESTAMENT WORDS FOR "SIN"
Comparison of Greek Words with English Counterparts in NASB

For ease of comparison, all possible renderings in English are given in singular, nominalised (frequently gerund) form, even though many of the instances of usage are verbal or adjectival. Also, words with the same root, but differing lexical forms, and associated phrases, have been placed together in single word groups (e.g., *bearing sin*, *committing sin*, *sin*, *sinfulness*, *sinned*, *sinning*, and *sins* would all be placed in a single group). The number of times the Greek was translated by a particular word group is included in the parentheses immediately following.

GREEK	NASB RENDERINGS
1. ἁμαρτάνω, ἁμάρτημα, ἁμαρτία	offence(1), sin(218) (NIV also uses "guilt")
2. κακὸς, κακόω, κακία, κακοήθεια, κακοποιέω	bad(2), cruelty(1), being embittered(1), evil(42), harm(8), illness/sickness(11), loathing(1), malice(6), mistreating(3), trouble(1), wickedness(2), wretchedness(2), wrong(8) (NIV also uses "depravity")
3. πονηρία, πονηρός	bad(5), crimes(1), envy(2), evil/evil one(58), malice(1), malignance(1), wickedness(15), viciousness(1), worthlessness(1) (NIV also uses "demon possession", "guilty conscience", "pain", "seriousness", and "sinfulness")
4. ἀδικία, ἀδίκημα, ἀδικέω, ἄδικος, ἀδίκως	evil(1), harm/hurt(9), iniquity(4), injuring(3), injustice(6), misdeed(1), offence(2), unrighteousness(22), wickedness(5), wrongdoing(16) (NIV also uses "becoming guilty", "crime", "damage", "dishonesty", "misdemeanour", "mistreating", "sin", "torment", "unfairness", "ungodliness", and "worldliness")
5. ἀνομία, ἀνόμως, ἄνομος	godlessness(1), lawlessness(24), transgression(2)
6. παράπτωμα	transgression(16), trespass(4) (NIV also uses "sin")
7. ἀσέβεια, ἀσεβέω, ἀσεβὴς	godlessness(1), ungodliness(16) (NIV also uses "unrighteousness")

8. παραβαίνω, παράβασις, παραβάτης	breaking a command(1), offence(1), turning aside(1), transgression(11), violation(1) (NIV also uses "leaving" and "sin")
9. παρακοή, παρακούω	disobedience(3), refusal to listen(2) (there are three additional instances of usage, where context is non-moral)
10. ἀγνόημα, ἄγνοια	ignorance/sins of ignorance(5)
11. ἥττημα	defeat(1), failure(1)

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