CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE SHARP CONTRASTS OF SUMATRA

The cultural, economic and religious pattern of Sumatra was, around 1800, much more diverse than that of any of the other greater islands such as Java, Kalimantan, Sulawesi or Papua. This diversity was not only evident among the inhabitants of the inland regions, the population of the mountain chain of the Bukit Barisan that runs along the western coast from Aceh to the south, the home of the inland tribes of Batak, Gayo-Alas, Minangkabau, Kubu (Jambi) and Lampung. There were also, and still are, great differences in the coastal regions: the Malay Sultanates of the East Coast, Java-oriented Palembang, the proud and independently distinct identity of Aceh, equally distinct Minangkabau, just to mention some of the major cultures. Besides, there were quite significant differences in culture in the numerous smaller islands surrounding Sumatra. Since the 1860s large numbers of migrants had arrived from China in the islands of Bangka, Belitung and Riau. Many more Chinese, and later many poor coolies from Java, came to the new plantation area of Medan. These migrant workers dominated the tin mining, rubber, tobacco and pepper plantations, and much of the non-agricultural smallholder economy. The islands of Nias, Batu, Mentawai and Enggano preserved different cultures again. Many of the Sumatran coastal cultures had been Muslim for several centuries. The most assertive of these were the Acehnese, as well as the smaller coastal settlements like Bengkulu and, on the Eastern coast, the sultanates of Deli (Medan), Serdang, Langkat and Siak. There were also strong inland Muslim traditional societies in the mountainous regions of Minangkabau, Gayo-Alas, Palembang and Lampung.

Confronted with all this diversity it will be necessary to concentrate on two major regions of mission and church development, those of the Toba-Batak and Karo homelands in what is now North Sumatra, and more specifically on two churches, HKBP and GBKP. Different in many ways, the developments in these two regions and churches yield insights into the processes of religious change in Sumatra without overshadowing the very important developments in other regions and churches.

Missionary initiatives prior to 1857

The Batak homeland, (today the larger part of the Indonesian province of North Sumatra) lies between Aceh in the north and the provinces of West
Sumatra and Riau in the south, approximately 50,000 square km in extent, or one ninth of the land area of Sumatra. Dominant geographical features are Lake Toba and the extensive mountain ranges and highland, which form part of the Bukit Barisan range that runs through the length of Sumatra. Among the high peaks are active and dormant volcanoes, a number reaching height of over 2,000 m. The highland area has a cool, wet climate.

Lake Toba, which has a central place in Batak folklore and tradition, lies in the bed of an extinct volcano in the heart of the Batak highlands. A large island, Samosir that is about 50 km long and about 16 km at its widest point, dominates it. A narrow plain on the west coast, and the extensive lowlands of the east coast, while not part of Batakland proper, have had extensive Batak populations since pre-colonial times.

In scholarly discussion the name Batak refers to an ethnological grouping of peoples who share differing but similar cultures and whose languages, while too distinctive to be regarded as dialects, are closely related. These people are the Toba, Dairi or Pakpak, Simalungun, Karo and Angkola-Mandailing Batak, each with their own homeland although in modern times many have migrated into neighbouring areas or to other regions of Indonesia. Whether ‘Batak’ is an indigenous name or one applied first by outsiders, remains controversial. The Toba Batak, who are often simply called ‘Bataks’ and whose folkways are considered by many Indonesians to be characteristic of all Batak, in fact refer to themselves more readily as Tapanuli people, taking the name of the great bay that is a feature of their region. Similarly the Karo and others do no readily refer to themselves as ‘Bataks’.

In a discussion of the processes of religious change among the Batak peoples in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries two regions are of particular interest. These are the region of North Tapanuli, which was the scene of the German Rhenish Mission’s most rapid and spectacular successes, and the region on the east coast of North Sumatra and the neighbouring highland plateau, the homeland of the Karo people who resisted Christianity, as they had resisted Islam, until the period of rapid church growth after Independence. Both these regions, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, were in reality outside the sphere of influence of any of the European powers. The mountain regions were secure in their isolation and although accounts were emerging of Batak life, such as William Marsden’s report of a journey made in Sumatra in 1783, little account had been taken of the region by the European powers.

In 1824 the Treaty of London regularised Dutch and British interests in the Malay Archipelago by establishing Malaya as a British sphere of interest, and recognising Sumatra (where the British had had a foothold at Benkulen or Bengkulu since 1685) as a Dutch sphere of influence. Distracted by their Aceh War and other concerns the Dutch colonial administration did not seek to extend its rule to the east coast and North Tapanuli regions for at least forty
years after the Treaty, and then unevenly. The final occupation of the Karo plateau, for example, did not take place until 1904.

In this situation, missionaries in Tapanuli and planters on the east coast of Sumatra entered areas that were completely independent of colonial rule or significant European influence. Having established their enterprises they continued, for some time after colonial penetration began, to overshadow the colonial administration and its officials who often depended on their local knowledge and their ability to speak local languages and to negotiate with local leaders and rulers.

The Protestant mission among the Angkola, Toba and Simalungun Batak peoples is widely, and appropriately, associated with the German Rhenish Mission, which entered Batakland in 1861, and with the name of the great missionary strategist Ludwig Ingwer Nommensen (1834–1918) who arrived in Sumatra in 1862. However, the Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft (RMG) was neither the first, nor the only, pioneering mission agency to enter the Batak world during the nineteenth century, and Nommensen himself undertook his pioneering work in North Tapanuli in company with others (among whom P.H. Johannsen and August Mohri) and from a basis already established by the Mission in the southern Bataklands.

The death in 1834 of two missionaries sponsored by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Henry Lyman and Samuel Munson, on their first entry to the inland Batak territory, is also well known, but over a decade before this tragic event British Baptist missionaries had been active in the region. This earlier activity was closely associated with the British presence on the west coast of Sumatra and the personal interest the British Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, had taken in the evangelisation of the indigenous peoples of the Indonesian region. In 1824, the year in which he finally left the east, Raffles had commissioned Richard Burton and Nathaniel

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1 On the life of Nommensen, there is a note of the more accessible, modern European studies attached to Schreiner 1998:499–500. In what follows Jonathan T. Nommensen 1974 was used, being an Indonesian translation by E.I.D. Nababan-Tobing, of the Toba Batak life, written in Sumatra by Nommensen’s missionary son soon after his father’s death, and published in 1925. This work is written out of, and into, a Batak rather than a European or mission board context. It is based on recollections and interviews and is largely free of the RMG image of Nommensen and of the idealistic veneration that later grew around the first Ephorus of the Batak church. Intent on telling the story of his father’s life the younger Nommensen provides raw data, rather than an interpretation. In doing so, so closely after the events, he presents also the unmistakable flavour of missionary life: piety, family tragedies, political manoeuvring with respect both to Batak chiefs and the Dutch authorities. A second edition was published in two parts in Pematangsiantar about 1963/4. It was not possible to use recent publications on L.I. Nommensen, written by Martin E. Lehmann (1996) and Lorman M. Peterson (Nommensen’s grandson-in-law who lives in San Diego USA), published in 2001.

2 Payne 1945:38–56 offers a comprehensive account.
Ward to explore the central Batak region, preparatory to setting up a mission to the people around Lake Toba.

This party appears to have been well received, after a difficult journey through the rugged territory from Sibolga to the Silindung valley. From there they were forced to return to the coast when Burton became ill with dysentery, and their consequent failure to honour the summons of the principal Batak ruler, Si Singamangaraja, may have influenced the later Batak response to the tragic Munson and Lyman expedition of 1834.

The British Baptist Mission terminated its work in Sumatra when the island was returned to Dutch rule in 1825 but some British mission activity continued on the west coast. While Richard Burton relocated to Bengal, in India, where he died in 1827, Nathaniel Ward moved to the principal local settlement, Padang, where he supported himself while engaging in evangelism and translation work among the coastal Malay population.

The missionaries’ assessment of prospects in the Batak region is presented in an 1846 Memorandum by Ward, written in response to an enquiry from the Dutch Bible Society (Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap) about missionary prospects among the Bataks. In the Memorandum Ward notes that Richard Burton had established himself at Sibolga in 1821–1822 as a missionary to the Bataks, supported by the English Baptist Missionary Society, and remained there until he moved to Bengal in 1825. Burton, it seems, made some progress in the study and documentation of the ‘Batta’ language, but took all the results away with him. He had investigated a font to print a translation of John’s Gospel in ‘Batta’ script although there is no evidence that any Batak material was printed at this time.

In describing his 1824 journey with Burton, “at the expense of the British Government,” Ward reported that they had moved in a north-westerly direction from the Bay of Tapanuli, to the region of the great lake, in the heart of the Toba country, near the seat of the principal Batak ruler, Si Singamangaraja. After crossing a triple chain of mountains, where there were occasional villages, they came into the clear open Silindung valley, which they found cultivated

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5 It was common to spell Batak as ‘Batta’ in the 19th century, the final ‘k’ being indistinct in pronunciation. More confusing is the use of ‘Batak’, which unites several very distinct but related peoples (the Toba, Karo, Simalungun, Pakpak and Angkola Bataks), with specific reference to the Toba Batak, or their culture, language or religion. This practice is so established that it can no longer really be avoided.
and occupied by 20 to 30 populous villages, of solidly constructed communal houses.

Here they were received with respect and kindness and their very simplified presentation of the Christian gospel, limited to reading out tracts on creation, the Ten Commandments and the way of salvation, was heard with respect, although the Bataks sensibly declared that they would have to consider these matters further before accepting the new teaching.6

A modern Batak commentator has suggested that the response of the spokesman for the assembled people might have been, “we cannot desert our custom (adat) which has become part of our living being, but if you lead us to wealth and glory we are willing to welcome you among us.”7 It is an apt observation in light of the focus of Batak religion, ancient and modern, on the increase of sahala8 by promoting an increase of wealth, power and status. As the nineteenth century advanced, progress (hamajuon), would become a driving force for religious change in each of the Batak societies of North Sumatra.

In his report Ward had come to the conclusion that the traditional religion of the Batak would fall before the first assault made on it, by either Muslims or Christians. Expanding colonial influence was bringing this day closer so, he argued, it was important for Christian missions to seize the opportunity. Given their openness to something new, the Bataks in Ward’s view were unlikely to oppose the introduction of the Bible and Christianity.

The American Board of Commissioners appointed one further missionary, the Rev. Jacob Ennis, in 1837. Based in Padang, Ennis visited the southern Batakland without problem,9 but this work was not continued, seemingly because of Dutch government opposition. Further missionary initiatives in the Toba Batak homelands, after Burton and Ward's 1824 expedition, were prevented, for the time being, by renewed incursions of militant Minangkabau Muslims northward through Mandailing and Angkola as far as the Silindung valley and Lake Toba, making converts and spreading alarm wherever they appeared. An extension of the Padri struggle of 1818–1820 in West Sumatra, this conflict resulted in forced conversions to Islam, the carrying off of captives and many deaths in the Silindung, Pahae and Tarutung areas.

The Padri combatants opposed the extension of Dutch colonial rule in their home territory while at the same time attempting to extend Islam by force into the neighbouring Batak homelands. In the south the result was decisive in two

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6 Schreiner 1971:60.
7 A. Silitonga 1965:64–70 at p. 65.
8 Saha is a Toba Batak concept similar to the Polynesian *mana*. Bishop Anicetus Sinaga defines it as the “power of the soul and its authority which is seen as a living and effective power in real manifestation,” Sinaga 1981:233, cf. Lumbantobing 1961:7–12.
ways. Angkola and Mandailing have been predominantly Muslim since the 1830s, and the colonial government, seeking to pacify the region and disable the Padri movement, quickly consolidated their own rule in these southern Batak territories.

In the north many Batak communities were devastated. Although the Islamic fighters were forced to withdraw, leaving the free Batars bitterly opposed to militant Islam, insecurity and fear were to be a continuing feature of Batak society until the colonial power eventually established a substantial measure of peace and order. Fighting in some areas had left communities unable to bury their dead or to fulfil the requirements of their adat, a circumstance to which some Batars attributed later calamities that befell them. Unburied bodies led to outbreaks of disease, culminating in an extensive outbreak of fever and cholera.10

A modern Batak historian has described this invasion as an “impasse” that disrupted every aspect of Toba Batak society,11 causing a serious breakdown in social order, in patterns of belief and in the standing of the Singamangaraja dynasty of ruler-priests whose head, the hitherto never-defeated Si Singamangaraja X, had been killed in battle early in 1819.

This sense of perilous insecurity remained a constant in the Batak areas unoccupied by the European colonial power and it is against this background that we can begin to understand both the hostility of those who killed S. Munson and H. Lyman in 1834 and the openness of some north Tapanuli raja, thirty years later, to both the German mission and the Dutch colonial administration.

Burton and Ward, as we have seen, were not able to complete their journey as far as Bakara, the headquarters of Si Singamangaraja XI, and some Batars attributed the Padri assault and its horrific consequences to the failure of the foreign visitors to observe the basic requirements of Batak adat. Totally unprepared for their encounter with free Batars, Munson and Lyman fell in with a band who had determined to allow no other Europeans to enter their territory and were killed.12

By the time Nommensen entered the free Batak territory of north Tapanuli the social disruption following the Padri incursions had led to frequent inter-village conflicts and a general breakdown of peace and security. In fact Nommensen and his party, on their first night after crossing from the Dutch-controlled area, shared a cave with fugitives from inter-village warfare, and the

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12 This was the reason given to Nommensen by Raja Panggalamei, one of the leaders of the band who killed the two missionaries. Cf. Nommensen 1974:62–63.
insecurity and distrust pervading the region remained a feature of the early years of the mission in north Tapanuli.

The beginning of sustained mission to the Toba Batak: Nommensen since 1862

The movement for the Christianisation of the Toba Bataks had commenced in earnest in January 1857 with the settlement of the Dutch missionary G. van Asselt in the Sipirok high country, in Angkola in the southern Batakland, by this time already under effective Dutch rule. Here he was joined by three fellow missionaries, Dammerboer, Van Dalen and Koster, all like himself, sent out by an independent revivalist church in Ermelo, in the Netherlands. Without financial backing the Ermelo missionaries supported themselves, in G. van Asselt’s case by working as a coffee warehouse overseer in Angkola and Sipirok. To this day, and notably at the time of the HKBP centennial in 1961, the Sipirok Protestants, a minority in the now overwhelmingly Muslim southern Batak homelands, assert their place as the pioneer Batak Protestant community. Recalling the pioneering mission activity in Sipirok in the 1850s they celebrated their own counter-centennial celebrations.

The first missionaries of the Rheinish Missionary Society (RMG) arrived in North Sumatra in the aftermath of the 1859 Dayak rising in Dutch Borneo (Kalimantan), when the mission withdrew after some of its staff were killed and the colonial government prohibited further entry, or re-entry, to inland areas. In the same year the RMG Inspector, Dr Friedrich Fabri, while visiting the Netherlands, became aware of the publications of Dr Herman Neubronner van der Tuuk who, from 1849, had undertaken a very productive survey of Batak languages on behalf of the Netherlands Bible Society, operating from a base in Barus. After discussion with Dutch mission leaders Fabri returned to Barmen convinced that his mission should send workers to Batakland. His

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14 Nommensen 1974:44. Lempp 1976:111 names Dammerboer [sic], Van Dalen and Betz. Betz, also from the Ermelo Free Congregation, seems to have arrived separately.
15 Schreiner 1972:116, 141; Lempp 1976:110–111. ‘Christianisation’ (German Christianisierung, Indonesian pengkristenan) has proved to be an unfortunate term in respect to inter-faith relationships in modern Indonesia, heightening Muslim suspicion that Christians aim to overwhelm the Muslim and other religious communities altogether.
17 Fridolin Ukur 1971:90; cf. chapter twelve.
19 Van der Tuuk was a colourful and eccentric scholar who entered well into Batak society and was warmly accepted by the Bataks, who made a friendly pun on his name: ‘Pandortuk—Big Nose.’ He may have been the first European to see Lake Toba.
board agreed and on 7 October 1861 three RMG missionaries, J.C. Klammer, C.W.S. Heine and W.F. Betz joined Van Asselt for a discussion, in the home of Bondanalolot Nasution in Parau Sorat, in Sipirok, where they established the Batak Mission, assigning to themselves particular areas of responsibility.\(^{20}\) The missionaries Dammerboer and Van Dalen declined to serve under RMG oversight and sought other employment, while Koster died in Pagarutan.\(^{21}\)

The date of this meeting has since been recognised by HKBP as the date of its foundation, with some Bataks later claiming to find a mystical significance in the names of the four pioneers: Heine, Klammer, Betz and Van Asselt. With \(v\) being pronounced as a \(p\) in Batak speech, the initials formed the now familiar HKBP, *Huria Kristen Batak Protestan*, the Christian Protestant Batak Church.

On 2 April 1861 Van Asselt had baptised the first Batak Christians, Jakobus Tampubolon and Simon Siregar.\(^{22}\) Known locally as the ‘Rijnsche Zending’ the RMG appointed a number of missionaries to work in the south from the 1860s. Batak lay assistants were appointed and Bible schools were established in some villages. From the time of the Padri war the southern Batakland has been substantially Muslim with Christians forming a vibrant minority community that by modern times was stable at about 10% of the population of Sipirok.\(^{23}\)

Herman Neubronner van der Tuuk had concluded, from his researches among the Toba Batak, that the mission organisations should withdraw their personnel from the southern Batak regions of Angkola and Mandailing, already substantially converted to Islam, and relocate them in those regions as yet uninfluenced by outside religions. He considered the time available for a successful mission to the free Bataks to be short, anticipating that with the expanding Dutch colonial enterprise would come the Malay language, the *lingua franca* of the archipelago, and in its wake Malay Muslim evangelists from the coast.\(^{24}\)

It was this vision that directed the attention of Ludwig Nommensen and his contemporaries to the region of northern Tapanuli and the free Batak territories as yet beyond the range of the Dutch colonial system, which at this


\(^{22}\) Lempp 1976:111. Pedersen 1970:49 suggests that an army chaplain may have earlier baptised two Bataks returning from the Padri wars, but offers no names, time, place or evidence in support.

\(^{23}\) Susan Rodgers Siregar 1981:2.

\(^{24}\) Cited in: Theodor Müller-Krüger 1966:210. In translating *orang-orang Melaju* in this citation as “people from Malaya,” Pedersen 1970:54 creates a misleading impression. Van der Tuuk was not suggesting that Islamic missionaries might come from British Malaya.
time was limited in the north to the port towns of Sibolga and Barus. Work continued energetically in Angkola and Mandailing, particularly in areas such as Sipirok, Bunga Bondar, Sipiongot and Padang Bolak, under both RMG and a Dutch mission usually referred to as the 'Java Committee'.

Adding ecumenical and international colour to the region was a small Russian Mennonite community from the Ukraine, which settled in Pakantan, in Mandailing, in 1838. In 1871 the Dutch Mennonite mission established a station at Pakantan under Heinrich Dirks, followed later by two further stations, several subsidiary stations, two hospitals, an orphanage and schools. These congregations joined themselves to the Batak Church, HKBP, in 1931, along with congregations founded by the Java Committee, but the Mennonites re-formed their own community in 1951.

Müller-Krüger has observed that one important element in the extraordinary success experienced by the RMG mission amongst the Toba Batak was its organisation and cooperative strategies, and a strong backing from Germany at least until 1914. From the meeting of the four missionaries in Sipirok in 1861 a plan was evolved and adhered to, and missionaries were located, and relocated, to strategic areas as situations changed and opportunities developed. Decisions were made on the field by consultation and consensus.

This feature must be kept in mind as the crucial contribution of Ludwig Nommensen is considered. Of immense and increasing influence, he too was part of a team and his work formed part of an overall strategy. Increasingly his ability to understand the Batak and to relate to them on their own terms opened new strategic opportunities. But of equally crucial importance to the survival and then to the success of the mission in Silindung and Toba was the early adherence and support of strategic Batak leaders, pre-eminent among them the young Raja Pontas Lumbantobing.

Ludwig Ingwer Nommensen was born on 6 February 1834 on the Danish North Sea island of Nordstrand that was later absorbed into Germany. His family was very poor and as a child Nommensen had to work to support himself and to help his family. He suffered ill health and it was in response to healing from the effects of an accident that he committed himself to a life of missionary evangelism. His religious education was Lutheran, outwardly conventional although marked by the warm piety of the revivalist tradition. His son's account of Nommensen's youth reveals an emphasis on individual profession of faith, and the strong influence and support of his widowed mother.

25 The Java Committee was Dutch and Reformed, basing it's teaching on the Heidelberg Catechism. Its congregations united with HKBP in 1931 (Müller-Krüger 1966:212).
Nommensen sought what opportunities there were for education during the winter months, when farm work was not available, and when his family’s circumstances finally permitted he left home to find work and education as a pupil-teacher. Finally he came to Barmen, headquarters of the Rheinisch Mission where after further part-time instruction he was admitted to the Mission Seminary for a four-year course leading to his ordination, in October 1861, as a missionary pastor.29

The Mission Seminary (Missionsseminar) provided a full training for missionary candidates leading to ordination but it operated independently of the theological faculties of the universities at which German Protestant ministers were educated. The Seminary provided both theological education and missionary formation in the conservative pietistic and revivalist traditions that undergirded the nineteenth century Protestant missionary movement.

A strong emphasis was placed on developing an ability to communicate the Christian gospel and to seek the conversion of non-Christian people overseas. There was less attention paid to the critical biblical and theological scholarship of the day, or to developing a critical understanding of the missionaries’ own society and culture. Practical preparation included language study, some medical instruction and the practical skills necessary to construct and maintain church buildings, houses and schools.30

The missiology of the Seminary was influenced by early nineteenth century German theology, including the work of major theologians such as Schleiermacher, and by the intellectual and spiritual impact of teachers and mission leaders whose ideas had been shaped by influences from the revivalist movement and German idealism. Of particular significance was romanticism with its emphasis on a quasi-mystical concept of ethnic identity, Volk in German, leading to the concept of the Ethnic Church (Volkskirche) that was to be crucial in the strategy of the Batak mission.

Socially the Seminary was conservative, representing the nationalistic German Protestantism of the day, and Fabri, for example, was a strong advocate of German colonial expansion. Ecclesiologically the mission saw its link with the life and calling of the German Protestant church as important.31

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29 Biographical details from Nommensen 1974:chapters 1–4. It is not possible in this context to offer an adequate biographical study of Nommensen. For bibliography see Schreiner 1998:499–500. The theology of key teachers in the Seminary, and leaders of RMG, is discussed in Schreiner 1972:33–70.

30 There is a fine study by Lothar Schreiner 1972:chapter II, where after a general introduction he discusses the specific theologies of mission leaders and teachers who shaped the RMG missionaries’ tradition of faith. See also Jan S. Aritonang 1994:70–96 on the Seminary, the Mission teachers and their theology.

Theologically, the Seminary programme focused upon the need of humankind to find individual salvation from sin. The pietistic and revivalist influences gave warmth to what might otherwise have been a cold Protestant scholasticism, and produced a religion of the heart, in which redemption brought a close, personal and individual, relationship to God through Jesus Christ. There appears little evidence of an understanding that sin also operated in the orders of society and Jonathan Nommensen's account of the early preaching in Batakland illustrates a dualism that attributed blessing to God and evil to the work of an active, personal Devil (Iblis; Sibolis).32

On 1 November 1861 Nommensen left Barmen for the Netherlands, where he met the leader of the Ermelo congregation. He also had discussions with Neubronner van der Tuuk whose strategy of moving into areas untouched by either Islam or the colonial administration Nommensen seemed to advocate from his first arrival in Sumatra. On 24 December he finally left Amsterdam and joined the collier Pertinax for a 142 day long, and unpleasant, voyage to Sumatra, disembarking at Padang 16 May 1862.33 He was to remain in Sumatra, apart from four furlough periods in Europe, until his death in 1918.

Forbidden to enter the hinterland by both the colonial authorities34 and the local leadership of the mission, Nommensen took ship to Barus, where he continued his study of both Malay and Toba Batak. By the end of 1862 he had moved to Sipirok, realising that Barus with its mixed coastal population was not a suitable base for a Batak mission.35 By the end of 1863 Nommensen was in the Silindung valley, with the permission of the Dutch authorities although this area, like most of the northern Batak region, was part of the onafhankelijk gebied, the free territory that remained for the time being outside effective colonial rule and administration.

With his initial goal to get beyond the effective reach of either colonial or Islamic influence now realised, Nommensen was ready to begin the work of winning the free Batak people for the Gospel. It was a strategic move, strategically timed, for the Padri wars had unsettled Batak society and left a fear of Islamic incursion that was again heightened in the 1860s. Conflict between clan groups and even between villages created insecurity and a loss of confidence in the traditional ways and values to hold Batak society together. In the face of outside pressures many Batak were, consciously or unconsciously, looking for some new and secure ground to stand on.

Feeling themselves pressed between Islamic forces to both north and south, and the colonial regime on the coast and to the south, some at least among

34 Nommensen 1974:40.
the free Bataks were now ready to consider the possibilities of a new religion, which seemed willing to take their language, their social structures, and even the major elements of their custom (adat) seriously. Missionary efforts in health care, in education and in the ransoming and education of prisoners and slaves demonstrated new social values that came gradually to be appreciated by the democratic Batak communities and their leaders.

The village leaders (raja huta) who chose decisively to opt for this new way determined the response of their communities to Christian preaching, and became essential allies of the missionaries. Such a person was Raja Pontas Lumbantobing, an intelligently pragmatic young leader from Pearaja who saw alliance with the mission and acceptance of colonial rule as appropriate responses to the social crisis of the free Batak communities.

Raja Pontas believed that the time of the Si Singamangaraja dynasty had passed, along with the old Batak religion it steadfastly upheld, and he was baptised by Nommensen 27 August, 1865. His authority, which was widely respected as far as Lake Toba, in effect secured the Silindung valley for the mission, and his ceaseless urgings to embrace literacy and the Christian faith encouraged both conversion and education in the region. His own standing and personal authority enabled Raja Pontas to travel freely wherever he chose, and his name afforded right of passage and protection to the missionaries in their travels. He died on 18 February 1900, described by Jonathan Nommensen as the chief pillar of the Batak Church in Silindung.

There were other strategic indigenous leaders, but there were also many who, from the first arrival of the missionaries, rejected both them and their teaching. Always alert to the outside world, many Batak leaders suspected that Nommensen, in spite of his fine words, was a spy for the Gomponi, as the whole colonial enterprise was long known in Batakland, and a forerunner of colonial occupation of the free territories which, they feared, would bring traumatic disruption to their traditional societies. The most dramatic Batak opposition was mounted by the paramount leader, Si Singamangaraja XII.

Mission relationships with the colonial administration developed to the mutual benefit of both parties, although there was competition in some areas between government and mission schools. The colonial authorities reserved

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37 Nommensen 1974:45, 90. Raja Pontas was given the name ‘Obaja’ (Obedia) at his baptism, and is sometimes referred to by this name in missionary writings. It is a mark of his standing as a traditional leader that his new name faded from sight in time.  
39 Aritonang 1994:118 mentions several.  
40 Nommensen 1974:49, 51. Gomponi (Kompeni in Malay and Indonesian): the colonial administration and its associated interests and activities were so termed until 1942—from the Dutch East India Company—the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC 1605–1799).
the right to permit or forbid missionary entry into even the free territories, and to prevent mission competition. This latter restriction long delayed the entry of Catholic missionaries into the Batak territories. Missionaries, for their part, felt secure under Dutch protection, a not inconsiderable factor in the wake of the RMG experience in Borneo.

Like most nineteenth-century European missionaries the RMG workers saw the civil mission of the colonial government as parallel and allied to the task of Christian mission. Nommensen, as his son records, was quite ready to appeal to Dutch colonial authority when his first intention to settle in Silindung was challenged, although this region was still at that time free territory. With every attempt to build a house and begin his work thwarted, Nommensen invited local leaders, including the four raja recognised by Si Singamangaraja, and confronted them with documents signed by the governor of Padang and by the governor general of the Indies, permitting him to live in the region.\(^\text{41}\) Later, at a time when Silindung was still free territory, the Dutch Governor of Padang, P. Arriens, paid an extended visit to the mission, from December 1868 until January 1869. Soon after, a district officer (controleur) was appointed and the process of ‘pacification,’ as the colonial administration termed it, of the inland Batak territories was commenced.\(^\text{42}\)

\textit{The strategy for Toba Batakland: 1860s-1900}

Having achieved his goal of entry into the free territory Nommensen at first attempted to establish his home, and base, in a settled village. Batak leaders who had come to associate the visits of foreigners with outbreaks of disease and other calamities opposed this. As the number of converts grew, to the point where they could not longer be dismissed as village eccentrics, Christians were expelled from their villages and Nommensen was forced to establish a Christian village, Huta Dame, Village of Peace, with its own school and church.

\(^\text{41}\) Nommensen 1974:57–58. It appears that the Si Singamangaraja dynasty exercised a moral authority in the wider Batak world that was much more extensive than that of a Raja Huta, or village chief. The title singa or lion (an animal not found in Sumatra but represented in Batak architecture) and mangaraja, maharaja or ‘great king’ is clearly Indian, probably Hindu-Javanese, in origin. There is evidence that an earlier Si Singamangaraja had designated four traditional leaders in each of the Batak societies to function as a tetrarchy. Even in his own Toba Batak society this institution never became established, but the designated chiefs, and their descendants, were remembered, and respected as representatives of the priest-king dynasty. Nommensen names the four his father challenged by their personal, but not by their clan (marga), names (p. 58).

\(^\text{42}\) The visit is described Nommensen 1974:98–100.
An unexpected outcome of this development was that the Bataks now expected Nommensen, as a village founder, to act as a raja and take responsibility for administering the affairs of his villagers. There were other unanticipated outcomes to the encounter of the two radically differing worldviews of the Bataks and the missionaries, and the 'church-state' relationship in Tapanuli was influenced in this initial period as much by Batak cultural expectations as by German political theology.

The tendency to relate events, such as an epidemic coming after a visit by someone who may have unwittingly offended against an aspect of Batak customary law, sometimes had unfortunate consequences. Similarly, Bataks sometimes interpreted conventional European objects in their own terms. Accustomed, for example, to the magical staff carried by their own datu and used to assert his power, Bataks were in great awe of Nommensen’s walking staff. “At the beginning they were more afraid to see this staff of mine than they were to see me,” Nommensen recorded, “and often this staff became God’s means of protection for me in their midst.”

This raja with his symbol of priestly power, his coolness in the face of danger, his patience in facing all kinds of provocation, his kindness and friendly interest, and his growing mastery of the Bataks’ complex customary law was clearly someone to be taken account of. Nommensen’s dialogical approach to evangelism was particularly suited to the Batak, who enjoy intimate debate and the vigorous exchange of ideas and viewpoints. He posed questions and raised possibilities for consideration even in baptismal instruction, rather than setting out to present in formal mode the whole biblical history, from creation to the return of Christ.

In February 1866 Nommensen had been joined in Sibolga by his fiancée, Carolina Margaretha Gutbrodt (1837–1887), and a new colleague, Peter Heinrich Johannsen. Carolina Nommensen shared the hardships and heartbreaks of many missionary wives and mothers, and died in Europe, 29 March 1887, having taken their children home to continue their education.

Johannsen, the second European missionary to be based in the Silindung valley, was a scholar, writer and translator. He would train the first local teachers, writing or translating the course materials himself, and his very fine Batak translation of the Old Testament is still widely praised. Johannsen has tended to be overlooked in the early history of the Batak Mission, in large part because Nommensen’s work was consistently highlighted in European mis-

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43 Recorded by his son, Nommensen 1974:49.
44 Nommensen 1974:77, 35.
45 Nommensen 1974:159.
visionary publications, in the later histories, and finally in what became almost the cult of the first ephorus or superintendent of the Batak Church.

In more recent times Lothar Schreiner, whose work greatly advanced our understanding of both the theology and the history of the Batak Mission, has clearly established the significance of the three-sided partnership between Nommensen, Raja Pontas and Johannsen. This was to be a crucial factor in the initial acceptance of the Christian Gospel in Silindung, and ultimately in the dramatic success of the Batak Mission. Nommensen he sees as a man of initiative and vision, “a spiritual personality with an unfailing vision, related to the religious renewal.”47

Raja Pontas Lumbantobing may be characterised as a radical cultural negotiator, who has suffered some eclipse in Batak history because of his ambiguous role in welcoming the western influences intruding on traditional Batak society. Open to both the mission and the coming of the colonial administration he was able to influence other rajas to accept the new order. His was a political role. As Schreiner notes, “His spiritual strength and insight into the mind of his fellow men influenced the parbaringin organisation to give way to the new faith…. His stand with the missionaries and the Christian congregations helped the new faith to stay among the Batak.”48

Johannsen, for his part, provided the basis for teaching and preaching in the local congregations. Schreiner sees him as a scholar and teacher concerned with “the reconstruction of knowledge” in Batak society.49 Resting on a shared insight, these three pioneers recognised clearly that historical continuity with the social and cultural past was vital if Batak people were to be able to accept a new faith, and with it a reconstructed world-view. The three-fold kinship structure of Batak society (the dalihan na tolu), and the customary law (adat) were to be safeguarded. Batak converts would become Batak Christians, living in a society that would change with time but remain clearly and distinctively Batak.

By 1876 there were about 2,000 Christians in the Silindung region and the missionaries felt assured that the community would endure in the face of strong reaction from the leaders of the old religion, and the opposition of those who distrusted the motives of the mission and its close association with what they still called the ‘Company’, the Dutch colonial administration and its agencies. Characteristically, Nommensen’s reaction to this improved situation was to move further north and engage in a new encounter, this time with the people in the region around Lake Toba. He was careful to maintain

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a formal relationship with Si Singamangaraja XI, and his successor, the most prominent Batak leaders in the region, and the most prominent and enduring stalwarts of the old ways.

Another feature of Nommensen’s strategic insight was the move made, from the late 1870s, from emphasis on individual conversion to emphasis on the conversion of family groups, or even whole communities, to the Christian faith. Admission to church membership was always, and only, by means of an individual profession of faith and baptism, but the missionaries had come to realise that in Batak society the decision to accept instruction and then to seek baptism was often a communal one. It was this move in strategy that opened the way for the development of a genuine People’s Church (Volkskirche) in Toba Batak society.

The mission theology in which Nommensen and his colleagues had been trained lent itself to this rather pragmatic approach to Batak society. The view of ‘salvation history’ taught by Friedrich Fabri and Georg Ludwig von Rohden emphasised renewal as a paradigm for evangelism. New life in Christ could penetrate and renew, rather than annihilate and destroy, the traditional world of the Batak. Nommensen’s own method of evangelism emphasised instruction by question and answer, a dialogue to determine what the seeker was looking or hoping for, rather than a dogmatic proclamation of religious truths. Above all, the early missionaries lived within Batak society, in solidarity with local people and communities, both confronting the old religion and its practices and demonstrating in their own lives that the new religion was a practical, and promising, alternative for people seeking harmony and a renewal of their social order.

Nommensen’s theology has been described as anthropocentric and this enabled him to conceive of, and to present, a Christian life and ethos growing organically within the actual life of Batak communities. This theological orientation enabled Nommensen not only to develop and present a doctrine of human solidarity in Christ but also to accept as something quite natural and proper his own human solidarity with Batak people, whose life ways he respected and entered into as fully as he was able, for the rest of his life.

Nommensen’s ecclesiology has more complex roots, although again his openness to human life and its potentialities is pivotal. He developed what Lothar Schreiner has called a ‘contextual ecclesiology’, which took the adat—the Batak customary law—and the social structures of Batak society seriously, unless they were in clear contradiction to Christian faith and teaching. But his ecclesiology is also rooted in the Lutheran Reformation, which identified the congregation with the commune—the socio-political entity—rather than with the idea of a

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50 Schreiner 2000:81–84, at p. 81.
distinct religious community. This Lutheran heritage, and the more modern Folk-Church idea with its roots in the German Romantic Movement, facilitated the development of the unique Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP). Huria, a Batak word denoting community rather than church, catches well the sense of identity between church and society. For this people's church Nommensen set apart appropriate lay leaders, the elders, more associated with a Calvinist or Reformed church order but significantly appropriate to Batak society. The kerygmatic paradigm employed by Nommensen in both evangelism and the nurture of converts was the concept of ‘New Life’ that had been strongly emphasised in the Barmen seminary.

Put together these elements of theology, evangelism, missiology and ecclesiology represent an astute and sensitively contextual response to the task of introducing a new faith for consideration by a people whose confidence in their own social order and system of belief remained intact, although under severe stress. As the Christian community in Tapanuli moved beyond its initial phase, 1864–1878, the small groups of baptised Christians began to take more recognisable shape as local congregations. In this situation the mission leaders began to seek out and train local leadership, to enlarge their outreach as well as to educate members of existing congregations. Church elders, appointed in congregations, worked closely with Christian rajas where the offices were not actually held by the same person. Thus a German Lutheran model of the relationship of ‘church and state’ came, quite naturally, to find an appropriate incarnation in Batakland.

As suspicion of the missionaries’ association with the ‘Company’ diminished villages began to ask for the appointment of a mission teacher and the opening of a school. The desire for hamajion, progress and advancement, always to the fore in Batak motivation, and the added prestige a village would enjoy in having a school and teacher, lay behind these requests.

Initially these elementary schools doubled as preaching posts and places of worship and were open to all children, in the hope that some might become Christians. Later they were restricted to baptised children, not for religious reasons but out of mission experience; the attendance of non-Christian pupils was too erratic to be of any educational value. Later, schools were restricted to larger villages, where there were fifty or more Christian families.

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51 A recent statement by Peter Matheson 2000:137 and passim.
52 Gereja in modern Indonesian, and most of the regional languages, derived from Portuguese Igreja.
54 Aritonang 1994:118 and n. 21.
At first the teachers were missionaries, and therefore restricted in numbers. As early as 1862, while still in Barus, Nommensen had proposed the establishment of an institute for training local teachers, but it was only after the arrival of August Schreiber in Sipirok in 1866, to be leader (Praeses) of the mission, that anything could be done. The first RMG missionary in this region who was a university graduate in theology, Schreiber, remained in Sumatra until 1873 when he succeeded Gustav Warneck as inspector general of the mission in Barmen. In April 1868 he opened a Catechetical School for adult students in Parausorat. The mission personnel involved with the School saw their efforts as an endeavour to nurture a self-supporting church, the ultimate goal of Protestant mission activity.\[56\]

As the centre of the mission’s activity moved from Angkola into the northern, Toba Batak speaking, regions the Catechetical School could no longer provide appropriate locally trained congregational teachers. Both distance and the language difference made the school at Parausorat unsuitable for Toba Batak candidates, and Schreiber had become anxious about Malay influence in Angkola, where the Angkola Batak language, he reported, was becoming ‘Malayised’ (vermalaisiert).\[57\] Like the later Dutch missionaries in Karoland, he feared that learning Malay, instead of holding to their own languages, would open the various Batak communities to Islamic influence.

An emergency effort was made to meet the needs of Toba Batak students in Silindung, in 1874, a Wandering School (Sikola Mardalan-dalan) which saw 20 students selected from the best elementary school graduates taught by Nommensen on Mondays and Tuesdays at Saitnihuta, on Wednesdays they were with Johannsen at Pansur Napitu and on Fridays the students were taught by August Mohri, missionary in Sipoholon. Apart from walking from one centre to the next the students filled in their week with study and congregational activities.

This course, like that at Parausorat, lasted two years. Nommensen taught biblical background, preaching, history, natural science, elementary medicine and German, the latter causing some amazement when reported in Germany. Johannsen taught biblical studies, geography, world history, church history, arithmetic and the catechism, and Mohri Islamic history, dogmatics, Malay language and music.\[58\] This venture produced so pleasing a level of achieve-

\[56\] Aritonang 1994:89–92, 137–139.
\[57\] Aritonang 1994:137–139 and n. 66.
\[58\] Aritonang 1994:140 and n. 67, 68 which record the surprise of an RMG editor who added emphasis (‘?!”) after reference to German—which had been taught at Parausorat also. Elementary medicine was offered as an alternative to the traditional datu’s remedies. Nommensen translated Luther’s Smaller Catechism in 1874.
ment that a decision was made in 1877 to establish a permanent catechetical school, later called a seminary, at Pansur Napitu and to amalgamate the Parausorat school with it.

Initially Johannsen was sole teacher in this new establishment, and had to set aside time each day for writing and translating, to prepare the texts his students required. The first thirteen graduates completed their courses in 1879 and were placed as teachers in various congregations, where they served also as evangelists and educators. Although a heavy work load combined with inadequate remuneration and lack of status led some Batak teachers to transfer to the government service, these teacher evangelists became key persons in the expansion of the Batak Christian community.59

By about 1910 a network of mission stations and village schools had been established throughout North Tapanuli and the Toba Batak were well on their way toward the progress that would give them a prominent role in the yet undreamed of Indonesian republic. By 1918, the year of Nommensen’s death, the Batak church was firmly established with a membership of 180,000, served by 34 ministers and 788 teacher-preachers. At this time there were 60 RMG personnel, men and women, serving with the Batak church, which entered a new phase in its life after World War I.

In a mere half-century the whole Toba Batak region had become accessible to the Christian gospel. Seen against the very difficult situation Nommensen and other pioneers faced in the 1860s, not to mention the tragic fate in 1834 of Munson and Lyman, this requires some explanation beyond the affirmation that this was the time determined by God.

Politically the Batak leaders of North Tapanuli were faced, as the mission entered their area, with the prospect of a steady advance of Islam from the south. In a society that had been thrown into internal disorder by the earlier Padri incursions endemic village and clan conflicts undermined any sense of security or prospect of prosperity. The coming of a new force into the Toba Batak area was seen, in time, as a possibility that could be embraced and utilised.

At first the Batak rajas were as suspicious of Nommensen and his colleagues as they had been of earlier European visitors, and time has shown that Batak leaders were realistic in associating the coming of missionaries with an extension of colonial rule. However, as the missionaries were able to demonstrate both their goodwill and their usefulness, some Batak leaders came to see them as potential agents or advocates in dealing with the encroaching colonial regime.

The Rhenish missionaries, mostly German by nationality, did not intentionally facilitate the extension of colonial government, but they found the protection offered even in the free territories, and the relative peace and good order that followed colonial ‘pacification’, very beneficial in the advancement of their own labours. Some Batak raja also came to see European rule as preferable to endemic social disorder and the threat of further Islamic incursions. They were also well enough informed to know that European rule would bring social benefits, particularly in health and education.

In the resulting political changes the mission showed remarkable insight into Batak social values. Nommensen’s introduction of the office of lay elder (sintua) and his care that, wherever possible, this new office be held by the village raja, gave the traditional rulers a high stake in the local congregation and its advancement, and ensured that people saw a continuity rather than a disruption in the changing social order.

The elders came to carry heavy responsibility and the rajahs to play an increasingly important role in the rapid territorial expansion of the Batak Mission. The two offices, particularly when combined locally in the one person, were the twin pillars of the local church and ensured that the lay membership, directly or through their raja, were identified with the new religious enterprise.

The Batak Mission from the outset addressed the problems Batak people faced in their society. The ‘Good News’ of the Christian Gospel was contextualised—embodied in practical responses to the concrete issues of Batak life. Illnesses and accidents were attended to with the basic medical knowledge the missionaries had gained in their training. Slaves, and people made prisoner for debt or other reason, were purchased, set free and often educated. Village schools opened a new world of knowledge to the Bataks whose alert and inquiring minds, and quest for advancement, made them keen learners. Thus the mission quickly established itself as a useful and progressive agency in Batak society, seeking to serve, and respectful of Batak leadership and values.

The particular style of mission, embodied particularly in Nommensen’s praxis, encouraged a perception that Christianity was a development of the traditional wisdom and values inherited from the ancestors. Evangelism was often by dialogue rather than dogmatic preaching, taking seriously the intellect and understanding of the hearers. The combination of courage in danger, steadfastness in difficulty, humility in service and a willingness to enter as far as possible into Batak life in terms of its own patterns and values proved an attractive combination to Batak observers, who came as time passed to see in the missionaries something more than agents of an encroaching colonial regime.

In the economic sphere missionaries actively advanced the opportunities for a people long isolated from the commercial mainstream. In time the mission introduced, developed and promoted commercial crops and actively sought
technical information and new vegetable and plant varieties for the development of village agriculture.

Entering the Batak homeland at a time of social disorder the mission strived to develop a Christian community, in which individual converts, and later groups of new Christians, could find the new life that was central to the missionary theology of Nommensen and his contemporaries. That it enabled a whole society to make the transition into a wider and more complex world without losing the patterns and values of their own tradition and culture is evident in the vitality of the modern Batak churches and in the contribution individual Bataks have made to the now independent Republic of Indonesia. There have been several large schisms from HKBP, and some bitter conflicts, but the people of Tapanuli have found a new spiritual orientation for themselves and an orientation for life in a new age and a changed order that has transformed their society in just over 150 years.

1900–1945: the difficult struggle for the independence of the major Batak church

The success experienced in the early decades of the Batak Protestant church also presented elements of challenge. Nommensen and his contemporaries knew that their enterprise could not remain forever dependent on overseas mission support. The magnitude of the task and the danger of producing a passive, dependent Batak community both demanded a change in direction, toward self-reliance and ultimately independence. To this end a Batak Missionary Association, the Pardonganon Mission Batak, known more familiarly as the Kongsi Batak, and later as the Zending Batak after it was integrated into the HKBP structure in 1921, was formed in 1899. Henoch Lumbantobing, a pandita Batak (Batak pastor), enjoyed some success in isolated areas such as the district around Samosir, and on islands near Sumatra: Enggano, and the Mentawai group, where an independent church, the Paamian Kristen Protestan Mentawai was established.

But not long after entering the twentieth century the Batak church faced and experienced a series of waves of rapid and decisive change. Through some channels of information, though still very simple and limited, the Batak Christians knew that there was an emergence of nationalism among Asian nations. Japan's victory against Russia in 1905 raised a consciousness and pride among Asian nations that they were not always behind and weaker than

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60 A thorough study on this subject was provided in J.R. Hutauruk’s dissertation 1980 and the Indonesian translation 1993.
the western nations. The emergence of Indonesian nationalism, as indicated, among other influences, by the forming of Budi Utomo in 1908, followed by some other parties—Islamic (like Sarekat Islam and Muhammadiyah, both in 1912) or secular (like the Indische Partij, also in 1912)—in Java, in a short time found echoes in many other places.

World War I (1914–1918) was a turning point in relations between the European missionaries and the Batak Church. The prestige of Europeans in general suffered an irreversible setback in Asian eyes, and German resources after the war were much reduced. The death of Nommensen in 1918 removed the one leader who stood beyond criticism at a time when Batak church leaders were better educated and increasingly influenced by the growing spirit of Indonesian nationalism. The paternalistic pietism of the mission seemed to many younger Batak Christians to be holding their people back from a fair participation in the opportunities of the modern world. Their protest manifested itself firstly in vigorous journalism, critical of both the colonial government and the German mission.

One of the main indicators of the emergence of nationalism in Batakland (more accurately described as regional nationalism) was the forming of Hatopan Kristen Batak (HKB, Batak Christian Association) in 1917, led by Mangihut Hezekiel Manullang (more popularly called Tuan Manullang), a former student radical returning after a decade overseas. Politically the Association was linked to early nationalist movements and on the church front they challenged the religious monopoly, as they saw it, of the mission. The initial motive of HKB was the social and economical enhancement and independence of the Batak within a Christian environment through achieving higher status, or even equality with the westerners in all fields of life, including the church. This enthusiasm became stronger when HKB knew that Germany was defeated in the World War I with all of the consequences: political, economical, spiritual, and that the RMG had also to bear these consequences. HKB appealed to the Batak Christians to take over the leadership in the church from the German missionaries, and the political leadership from the Dutch.

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62 For a further description and analysis of HKB and M.H. Manullang see Hutauruk 1980:144–188.
63 One of the serious consequences was financial. Not only was its budget for its mission field reduced significantly but RMG was also called to overcome the financial difficulties faced by the churches in Germany. In some editions of Immanuel monthly in Batakland in 1925 we read RMG’s appeal to the Batak Christians and local congregations to collect funds bahan manumpah Rijnsche Zending na targogot di tingki on (to aid the RMG in its dire financial straits). A number of laymen and HKBP pastors even formed a Committee to Help the Barmen Mission and Elders’ Mutual Aid Society that succeeded in collecting a sum to be sent to Barmen: Aritonang 1994:276.
The missionaries accused HKB of bringing danger to the church and to society, and acting together with the colonial government had its leaders jailed. This only sharpened hostile feelings among the HKB leaders and supporters. When Sarekat Islam entered Batakland, HKB showed its sympathy and support, although politically HKB was more closely affiliated to *Insulinde*, a secular party. This support was shown in the case of Sjeh Haji Ibrahim Sitompul who proclaimed himself to be “Leader of Islam, President of Sarekat Islam, and raja of Janji Angkola.” He won the election of *kepala negeri* (head of district) of Janji Angkola (in North Tapanuli but close to the border of South Tapanuli, inhabited by Christians and Muslims) but the colonial government through J.W.Th. Heringa, the *controleur* in Silindung (that covered Janji Angkola), cancelled the counting of votes and planned to appoint his competitor, Aristarchus Sitompul, a Batak pastor. HKB joined the protest to bring the case to the resident of Tapanuli, F.C. Vorstman, to secure Haji Ibrahim’s victory.  

HKB’s protest against the western (colonial as well as mission) domination continued. Their demands for indigenous participation in church decision-making, as well as the establishment of local boards for church governance and financial management, were denied. Thereupon they formed their own church in 1927, *Christen Batak Hoeria* (Batak Christian Church), led by Tuan F.P. Sutan Maloe Panggabean. This new church represented a first schism in the great Batak Church. The leader of the ‘official’ Batak Mission/Batak Church—the *ephorus* at that time (from 1920)—was Johannes Warneck, son of Gustav Warneck the founder of modern Protestant Missiology, nicknamed by the HKB, “The Batak Church Pope.” Johannes Warneck tried to block this nationalist Batak action by saying that a new church order for a self-reliant Batak Church was in the process of composition, and would be soon launched and ratified, but in this he failed.

The plan to compose a new church order to parallel the new name (*Huria Kristen Batak*), and to define the nature and structure of the Batak Church was actually not wishful thinking; the process was already initiated by 1925. But the leaders of the Batak Mission, who were simultaneously the leaders

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64 For a further information and analysis see Castles 1972:98–104 and Aritonang 2004:116–118.

65 A similar spirit of independence and demands for indigenous participation was also seen in the establishment of *Punguan Kristen Batak* (PKB, Batak Christian Gathering) at Batavia on 10 July 1927, that later grew to be a new church split from the great Batak Church, as well as the *Gereja Mission Batak* (GMB, Batak Mission Church) at Medan on 17 July 1927. In November 1946 most of the HChB members founded *Huria Kristen Indonesia* (HKI, Indonesian Christian Church), while some of them remained in HChB that in 1950 changed to become *Gereja Kristen Batak*. For a further description see Pedersen 1970:149–156; Lempp 1976:232–272; Hutauruk 1980:204–208; and B.A. Simandjuntak 2001:476–490.
of the Batak Church, felt that they still needed time to establish a truly self-reliant church, since they perceived that the Batak Christians were not mature enough, especially in terms of spirituality and mentality. The attempt was, however, intensified after the visit of Dr. Hendrik Kraemer in February-April 1930 and the receipt of his critical report. Kraemer concluded that the Batak Mission showed a very strong possessive paternalism or patriarchalism, “the pattern of relations was mostly patriarchal;” therefore he advised the German missionaries to give the opportunity and trust to the Christian Batak.  

This assessment was based on a very basic change in the theology of mission in Europe after World War I. Strongly influenced by Karl Barth, one of the most prominent Protestant theologians, Kraemer stated that the maturity of a church did not depend on the evaluation of, and was not determined by, the missionaries, but merely by and under the judgment of the Word of God. World War I had proved that the so-called Christian nations and churches were not reliable anymore as the best examples.

The Batak Mission called a synod in 1930 with the approval of the board of RMG in Germany. This Great Synod (Synode Godang) produced a unique church order or constitution and established a new name, Huria Kristen Batak Protestant, as a fully recognised church, separated now from the founding mission. It was actually stated that the Batak Church should be led by the Batak Christians and will become self-reliant (Batak: manjuiung baringinna) and an attempt was made to incorporate the wishes of the dissenting groups into the church order. In Kraemer’s words, “in this Constitution the Bataks have been assigned a larger measure of independence and participation than they had before.” But the bitterness of the division ran too deep. Moreover the foreign leaders of the Batak Mission still needed time for the handing-over of the leadership so that in the time of transition the top leadership positions should be still held by the German missionaries. That happened when P. Landgrebe replaced Johannes Warneck in 1932 and E. Verwiebe replaced Landgrebe in 1936.

This postponement of the transfer of leadership brought restlessness in the Batak Church. It was no wonder then that not long after the Dutch colonial officials interned the German missionaries, on 10 May 1940, as a retaliatory response to the German occupation of the Netherlands, the Batak Christian leaders held an Extraordinary or Special Synod on 10–11 July 1940. They refused the agreement made by the Dutch colonial government, the

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66 English translation of H. Kraemer’s report on Batakland and the Batak Mission/Church is available in Kraemer 1958:43–72. The term ‘possessive paternalism’ was also used in Pedersen 1970:151.
Zendingsconsulaat and the Batak Mission that the management of the Batak Mission would be transferred to the Batak Nias Zending (BNZ), a special mission institution established during the war to manage or to take over the work and property of RMG in the Batak and Nias areas. In the election of Voorzitter (Chairperson) of the HKBP (equivalent to the Ephorus) during that Extraordinary Synod Pastor Kassianus Sirait, respected for his firmness and willingness to confront foreign representatives at a time when independence from the mission was at stake,69 won against Pastor Hans de Kleine, proposed by the BNZ. Dr. J. Winkler, one of the officers of RMG, called this synod Räubersynode (Synod of Robbers) and refused to release all property of the Batak Mission to the “really self-reliant HKBP.”

The RMG could not understand how the HKBP could proclaim itself an independent church without regard to the RMG, without expressing even a few words of thanks for its ministry and without taking proper steps to effect the separation. This disappointment increased when they read that the ‘radical group’ in the Special Synod had laid claim to ownership of all RMG property in the Batak area without buying it with money from the Batak Christian community.70

While RMG was busy with the Dutch government and the Zendingsconsulaat discussing how to continue administering its work and property, and while BNZ was debating in a harsh quarrel with the HKBP leaders, Japanese troops landed in March 1942, to occupy Indonesia. This Japanese occupation also brought HKBP into a very difficult situation, among other factors due to the Japanese suspicion that Christianity was a western religion, the religion of the enemy and the religion of the colonialists, and that HKBP, like the other churches, was pro-Western in its sympathies. During the short period of 1942–1945 many church buildings and practically all schools, hospitals and many other buildings and property were forcibly taken over by the Japanese to be used as warehouses, military barracks, etc. The seizure of property had long-term consequences because this property sometimes passed to the control of the succeeding government rather than being returned to the church.71

In the eyes of HKBP Japanese actions were a perversion of the message in the Bible because they implanted anti-Christian teachings in the population with the final goal of wiping out Christianity. For those who had been with the RMG, these Japanese actions meant that, “the Church would lose its

70 Aritonang 1994:310. Only in 1948 did the RMG officially declare that the property of the RMG in Sumatra belonged to HKBP. For HKBP this declaration was important as a symbol of the change in relations with the RMG, i.e. partnership in obedience. Nyhus 1987:183, cf. Aritonang 1994:312 and A. Lumbantobing 1961.
influence over the youth. It would no longer be possible for the Church to teach Christian young people in a Christian way through instruction in the school.” For the members of HKBP in general, as happened too in all churches at that time, this period also brought a serious temptation to their faith. They were forced to worship and express homage to the Japanese Emperor Tenno Heika by doing sheikerei (bowing or bending from the waist toward the sun, since the emperor was believed to be descended from Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess). Some of the HKBP leaders, like Justin Sihombing, tried to refuse this ritual because they felt that by doing this they made the emperor equal to God. But most HKBP leaders, for example at the Synods of 1942 and 1944, publicly declared the church’s loyalty to the Japanese government, referring to Romans 13:1–7.

The two-year conflict with BNZ and the terrible conditions brought about by the Japanese occupation were apparently too heavy for Kassianus Sirait and so greatly disturbed his physical condition that he asked permission to resign during another Extraordinary Synod in 1942. In the meantime, with the arrival of the Japanese, many felt that a more quiet personality was needed, and they found it in Justin Sihombing who succeeded as leader of HKBP during this very difficult period. Like many other churches, the bitter and harsh experience caused by the Japanese, however, brought a blessing in disguise; it brought HKBP to a real self-reliance, according to Henry Venn and John Nevius’ three-self formula: self-supporting, self-propagating and self-governing. Although many Batak Christian teachers—doing a double task, in the school as well as in the local congregation—resigned because the church could not pay their salary and the Japanese authorities were not interested in advancing education and the life of the church, HKBP was able to maintain its existence and ministry.

**HKBP as a major Christian factor in ecumenical and political developments of Indonesia: 1945–1980**

The difficulties faced by Indonesia soon after the proclamation of independence or during the so-called era of physical revolution 1945–1949 (cf. chapter six) also applied to HKBP. When the Dutch eventually gained control of the East Coast of Sumatra and much of Java, HKBP members were divided between

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72 As told by Hans de Kleine, who was also interned by the Japanese authorities, in *Jahresbericht der RMG* 1951/1952:20, quoted in Aritonang 1994:312.
74 Nyhus 1987:153. In the election of July 1940 Justin Sihombing was actually nominated by many Batak/HKBP pastors. But he withdrew as an expression of his respect for Sirait, his senior. Sihombing later became the longest-serving Batak Ephorus of HKBP (1942–1962).
the Republican and the Dutch-controlled areas. Tensions between Republican Tapanuli and Dutch-dominated East Sumatra and Java temporarily threatened the unity of HKBP. In Republican-controlled Tapanuli many government and legislative officials were members of HKBP, including the Resident of Tapanuli Dr. Ferdinand Lumbantobing, while on the East Coast Dutch authorities hoped for cooperation from Christian groups, including HKBP. The differences in political opinion began to influence relations between the two areas. Already in December 1947 Republican voices had accused the Dutch of using Indonesian ministers and priests to promote the Dutch point of view. By late 1948, after a civil war had erupted in Tapanuli, Federalist supporters among the Toba Batak on the East Coast, who had been advocating the creation of a Batak State in Tapanuli, out of fear that the clashes had gone beyond Indonesian control also called for Dutch intervention. In this atmosphere the Tapanuli republican government forbade HKBP to permit delegates from the East Coast and Java District to attend the General or Great Synod to be held at the end of November 1948, contending that anti-Republican sentiment might be expressed.\textsuperscript{75}

Notwithstanding the tense and uncertain situation, HKBP continued to develop and to play its role in the political sphere. Throughout the early process of institutional formation in 1945 and onwards, important ties existed between HKBP and government and party leaders, especially Partai Kristen Indonesia (Indonesian Christian Party, Parki, later Parkindo). Citing Van Langenberg’s summary and conclusion, religion and religious organisations served as an important integrative force. “Christianity and the HKBP provided ideological and institutional cohesion between government and party, between mass and elite.”\textsuperscript{76} But, continued Nyhus, the conclusion should not be drawn that the church was a monolithic unit acting in this capacity. Within the church difference of opinion existed concerning what role the church should have in political activity and about its ties to both government and political parties, and what part officials, clergy and laity should play.\textsuperscript{77} These questions and differences of opinion also continued in HKBP during the following years, up to the present.

HKBP also played a very important role in the development of the ecumenical movement (cf. chapter seventeen). As early as the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Batak Mission had shown its participation in the ‘ecumenical’ Depok Seminary (that existed 1878–1926) by sending quite a large number of Batak students (see chapter sixteen). When some churches and missions initiated a union or ecumenical higher-level seminary, the Hoogere

\textsuperscript{75} Nyhus 1987:145–146, 483–484.
\textsuperscript{77} Nyhus 1987:487.
Theologische School (HTS), at Batavia in early 1930s, HKBP also demonstrated its genuine participation by commissioning some students (some of whom later became ephorus) and by contributing funds. The first four HKBP students at the HTS, together with other HKBP students on Java who were members of the Student Christian Movement, also participated in ecumenical activities that brought them into contact with other students from Asia and with world church leaders.\(^78\)

Regarding the initial participation of HKBP in some international ecumenical organisations, Nyhus\(^79\) has given a sufficient summary: during World War II national and international Christian organisations in Europe and North America maintained their interest in the HKBP. They recognised the church’s independence and, following the war, invited HKBP to take part in international conferences, among others the conference of the International Missionary Council in Whitby 1947 (represented by Rev. T.S. Sihombing), and to become members of international organisations. In 1948 HKBP, represented by Rev. K. Sitompu, became a charter member of the WCC, at its inaugural assembly in Amsterdam. In 1949 HKBP sent delegates to the first meeting of the East Asian Christian Conference held in Bangkok, and in 1957 HKBP was the Indonesian host when the conference of EACC was held in Parapat. HKBP also became a member of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in 1952.\(^80\)

Membership of LWF was not promptly achieved, because one of the requirements was that HKBP had to accept the Augsburg Confession of the Lutheran church. The HKBP leaders were aware that they were not purely Lutheran since they had inherited from the RMG the so-called Uniert tradition, that is a union or combination of Lutheran and Reformed (Calvinist) traditions, and they wanted to define their own theological identity. To solve this problem, HKBP formulated its own confession in 1951 that on the one hand adopted the Augsburg Confession and on the other hand reflected its own theological struggle and standpoint. The LWF assembly in 1952 accepted this Confessie HKBP 1951 as not contrary to the Lutheran doctrine and confession. This Confessie is the first confession formulated by the Indonesian Protestant churches.

At the national level HKBP has been active since the preparatory meetings for the founding of Dewan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia (DGI, the Indonesian Council of Churches). Already in 1949 HKBP had stated its agreement to

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\(^78\) Nyhus 1987:177.


\(^80\) By becoming a member of the LWF, from 1954 onwards HKBP could receive a generous amount of grants, among others—with the support also of the RMG and some other overseas partners—to establish a large university in Medan and Pematangsiantar, called Nommensen University. Pedersen 1970:167–170.
becoming a member of DGI. On the question of whether the members of the DGI should move toward organisational unity, some spokesmen of HKBP at the general conferences of DGI in 1953–1964 supported this as an ultimate goal, but emphasised spiritual over organisational unity. As the largest Protestant church in Indonesia, HKBP’s opinion had a substantial influence, and from time to time HKBP commissioned its personnel to hold certain tasks and office; the most prominent was S.A.E. Nababan, DGI/PGI’s general secretary 1967–1984 (see further below and also chapter seventeen).

In terms of quantity, the decade of the 1950s was a period of impressive growth and expansion for HKBP, although in the midst of this period there was a separatist movement or revolt, Pemerintahan Revolusioner Republik Indonesia (PRRI, Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia) that involved many of HKBP’s members and ministers.  

81 From 512,000 in 1951 its membership increased to 745,000 in 1960. More and more local congregations and parishes were opened outside Tapanuli or Batakland due to the migration of the Toba-Batak to East Coast of Sumatra as well as to Java.  

82 But already from the late 1950s some new restlessness also increased within HKBP, as could be seen among other places in the case of the Gereja Kristen Protestan Simalungun (GKPS, Simalungun Christian Protestant Church) and the establishment of some other newly separated churches.

The spirit of independence and self-reliance among the Simalungun Christians that culminated in the establishment of GKPS in 1963 had already been evident since 1928.  

83 In that year the Simalungun Christians celebrated 25 years’ anniversary of the Pematang Raya congregation as the official starting point of evangelism in this area. During the celebration they also discussed the future of their church and Christianity in Simalungun and arrived at the conclusion that the main factor making progress rather slow was the domination of the Toba-Batak in the mission personnel and in the language that was being used. To enhance progress they asked the Batak Mission to provide them with Christian literature (including the Holy Scriptures and Agende or Order of Worship) and schoolbooks in the Simalungun language, to prepare more Simalungun Christians to become teacher, evangelists and even pastors, and to give opportunity to the Simalungun people to take part in the church office and structure. Furthermore, they asked the missionaries and the Toba-Batak church-workers to treat and appreciate the Simalungun people as equal with the Toba-Batak, because they have their own identity: culturally, socially, mentally and spiritually. Under the leadership of Jaudin Saragih

82 Regarding the migration in the 1950s see further Clark E. Cunningham 1958.
83 For a further description and analysis of this subject see Hutauruk 1980:208–222. A recent study on GKPS can be found in Juandaha R.P. Dasuha et al. 2003.
(a government officer) and Rev. Jaulung Wismar Saragih (1888–1968, the first Simalungun pastor) they also expressed their sincere aspiration by establishing some supporting organisations such as Komite Na Ra Marpodah (Advisory Committee, especially for literature and evangelism), Kongsi Laita (“Let’s go” Society for Evangelism) and—during the Japanese occupation—Parguruhan Saksi ni Kristus (Communion of Christ’s Witnesses), and issuing the Sinalsal (Ray) monthly. All this was attempted under a motto: Simalungun should be won by and in the language of the Simalungun people.

The Batak Mission and the HKBP did not give a sincere and rapid response to this Simalungun aspiration. Only in 1935 did Simalungun become a district in HKBP and only some years later did a Simalungun pastor, J. Wismar Saragih, administer it. In 1953, in the celebration of 50 years of the proclamation of the gospel in Simalungun, while the Simalungun Christians asked for an independent church, HKBP declared a special autonomy for this district, with a special name: HKBP Simalungun, and appointed J. Wismar Saragih as a Vice-Ephorus for this autonomous district. In the eyes of the Simalungun Christians this postponement of independence was just copying the paternalistic character of the Batak Mission against the former aspiration of the Toba-Batak Christians. Therefore they strove more intensively until the establishment of GKPS was realised in 1963. Although the ‘maturation’ of GKPS was celebrated in a big ceremony, many Simalungun Christians felt that the Toba-Bataks in HKBP wanted to continue their spiritual and ecclesial imperialism toward them. That is why, from then until the present, there has been an increasing consciousness among some Simalungun people that they are not a branch of the Bataks, notwithstanding the traditional belief or mythology that the Simalungun margas (clans) are part or branches of the margas of the Toba-Batak community.

We can find a similar case in Angkola-Mandailing region. Since the 1950s the feeling has increased among the Angkola-Mandailing Christians that they were too much dominated by the Toba-Bataks, while they were also aware and proud of their own language (or dialect) and adat (custom) and of their region as the starting point of the successful RMG work. When they asked in the early 1960s for an independent church, HKBP only gave a form of autonomy, including a special name: HKBP Angkola. After some further years of striving, in 1975 this church secured full independence with a new name: Gereja Kristen Protestan Angkola (Angkola Christian Protestant Church) and—like

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84 A recent study of J.W. Saragih from the so-called post-colonial perspective can be found in Martin L. Sinaga 2004.
GKPS—also extended its ministry to the whole province of North Sumatra and even to many other provinces in Indonesia.\(^{86}\)

Another striking restlessness showed up from the late 1950s, starting in Java especially in Jakarta and then spreading to all HKBP circles. There were some intermingled causative factors, among others the freedom of the congregations and parishes to manage themselves against the top-down policy of the synod-level leaders, the role of lay persons, the intervention of certain rich men in the policy of the church, and primordial sentiments (like nepotism, *margaism* or clan solidarity, and regionalism). In 1959 the Java-Kalimantan district (centred in Jakarta) wanted to set up its own policy regarding finance and personnel (including the qualification and placement of the pastors). The synod-leaders (the *ephorus* and the general secretary) in the HKBP headquarter in Tarutung did not approve the district’s policy and strove to apply their own policy. The conflict sharpened during the Great Synod of 1962 when—under the influence of a rich businessman T.D. Pardede—this synod reflected an atmosphere and produced some decisions that many of the participants felt to be contrary to the strategy and spirit of HKBP as a church.

Soon after the synod a quite large number of HKBP members and ministers—including many prominent laypersons—initiated a series of committees such as *Panitia Panindangi Reformasi* (Committee to Witness the Reformation), *Dewan Keutuhan HKBP* (Council for Perfection of HKBP), and *Dewan Koordinasi Patotahan HKBP* (the Coordinating Council for Reform) to put the HKBP in order. Some of their members organised a *pelgrimstocht* (a sort of long march) led by Professor Apul Panggabean MA, from Medan to Tarutung (almost 300 km), expressing their appeal and aspiration for the total recovery and renewal of HKBP. Instead of listening and fulfilling the appeal, the top leaders of HKBP dismissed a number of prominent leaders suspected to be the leaders of the movement, among others Rev. Dr. Andar Lumbantobing (President of the Nommensen University), Drs. H.M.T. Oppusunggu (Vice-President of the same university) and Rev. Dr. Sutan M. Hutagalung (Chairman of the Pastors’ Conference and a professor at the same university). When the participants and leaders of this renewal movement saw no more possibilities to renew HKBP from within, in August 1964 at Pematangsiantar they initiated a new church, *Gereja Kristen Protestan Indonesia* (GKPI, Indonesian Christian Protestant Church). HKBP tried to cancel the establishment of this new church by seeking the authority of the governor of North Sumatra, Ulung Sitepu, but was unsuccessful.\(^{87}\)

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\(^{86}\) See further J.U. Siregar 1999.

\(^{87}\) For supplementary description of the emergence of GKPI see; Pedersen 1970:173–178; Lempp 1976:273–276; Raja Lubis 1982; and B.A. Simandjuntak 2001:489–500. In 2005 GKPI had around 340,000 members gathered in around 1000 local congregations and served by
Besides GKPI, there is another church that split from HKBP during the same time, the HKBP Luther (later changed to Gereja Kristen Luther Indonesia/GKLI, Indonesian Christian Lutheran Church). This church, led by Rev. J. Sinaga and his family, has a strong relationship with the Norwegian Lutheran Church as shown by the establishment of a theological seminary at Sihabong-habong, in North Tapanuli (now Humbang Hasundutan) where its headquarters is also located. Some years later (in the early 1980s), after another internal conflict in HKBP, especially in Medan, there came another split, forming the Gereja Punguan Partangiangan, later changed to Gereja Protestan Persekutuan (Protestant Church of Fellowship). Then in 1992—after some years of struggle and attempts—the Pakpak-Dairi tribe in HKBP founded its own church, Gereja Kristen Protestan Pakpak-Dairi (GKPPD). Therefore, since the 1920s there have been at least nine churches split or derived from HKBP: HChB/GKB, HKI, GMB, GKP, GKPI, GKLI, GKPA, GPP and GKPPD. These churches (except HChB/GKB that is already defunct) became members of DGI/PGI together with HKBP, and most also became members of international ecumenical bodies (WCC, CCA, LWF and UEM). However, an increasingly closer relationship and cooperation between HKBP and its ‘children’ is also seen in PGI Wilayah (the regional communion of churches) in North Sumatra, as well as in many other provinces. This phenomenon is included in what was termed and described by Paul Pedersen in his book as the expression of Batak Blood and Protestant Soul (1970).

The establishment of new churches solved not all internal tension and conflicts. A quite sharp conflict in HKBP broke out again in the 1970s, also involving the hands of political power-holders, either members of HKBP or not. The epicentre was once again the Nommensen University, and in particular the Theological Faculty. Since 1973 a number of lecturers and students were dismissed and in 1977 this faculty split into two entities. The one was still part of the university while the other, called Sekolah Tinggi Teologia “Penggembalaan” (‘Pastoral’ Theological Seminary), had to borrow some classrooms or buildings from other churches (like HKI and GKPI) at Pematangsiantar. The problem was solved when in 1979 the Theological Faculty separated from the university and acquired its new name and legal entity: Sekolah Tinggi Teologia (STT) HKBP (HKBP Theological Seminary) and the dismissed lecturers and students were called back to the campus.

An unending struggle, experienced by HKBP and its ‘children’ together with many other churches in North Sumatra (including GBKP below), is

approximately 225 pastors. Besides being a member of DGI/PGI since 1976, GKPI is also member of WCC, CCA, LWF and the United Evangelical Mission (UEM, continuation and extension of RMG).
the encounter and tension between gospel and adat (custom). Generally speaking the Batak churches held the position inherited from the RMG, that is to divide the adat or the whole traditional culture into three categories: positive, neutral and negative. The positive elements (such as language, script and literature, social and family system and relationship, certain marriage values, and certain philosophical values) as well as the neutral elements (such as housing and architecture, the agricultural system, textile and weaving, the almanac and calendar system, some musical instruments, various kinds of knowledge and technical/practical skills, and much equipments for daily life) are accepted—even endorsed and developed—in the church, whereas the negative elements (such as worshipping the ancestors, witchcraft and divination) must be rejected. In the respective church orders this acceptance or rejection is also stated.

Evidently this categorisation is not always apparent and cannot help the Christian Bataks to answer many questions. In its very essence adat or culture is a all-embracing entity that cannot be specified using criteria from outside. From 27 July to 1 August 1968, at Nommensen University Pematangsiantar, HKBP held a Seminar Adat under a theme Panindangion Hakristenon di Adat (Witnessing Christianity in Adat). Eight years later (6–9 August and 16–20 November 1976), together with some other churches in North Sumatra (HKI, GKPS, GKPI, GBKP, Roman Catholic), HKBP and the Indonesian Regional Asia Programme for Advanced Studies (IRAPAS), and sponsored by LWF, held a series of Seminar Adat Batak. The aim of this seminar was to find a way out to the problems caused by the encounter and collision of Christianity and Batak Adat. There were a number of attractive findings and recommendations, but many problems are still outstanding, even after so many seminars, workshops and the like. In the meantime, since the 1980s and culminating in the 1990s, some leaders from Evangelical and Pentecostal-Charismatic circles presented their negative assessment and rejection of adat. Sometimes they showed this through a demonstrative action such as burning ulos (traditional textile), carvings and many other traditional crafts, based on a judgment that all these

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88 One of the in-depth studies on this subject is Schreiner 1972.
89 For a further description of family relationship see Kathryn J. Brinemann Bovill 1985: 127–136.
90 For a detailed specification of these three categories see Aritonang 1994:42–66.
91 Compiled in mimeographed publication, “Seminar Adat di HKBP 27 Juli–1 Agustus 1968” and “Seminar Adat Batak diselenggarakan oleh IRAPAS,” 2 volumes.
92 The last big event on this issue was the seminar of 24–26 June 2001 in Jakarta, together with the launching of a Festschrift for the 75th anniversary of Prof. Dr. Lothar Schreiner (ed. A.A. Sitompul et al. 2001).
93 Besides some Christian Bataks’ writings, there is a very important writing on ulos: see Sandra A. Niesen 1985. But the anti-adat groups generally ignore such an appreciation and respect for traditional products.
materials are full of satanic power. Parallel with the increasing tendency of exodus (or at least double-membership) of many members of the so-called traditional churches to the Evangelical-Pentecostal churches, this conflict has brought some losses to both sides. There have been many polemic publications issued by both sides that ultimately were widening the distance between them instead of promoting mutual understanding and respect.\footnote{One of the most prolific writers from the side of adat protagonist in this recent time is the Methodist Church member Richard Sinaga, \textit{Adat Budaya Batak dan Kekristenan} 2000, while from the Evangelical-Pentecostal side there are two productive writers, Rev. A.H. Parhusip, \textit{Jorbut ni Adat Batak Hasipelebeguon/The Awfulness of the Heathen Adat Batak} n.d. and Posma Situmorang, \textit{Ulos di tengah Adat Batak/Ulos in the midst of Adat Batak} 1998.}

\textbf{1980–2000: HKBP in turmoil and conflict with the government}\footnote{It is not easy to present a clear and objective picture on this subject, since most of the data come from one or the other side involved in the conflict; each of them trying to justify themselves while blaming the other. We use here materials from both sides and from neutral observers while trying to give a balanced description and evaluation.}

It is not exaggerating if we conclude that these two decades are the most crucial period in the nearly 150 years of the history of the Batak Churches, especially HKBP. Although in terms of quantity HKBP still flourished (in the 1990s around 3 million members) and many of its members were well-known as successful businessmen and high-ranked government or military officers, nevertheless—or just because of this fact—HKBP could not escape a series of tremendous conflicts and turmoil. This episode became very important because it was not only dealing with HKBP but also involved many other churches, not to say all Christians in the country. Moreover during this period there were also many other incidents that more or less paralleled or had connection with HKBP’s case (see chapter six). As usual in religious history, theological, personal and some other motives are interwoven and intermingled. Some theological problems that come to the fore, especially regarding church relations to the government, are very fundamental and have been repeatedly faced by the churches during many centuries.

In the Great Synod 27–31 January 1987 S.A.E. Nababan was elected to be ephor of HKBP for the term of 1986–1992.\footnote{The election synod should actually have been held in 1986, but due to the celebration of the HKBP’s 125th anniversary that was also attended by President and Mrs. Tien Soeharto, the synod was postponed to January 1987; P.M. Sihombing was also the chairman of the anniversary committee.} His competitor, P.M. Sihombing, was actually his colleague and close friend during their ministry in DGI/PGI in 1970s, and was the general secretary of HKBP in 1980–1986. His supporters were dissatisfied and accused Nababan of using unfair and fraudulent tactics
to win the election. Since Sihombing and his followers could not prove the charge, they had to seek other chances. Soon after Nababan became ephorus he declared a programme of improvement, ‘reformation’ and development. According to his observation, during the last twenty years HKBP had experienced a very serious decline in many aspects and fields, in socio-economic as well as spiritual aspects.

To enhance the socio-economic life of the people and to fight for their rights Nababan encouraged HKBP, based on his social theology, to support some NGOs committed to the empowerment of the poor in North Sumatra. Parallel with this, in order to recover the spiritual life, and especially to stop an increasing tendency to practice old beliefs (worshipping ancestors etc.) after an enormous earthquake at Tarutung in April 1987, he announced a programme of re-evangelising the members of HKBP. For this aim he recommended the Badan Pendukung Pelaksana Zending (BPP Zending; Supporting Body for Evangelisation), established in Jakarta a few years previously, to organise a special team named Tim Evangelisasi Nehemia (TEN, Nehemia Evangelisation Team).

This TEN had a very strong link with some Evangelical and Charismatic groups (see chapter eighteen) and used some of their popular methods of evangelisation like revival meetings, personal evangelism and healing (sometimes it was accused to practise baptism of naked adults and healing sessions with women in closed rooms), exorcism, altar calls, giving of a blessing by the laying of hands (by persons who were not ordained pastors). The P.M. Sihombing or Parritrit group viewed these practices as contrary to the doctrine, confession of faith and order of worship of the HKBP, and charged that Nababan and this TEN brought a serious danger to the spiritual life of

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97 At least since the 1960s the process of election of the top leaders (ephorus and the like) in HKBP as well as in any other Batak churches was frequently full of intrigues. There were always a number of candidates trying to chase this chair. One reason was explained in A. Lumbantobing 1961, “The Christian Bataks believed that—as during the time of Nommensen—by achieving this office the office-bearer will achieve a special sahala (special spiritual power) that in turn would give certain benefits to the election winner or successful achiever.”

98 This P.M. Sihombing group, consisting of twenty pastors and some other ministers and lay members, was later called Parritrit (Retreat group) because they held a retreat at Parapat in March 1987 to consolidate them and to mobilise supporters. The minutes of the retreat were issued in two booklets entitled “Parmaraan di HKBP—Quo Vadis HKBP?” (Disaster within the HKBP), and “Nunga Lam Patar” (It has been clearer). “Building the Truth” (a document provided by Nababan’s rival), p. 3; Steenbrink 1994:63.


the Christian Batak, and especially to HKBP. Nababan asked Sihombing and his group to prove the charges, or to confess their faults if they failed, and then obey the leader of HKBP. Some of the Sihombing/Parritrit group confessed their faults and their status was restored, but most of them rejected this appeal. The 49th Great Synod, of 10–15 November 1988, after consulting Parhalado Pusat (Central Council) and Rapot Pandita (Pastors’ Conference), dismissed them from their office.

This case of dismissal became a seed for the next disruption since the dismissed pastors continued to struggle and even to mobilise supporters. From time to time they gathered more support and sympathy or at least partners against Nababan’s leadership. On the one hand Nababan was recognised as a powerful leader and motivator for speeding-up progress. He had many brilliant ideas to equip and empower the workers and members of HKBP, and other churches as well, to cope with the challenge of modern science and technology that came together with the process of industrialisation and globalisation, while also working to improve the image of Tapanuli that was seen as a so-called “portrait of poverty.” But on the other hand he was also known as an authoritarian figure with autocratic and arrogant style, and not many people could easily understand his ideas and planning. In a traditional church like HKBP the way he was leading the church was often felt to be contrary to the inherited and inherent values deeply rooted in the soul of the people. His conflict with General Secretary O.P.T. Simorangkir, became an additional factor. Besides that, his disagreement with the New Order Government of President Soeharto, that had been evident since the early 1980s during his last term as the general secretary of DGI, escalated around 1990 in connection with the activity of PT Inti Indorayon Utama, a giant paper-pulp factory. For HKBP, which was accustomed to show homage and obedience to the government

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101 “Building the Truth”, p. 3.

102 There were 19 pastors dismissed (including P.M. Sihombing) besides a number of Guru Huria (teacher-preachers), Bijbelvrouw (Bible women), deaconesses, officials of Nommensen University and students of the Teacher-Preacher School; “Building the Truth”, p. 4; Steenbrink 1994:63; Moksa Nadeak et al. 1995:64–68.

103 “Building the Truth”, p. 1, said: “His harsh and authoritarian leadership had resulted in many reactions and disagreement among the members and pastors of the HKBP,” while pp. 3, 4 and 6 said, “Dr. S.A.E. Nababan dared to treat the General Secretary [O.P.T. Simorangkir] as not more than an ordinary employee.” “He often threatened his staff members, namely the praeses, pastors of parishes and staff of headquarter”, and “Dr. Nababan during his leadership term emphasised the obedience of all staff to the church constitution, but his own actions were often beyond and contrary to the HKBP constitution. All the facts obviously had described the characteristics of Nababan’s leadership which were authoritarian, controversial and unconstitutional.”

104 Nababan and KSPPM sharply criticised this factory because it led to environmental destruction around Lake Toba, both by causing air and water pollution and by clear-felling the forest, while Soeharto and his regime backed it for certain benefits. Gerry van Klinken 1996:1–2.
and which had many members holding high positions in the government service. Nababan’s criticism and opposition toward the government were viewed unduly harshly and out of proportion.\textsuperscript{105} It is no wonder that as time went on he experienced more and more resistance.

In the 51st Great Synod, from 23 to 28 November 1992, at Sipoholon-Tarutung the tension escalated dramatically. “In reality the process of the synod’s sessions was very heavy. Some sessions were knocked down by disturbances and storms, so that the three items for the plenary sessions that had been approved by the Police National Headquarter could not be decided by voting.”\textsuperscript{106} Although it is not easy to provide an accurate number how many of the synod participants were pro and contra Nababan, it is obvious that the synod could not run properly. The last day of the synod assembly ended in chaos. Nababan as the chair of the synod could no longer manage the assembly. He suspended the assembly without a definite decision and went home around 22.00 pm., while the licence for the assembly was valid until 24.00 pm. What happened after the suspension is quite unclear.\textsuperscript{107} Referring to the document quoted in the footnote below, as well as some other documents from the anti-Nababan side, it was Nababan’s side that asked the government, in effect the military, to take over the leadership,\textsuperscript{108} while the documents from

\textsuperscript{105} Nababan’s criticism against some of the policies and acts of the New Order regime actually reflected DGI/PGI’s standpoint. But the government, esp. President Soeharto, developed this into a personal sentiment. Nababan was once charged as a communist when he—at an international conference in Portugal—expressed his support and sympathy for the Theology of Liberation exponents in Latin America (cf. “Building the Truth,” p. 19; MacDougall 1994:8). The government was also suspected of hampering his re-election as general chairperson of PGI in the eleventh general assembly at Surabaya in 1989.

\textsuperscript{106} “Building the Truth”, p. 8. The three items were: (1) To discuss and approve the HKBP Constitution of 1992–2002; (2) To elect the office bearers of the HKBP for the term of 1992–1998; and (3) To resolve the conflicts within the HKBP. The quotation also obviously showed how the government played its role in church business. Many other examples in this document as well as in some other documents showed the same fact. Meanwhile this document did not tell who were causing “disturbances and storms”, whereas Moksad Nadeak et al. 1995:75 stated that they came from the anti-Nababan group, led by O.P.T. Simorangkir and S.M. Siahaan.

\textsuperscript{107} In “Building the Truth”, p. 9, it was said, “The members of the Central Council of the HKBP immediately held an extraordinary meeting in order to take some steps to resolve the confused session. . . . Bearing the responsibility to save the HKBP in his mind, and at the request of the Central Council, the then General Secretary, Rev. O.P.T. Simorangkir, continued to conduct the session of General Synod for the remaining time before the deadline. After consulting the Central Council members, he came to a decision that the caretakers were. . . (five names were mentioned). They were expected to organise an Extraordinary Synod 5 months after the 51th General Synod. Unfortunately after presenting the decision in the plenary session, some delegates. . . (some names from Nababan’s side were mentioned) protested the General Secretary’s decision. They requested the government to cancel such a decision, and furthermore they asked the government to take over the HKBP’s situation.” But in Moksad Nadeak et al. 1995:76–78 we find a very different picture.

\textsuperscript{108} In a special section of the document “Building the Truth”, entitled “The Issue on Government ’Intervention’” (pp. 11–2), it was among other things said, “The contribution or the ‘intervention’ (campurtangan). . . in the HKBP obviously was not a ‘cause’ but a ‘result’ of
Nababan’s side and certain observers insisted that it was the anti-Nababan side that invited the government. 109

Whichever is true, in fact Colonel Daniel Toding, the Military Regimental Commander, took over control and announced that the HKBP issue was now in the hands of the government, while he also said, “The government will do the best for HKBP.” When the deadline of the synod’s licence had passed, Colonel Daniel Toding dissolved the synod’s session without any formal closing ceremonies namely prayer, worship and the Holy Communion, which were usual. 110

The suspension or dissolution of the Great Synod brought HKBP to an unclear situation. The Nababan side said that the synod was suspended, and that Nababan was still the ephorus (this standpoint was later maintained by Nababan and his followers until 1998). They did not recognise the dissolution by Colonel Toding, because they saw that it was contrary to the constitution of HKBP. But his rival’s side said that the dissolution was legal, since the licence for the synod assembly was only until 28 November and Nababan’s term was over. Therefore “since 29 November 1992 the leadership of the HKBP had been vacant and therefore it was delivered to the government and security officers.” 111

After receiving reports from Colonel Toding and from the then general secretary of HKBP, O.P.T. Simorangkir, Major General R. Pramono, the Area Commander of the Military Region of Bukit Barisan invited the members of the Central Council of the HKBP to hold a consultation on 16 December 1992 in Medan. An invitation was also sent to S.A.E. Nababan but he did not attend the event. 112 In the consultation, referring to certain articles in the constitution of HKBP, the members of the Central Council proposed three names as responsible persons to organise an Extraordinary Synod, namely Rev. Dr. W. Sihite, Rev. Dr. A.A. Sitompul and Rev. Dr. S.M. Siahaan. One week later, 23

Dr. Nababan’s leadership that had created the procrastinating and spread tensions. If the government’s involvement in the HKBP supported his interest and his followers’ interest, he and his followers kept quiet about it and they would not identify it as ‘intervention’. Otherwise, if government’s involvement did not support their wellbeing and inflicted their interest, they immediately condemned it as ‘intervention’… The fact impressed that Dr. Nababan and his followers used a ‘double standard’ in evaluating the government’s involvement. They agreed with something, which favoured them. Otherwise, they condemned something as ‘intervention’ if they were not in favour.’

109 B.A. Simandjuntak 2001:512 pointed out that it was O.P.T. Simorangkir who frequently asked for the government’s intervention during his term as the General Secretary, especially in 1992, including in the cancellation of the planned General or Great Synod of June 1992.

110 “Building the Truth”, p. 10.

111 “Building the Truth”, p. 10.

112 In the document provided by Nababan’s side, Nababan did not attend because in his opinion the government or the military commander had no right and authority to handle church conflicts, as this was the church’s own responsibility.
December 1992, Pramono issued a written decision to appoint S.M. Siahaan, professor of the Old Testament at STT HKBP, as the acting *ephorus* with the main task “to prepare and to conduct an Extraordinary Synod in order to elect the office bearers of the HKBP (*ephorus*, general secretary, the members of Central Committee, and praeses) in the middle of February 1993, according to the 1982–1992 HKBP Constitution.”

Less than one week after the issuing of that controversial document, during the Christmas and New Year season, a wave of demonstrations of protest and resistance flooded in from the members and ministers of the HKBP, followed by a number of institutions and organisations inside and outside Indonesia, including PGI. Nonetheless, after installing S.M. Siahaan to be the acting *ephorus* at Sipoholon Seminary on 31 December 1992, the Extraordinary Synod was held at Medan from 11 to 13 February 1993 with a sole main agenda: to elect the new officers of the HKBP for the period of 1992–1998. The elected *ephorus* and general secretary were Rev. Dr. P.W.T. Simanjuntak and Rev. Dr. S.M. Siahaan. Consequently this synod also decided that S.A.E. Nababan no longer had the right to represent HKBP either in Indonesia or in foreign countries. Against the charge from the Nababan side that it was illegal and unconstitutional, the organisers and supporters of this synod persisted that it was legal and constitutional. Since then the government on many occasions and through many officers and channels declared that it only recognised Simanjuntak and Siahaan. Therefore it was difficult to avoid concluding that the government deliberately created a rival against Nababan in order to crack down on the dissenting group that was growing within HKBP.

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113 “Building the Truth”, p. 11.
114 Reactions from PGI dated on 29 December 1992, 4 January 1993, and 2–5 March 1993 that among others regretted the intervention ‘from outside’ and the violence used.
115 Nababan’s side, that later was popularly called *Setia Sampai Akhir* (SSA, Be faithful until the end), although they preferred to call themselves “HKBP Aturan & Peraturan” (HKBP-AP, HKBP of Constitution), charged that the location of the synod in a hotel, i.e. Hotel Tiara, was against the constitution. But the other side claimed that it was constitutional, because it was opened and closed in a church building, i.e. HKBP Jalan Sudirman Medan, and argued that the sessions took place in a public hall, Tiara Convention Centre, not in Tiara Hotel. Actually the convention centre is part of the hotel.
116 Besides referring to certain articles of the HKBP constitution of 1982–1992 and the proportion of participants (464 out of 562 that had credentials; according to Moksa Nadeak et al. 1995:84 many of them were ‘fake’), the protagonists of this synod also pointed to the presence of some government officers like Director General for the Guidance of Protestant Society within the Department of Religious Affairs, the Governor of North Sumatra, and the Area Commander of Military Region Bukit Barisan, “Building the Truth”, p. 13. This kind of argument or defence was frequently found in the documents provided by the protagonists (later called Simanjuntak-Siahaan group, although they were also commonly called “HKBP SAI Tiara,” the HKBP produced by the synod in Tiara Hotel).
Whatever may be said by either side to prove their respective legality and constitutionality, as a matter of fact, before and after the extraordinary synod and in the coming years, at least until 1996, there were uncountable incidents that showed a serious disruption, division and even hostility in the corpus of HKBP. Brutal physical clashes (many times accompanied by hired thugs and hoodlums, actions, arrest and torture by the military, in several cases leading to death), intimidation, destruction of buildings and properties (including church buildings and parsonages with their furniture), filing of lawsuits from each side to the courts, and many kinds of violence were a daily picture.\textsuperscript{118} Certain external observers noticed that there was some violence from the Nababan side too, but this was legally prosecuted, while none on the Simanjuntak side were prosecuted for their offences.\textsuperscript{119} This conflict split many congregations into two factions (sometimes more) and they had to compete for use of the church buildings. The smaller faction (most of them are the AP-SSA group) in many cases had to gather in private houses or even in the open fields (par-lape-lapean). This conflict also brought disharmony and division in society and families: husband and wife, parents versus children, brothers and sisters and members of the same clan were caught up in the harsh conflict. Not infrequently members of a family divided into these two blocks and it took long time to recover. The conflict became more complicated when each side felt that some institutions outside HKBP were taking sides. Simanjuntak-Siahaan and associates, or the “Tiara” group, for example, complained that VEM/UEM in Wuppertal-Germany and PGI supported Nababan.\textsuperscript{120} S.M. Siahaan even wrote a letter to cancel the membership of HKBP in VEM/UEM.\textsuperscript{121} On the other hand Nababan and associates, or the AP-SSA group, charged that the

\textsuperscript{118} In “Building the Truth”, p. 17, it was said, “the supporters of Nababan were not reluctant to perform brutality and despicable deeds which had claimed a number of lives as well as properties…besides doing some terrors and intimidation, killed a police officer sadistically.” Whereas in Jochen Motte (ed.) ± 1994:21–23 (document provided by VEM/UEM as supporter of Nababan), we find 132 names from Nababan’s side who were arrested and tortured by the military and police before and after the Extraordinary Synod of February 1993. The more horrible torture was described in MacDougall 1994:1–5, that among others fell on Rev. Nelson Siregar, director of the HKBP community development department while also the executive secretary of KSPPM.


\textsuperscript{120} The “Tiara” group, for example, mentioned the transfer of DM 480.000 from VEM/UEM to HKBP (with a note, “Ephorus Nababan is the one who can spend this money”) through certain accounts of PGI. They also complained that a number of mass media in Germany were pressed by Nababan to publish a distorted story about HKBP, and that Simanjuntak and Siahaan were not accepted as the official representatives in the Central Committee meeting of PGI at Bandung on 7–13 May 1993; “Building the Truth”, pp. 15–6. On the other side, in Jochen Motte (ed.) ± 1994:5 we find VEM/UEM’s statement that it supported and still recognised Nababan as the Ephorus of HKBP and did not recognise Simanjuntak-Siahaan or the “Tiara” side.

government was playing a role behind this conflict with a plan to paralyse and destroy Christian potentialities in this country.\footnote{See among others Moksa Nadeak et al. 1995 and Einar Sitompul et al. (eds.) 1997. It is interesting to notice that at about the same time there was also a serious conflict within the faculty of Christian University Satya Wacana at Salatiga-Central Java, in which the government also interfered. A few years later a series of riots also broke out in many places that brought tremendous numbers of victims and loss among the Christians (cf. chapter six).}

There were many attempts to resolve the conflict and to bring reconciliation and peace. In 1990, for example, there was another Tim Damai (Peace Team) consisting of eleven prominent lay leaders in HKBP, led by Ret. General Maraden Panggabean, Ret. Major General A.E. Manihuruk and Ret. Rear Admiral F.M. Parapat, including some serving generals. This team was formally sanctioned by the then Minister of Religious Affairs, Munawir Sjadjzali, but was rejected by Nababan as an initiative that “is unknown in our church order and therefore should be considered as an intermingling of an outside power”\footnote{Quoted in Steenbrink 1994:63. MacDougall 1994:8–9 also noted that the rejection was also based on the findings of the Nababan group, that the main aim of the “Peace Team” was to overthrow Nababan, as admitted by M. Panggabean in their ‘safari’ to Sibolga on 30 September 1990. This team, MacDougall added, also had the full cooperation of the military, and in 1992—after this team had discharged itself in 1991—Panggabean backed Maj.Gen. Pramono in his bid to oust Nababan. See also Moksa Nadeak et al. 1995:68–73.} A similar attempt was made by the North Sumatra provincial government that set up Kelompok Kerja Terpadu Penyelesaian Masalah HKBP (a United Working Group to Settle the HKBP Problem) in October 1992. Members included the regional commander and the provincial head of police. One of its actions was to issue a statement that neither Nababan nor Secretary General O.P.T. Simorangkir could be a candidate for ephorus in the upcoming synod. Nababan’s followers, however, ignored the directive and nominated him.\footnote{MacDougall 1994:10.}

After the Extraordinary Synod of February 1993 another effort was attempted by Ret. Major General T.B. Silalahi, State Minister for the Utilisation of the State Apparatus, in June 1993, under the urging of President Soeharto.\footnote{The “Tiara” group noted further: The event was broadcasted by the National Television (TVRI) and published by the national newspapers. Unfortunately within less than 24 hours Dr. Nababan had broken the agreement. In a service at the HKBP Church in Jalan Fabrik Tenun Medan on 15 July (should be 15 June; ed.) Nababan was still declaring himself as the ephorus, “Building the Truth”, 16–17. Toward such a charge S.A.E. Nababan, in his explanation to the 14 June agreement, among other things, said that the handing over of the office of ephorus must be done in the coming constitutional Synod, not in the moment of signing the agreement; Jochen Motte (ed.) ± 1994:25.} Mr. Silalahi successfully organised a meeting between Dr. P.W.T. Simanjuntak and Dr. S.A.E. Nababan. They signed an agreement of seven points on 14th June 1993. The agreement, among other things, stated that, “Rev. Dr. S.A.E. Nababan supports the government decision in recognising Rev. Dr. P.W.T. Simanjuntak as the HKBP Ephorus and gives him opportunity to lead the HKBP in harmony...
and peace”. But this agreement was evidently abortive. In October 1994 the “HKBP Tiara” held the so-called 52nd Great Synod at Sipoholon Seminary, the same location as the chaotic and failed 51st Great Synod of 1992, under the theme “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts” and sub-theme “The Oneness and Unity of the HKBP supports the National Stability for the Sake of the Continuation of Nation and Country.” But this synod, like the previous attempts, was also viewed by the AP-SSA side as unconstitutional and “full of the political engineering of the government” and did not bring any result for reconciliation.

Much has been published regarding this complicated conflict, from both sides as well as from the external observers and analysts. Each writer tried to explain and analyse the state of affairs including the causes and the contributing factors. But one of the very striking aspects, and the mostly criticised, is the political aspect that is the involvement or intervention of the government. This brought the conflict to a very fundamental question: how should the church view and build its relationship with the government and how far might the government enter church or any other religious community’s affairs? Soeharto and his regime frequently stated that the government has no right to interfere with the internal affairs of a religion, neither with its doctrine nor with its organisation, and guarantees religious freedom according to the Constitution of 1945, but this HKBP case showed otherwise. This question becomes a perpetual question for all churches.

Whatever explanation, opinion and argument could be given, this complicated HKBP conflict had broken the image of Christianity in Indonesia, and especially that of the Protestant clergy. For a long time they were honoured as vicarius Christi to bring peace and harmony, but since the conflict they have been stigmatised as lover of conflict. While we may be glad that this conflict has finally been resolved, it is not yet fully satisfying to all sides. After so many riots and crises and after the fall of the New Order regime there

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126 B.A. Simandjuntak in 2001:503–29 and in his article in Einar Sitompu et al. (eds.) 1997:41–72, for example, tried to explain this HKBP conflict from a social-cultural perspective. He, among others, concluded that conflict is part of the culture and habit of the Batak and should not necessarily be assessed negatively; therefore he suggested that the resolution should also refer to cultural values and practices. Cf. Kraemer 1958:51, “Great difficulties are caused by the strong self-assurance of the Batak and by their quarrelsome nature.”

127 MacDougall 1994:15–16, for example, among other things concluded: A series of measures taken by military and civilian authorities were used to deny the AP-SSA members their internationally-recognised rights to freedom of religion, expression, association and assembly.”

128 Among others at the celebration of the Hindu day of fasting, Hari Nyepi, on 9 April 1992, as cited in Steenbrink 1994:71 from an article by Eka Darmaputera regarding the conflict in HKBP.

129 The fall of Soeharto and New Order regime could bring different interpretation and significance among the conflicting sides. For Nababan/SSAs side this might justify their conviction
is an increasing consciousness among Christians generally, and among both conflicting sides in HKBP particularly, that they have to unite and rebuild peace. On 18–20 December 1998 at Pematangsiantar both conflicting groups held a “Reconciliation Synod.” One of the steps to express reconciliation was the sharing of the top positions in the synod: Rev. Dr. J.R. Hutauruk (from the “Tiara” side) was elected to be ephorus whereas W.T.P. Simarmata (from the “SSA” side) was elected to be general secretary, and the 26 chairs of prae- ses (district superintendents) were divided evenly. Of course the long lasting conflict could not be resolved by only one event; the attempt at reconciliation that was continued up to the Great Synod of 2004 still left some remaining agenda for full and definite reconciliation and unity. The affected wounds apparently will take years, perhaps generations, to heal. The slogan “HKBP is the inclusive church” declared since 2002, however, is expected to bring healing and recovery, not only for HKBP but also to the whole nation.

*Mission in Karoland—A pattern of resistance and response*\(^{130}\)

The history of the Protestant mission to the Karo Batak people of North Sumatra, unlike the steady progress of the church among the Toba Batak, is one of staunch resistance followed by enthusiastic response, both features that call for careful analysis and explanation. Sixty years of persistent and well-informed Protestant missionary effort among the Karo people of North Sumatra, from 1890 to 1950, produced a church of only 5,000 members, which then grew to 35,000 in the next fifteen years (1950–1965), followed by 60,000 new baptisms in the four years, 1966–1970.\(^{131}\)

Similarly, response to Islam in Karoland is marked by strong resistance until the 1960s, followed by significant growth in Karo conversions since then.\(^{132}\)

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130 Because several recent studies of the mission to the Karo people and religious change in their society are readily available, this section avoids repeating detailed information and seeks instead to provide an overview of Karo response to the coming of Christianity. Some material in this section was published in 2000.

131 Rita Smith Kipp 1990 surveys the initial fifteen years, 1889–1904, from the perspective of the mission and its staff. This basically historical study is enriched by Professor Kipp’s earlier anthropological fieldwork in Karoland. Simon Rae, 1994, surveyed the process of religious change into the late 1970s, from the perspective of Karonese reaction to the intruding world religions. Professor Kipp’s collected essays, Rita Smith Kipp 1993 offers updated field reports on some of the issues around Karo religion.

132 Because Muslim communities do not keep statistics of either new members or the membership of local communities one must rely instead on local government statistics, often expressed in terms of percentages of the total population, and on information from individual villages.
There were a few villages in the Karo highlands with significant Muslim communities before World War II, and other villages with one or two Muslim families. An unknown number of Karonese became Muslim in the lowland areas of the Malay sultanates, but in doing so they departed out of the Karo community to masuk Melayu, to enter the predominantly (Muslim) Malay society of the east coast. In the years since Indonesian independence many people in the former Malay sultanates have reclaimed their Karonese ancestry, and resumed the use of clan names. Now consciously both Karonese and Muslim they have given a new impetus to Muslim mission in Karoland.

Finally, in recent decades, there has been observed some development toward a de facto secularism on the one hand and a revival of the traditional religion and the assimilation of its beliefs and practices into a popular form of Hinduism (one of the government-recognised Indonesian religions) on the other.

Karo Society on the eve of the colonial era

The Karonese are a proto-Malay people inhabiting a highland plateau in North Sumatra, and also much of the adjacent East Coast lowlands, where they were well established long before the first European contacts. They form one of the six very distinct divisions of Batak society and, like the Batak world in general, the Karonese experienced extensive Indian influence in an unrecorded past. Karo social structure is characterised by a division into five primary clans, and by a focus on kinship relationships.\(^{133}\) A significant proportion, sometimes said to have been about half the male population, was thought to have been literate in pre-colonial times, using a traditional script of south Indian derivation.

Pre-colonial Karo society was ‘stateless,’ characterised by village-based participatory communities, sometimes grouped in larger village confederations called urung. The Karo people were frugal, industrious and self-reliant. The highlands were self-sufficient in all the necessities of life but salt, iron and cotton, and the people of the Karo lowlands were involved in cropping, of pepper in particular, and in sea-borne trade to Penang and the Malay Peninsula.

Karonese traditional religion was known as Perbegu in earlier times, a term that may have been descriptive in the traditional society but later came to have negative connotations such as ‘pagan’ or ‘heathenish.’ It is now more politely described as Kiniteken si pemena, the original belief. Adherents of this traditional religion centred their attention not only on the ‘begu’ or spirit

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\(^{133}\) Kinship structure and function have been extensively described by the Karonese anthropologist, Masri Singarimbun 1975 and by Rita Smith Kipp 1976. Kipp 1996 is a valuable account of ethnicity, social structure and religious practice in contemporary Karo society.
of the dead, but also on the cult of the tendi or spirit of the living, which on death became a begu. This was a pattern of belief widely reported in regions of Southeast Asia where Islam had not displaced traditional religions.\textsuperscript{134} In the practice of their religion the Karonese gave attention also to the nature spirits of land and water, mountain, and river and of places of particular awe and mystery. The spirits of recently deceased close kin were believed to offer support and protection and received offerings, but were forgotten with the passing of time.

A major divinity was recognised by the Karonese, and spoken of by either traditional Batak or Sanskrit names (the latter, Dibata, being now recognised as the Batak name for God). This divinity was said to have a three-fold being—God Above, God in the Middle World and God Below, probably a local adaptation of Indian religious belief. There are few rites associated with the divine triad, which is represented in daily life by other and more immediate manifestations of the divine world.

Other supernatural beings were recognised, such as goblins, fairies and jinn, and one very significant kin group also had a particular religious significance. These are the kalimbubu, one's wife's father and brothers and their families, and one's mother's father and brothers and their families. This group was spoken of as dibata niidah or ‘visible gods.’ In traditional society they were seen as a source of life and blessing, a living manifestation or agency of the divine world.

Karo society was characterised by a curiosity about the beliefs and practices of others, and a willingness to adopt at least some of the concepts and terminology of the Indian traders and the Muslim communities they encountered on the coast. Their society was characterised also by competition or rivalry with both the lowland Malay population of the East Coast and the population of Aceh to the north. Both of these neighbouring societies were Muslim, the Acehnese particularly staunchly so. In the latter half of the nineteenth century the Malay sultans, originally river-port rulers who controlled Karo trade outlets and who could expand their own territories only at the expense of the lowland Karonese, found powerful sponsors and allies in the European colonial enterprises, established on the coast from about 1863.

The intentions of the warlike and ardently Muslim Acehnese were never certain and the possibility of a forced Islamisation of Karoland, as had occurred in the southern Batak territories, seems to have been a fear of the pre-colonial Karonese. There is evidence that some limited Acehnese penetration of Karoland had been attempted in pre-colonial times, and it was probably only the protracted Dutch-Acehnese war that prevented this being attempted again.

\textsuperscript{134} Jeanne Cuisinier 1951.
in the nineteenth century. On the other hand there are Karo traditions and stories that speak of friendly contact with the southern Acehnese communities of Gayo and Alas, with which some Karonese can trace clan and lineage connections.

*Colonial impact on Sumatra’s east coast*

In contrast to the situation in Tapanuli, the penetration of western European interests, values and cultures into Karoland was spearheaded not by missionaries, but by western planters and their extensive and expanding enterprises. The lowland Karonese felt early the negative impact of colonial capitalism, and made active attempts to disrupt it. The planters established direct contractual relationships with the lowland rulers, whose recognition by the colonial government gave them enhanced wealth, and status as ‘rulers,’ that they had never known before. In return they gave permission for the extensive intrusion of western commercial interests into territory traditionally occupied by Malay and lowland Karo planters. In time the commercial enterprises closed down much of the Karo pepper cultivation by either prohibiting cultivation or withholding seed. The Dutch colonial government did not occupy the independent Karo highland territory until 1904, after the conclusion of their long Aceh War, so there were still many people in Karoland at the time of the independence struggle (1945–1949) who had experienced the whole cycle of colonialism, from an independent stateless village and *urung* democracy, through the colonial era (1904–1942) and the Japanese occupation (1942–1945) and the struggle for independence asserted in August 1945 and conceded at the end of 1949.

In the nineteenth century the East Coast of Sumatra became ‘dollar-land’ for western enterprises, which set about a ruthless capitalist exploitation of the land and its resources. In this process the sultans became wealthy and powerful but the local people both Malay and Batak were, in the words of the Sumatran historian H. Tengku Luckman Sinar, “made poor in the midst of the wealth of their own land.” The lowland Karonese resented this powerful intrusion into their traditional lands and enterprises, where the European monopolies banned or destroyed much of the traditional lowland Karonese cropping and trading. At first lowland Karo people reacted by burning sheds and otherwise disrupting the European plantation cultivation, but in 1872 armed conflict broke out over a new concession at Sunggal. Even when the armed revolt was put down the pattern of looting, burning and disruption continued.136

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135 Tengku Luckman Sinar 1978:188.
136 Tengku Lukman Sinar 1980:8, 10–25 described this “big war in a small village.”
The Protestant mission to Karoland is associated historically with J.T. Cremer, a former administrator in East Sumatra and a firm advocate of opening up the outer provinces of the Indies for economic exploitation. After returning to the Netherlands Cremer entered parliament, and served for a time as Colonial Minister. His suggested solution to the problem of the free Bataks and their disruptions was to evangelise them. Plantation interests expressed their support, and an invitation was extended to the Dutch Missionary Society (NZG) to begin work among the Karonese.

Initially the Mission was reluctant, feeling itself already over-extended and being suspicious of the real motive behind the planters’ invitation. However, when no other agency took up the opportunity, the NZG transferred an experienced Dutch missionary educationist, with a group of Indonesian teachers to assist him, from Minahasa in 1890. The NZG, a lay association made up mainly of people from the Netherlands Reformed Church, had been strongly influenced by the revival and pietist movements in Europe. It was, however, more progressive than some of its contemporaries, and some of the missionaries in Karoland made important contributions to the recording of language, culture, the traditional religion and the oral history of the Karo clans. It was a fortunate circumstance for the Karonese that the real beginning of systematic Christian mission among them coincided with the beginning of missionary engagement with the new science of ethnology, around the first decade of the twentieth century. Not only was much of the old culture and traditional way of life recorded before it was changed forever by the opening of Karoland to the outside world, but the missionaries themselves were increasingly aware of cultural issues raised inevitably by the work they were doing.

Initially, the Dutch missionaries worked in the upper lowlands and based their work on the establishment of village schools, financed by the plantation enterprises. The first base was at Buluh Awar, a staging post on the walking track from the coast to the highland plateau. The Karonese here were polite, helpful—and disinterested. People helped build the first church, and came in large numbers to Christmas and similar special programmes, but increasingly they rejected schooling. The Karonese were suspicious of missionaries wanting to live in lowland villages, regarding them as either outcasts from European society or as spies or agents working on behalf of the colonial enterprises.

137 Rita Smith Kipp 1990:chap. 2 sets out the circumstances.
Missionaries also visited the free Karo communities in the highlands from time to time at this period and were welcomed there, unless they showed an interest in staying. In 1902 an attempt was made to establish a mission base in Kabanjahe, in the highlands, at the invitation of a local chief, who in retrospect seems to have been in need of some external backing in a struggle for power on the highland plateau. An alliance of other Karo leaders resisted and deposed this chief, and drove the missionaries off the plateau. The colonial administration took this opportunity to invade the highlands in 1904, ostensibly in defence of the deposed chief and the missionaries he was sponsoring but in fact as part of an Indies-wide campaign, at the end of the Aceh War, to occupy and pacify all the free territories remaining in the colony.

The Karonese clearly saw the 1904 invasion of the highland plateau as a military Christianisation of their homeland. In their view it was the Mission that ‘brought’ the Dutch colonial government to the highlands where, at this time, the lowland planters had no interest apart from the pacification of the groups involved in raiding and sabotage. Clearly also it was the Mission that benefited from the Pax Neerlandica that enabled Kabanjahe and other mission bases to be developed on the plateau.

The colonial era brought many changes to Karoland. A road, begun in 1906, extended from the existing lowland terminus to Kabanjahe, and then in two directions, to Kotacane, in Aceh, and to Pematangsiantar, in Simalungun. This road effectively broke down the long-standing isolation that had protected the highland Karonese. Later, with improvements in transportation, it opened an opportunity for inland Karonese to participate in the expanding economy of the East Coast of Sumatra.

These developments were to change Karoland forever. Systematic health care was introduced, inter-village conflict was reduced, and slavery was abolished by the new regime. At the same time taxes were introduced, the old participatory communal democracy was subordinated to the interests of the colonial regime and many Karo communities came under the influence of Malay or Toba Batak populations in the general re-organisation of local government and administration in what became the Province, and later the Governorship, of the East Coast of Sumatra.

Caught up in all this, the Karonese felt that the whole of their society was under threat; their religion, customs, values, culture and their freedom to organise their own lives. Because of this, Christianity was seen to be intrusive, the religion of invading foreigners. The activities of the mission in the lowlands had been tolerated, if largely ignored. After 1904 Christianity was dismissed as agama Belanda—the religion of the Hollanders, and its Indonesian converts as Belanda hitam—dark-skinned Hollanders.
The establishment of an independent Karo church, 1942 and later

The Dutch colonial era in Sumatra ended in March 1942 with the Japanese invasion. The Japanese military administration, for political reasons, favoured what they called native religions, among which they included Islam. Protestantism was regarded as being pro-Dutch but was not actively suppressed. Catholicism, at this time hardly represented at all in Karoland, was more favoured, reflecting the importance of the Catholic community in Japan. There was no persecution of Christianity and congregations were given permission to meet although preaching was forbidden. Churches and individual Christians experienced considerable restriction during the Japanese occupation. More significantly, Christians shared the great suffering of the civil population as the Allied blockade of Sumatra became more and more effective. This was the beginning of a slow process by which the small Christian population came to be seen more and more as part of the Karo community, and the Indonesian struggle for freedom, rather than as part of the European colonial enterprise.

Immediately prior to the Japanese invasion in 1942 the Protestant mission had established a Karo Synod, and the first two Karonese ministers were ordained—fifty years after the mission was established. These two men, with a small group of teacher-evangelists, held the Protestant church together through the Japanese occupation and the revolutionary struggle that followed Japan’s surrender in 1945. During this time membership of the Protestant Church was maintained at about 5,000, new members just replacing natural losses over this period.

The Indonesian Revolution, launched when news broke of the Japanese surrender, was in fact a much more difficult time for the Karo church than the occupation had been. The Revolution in North Sumatra took the form of an armed popular uprising against the allied attempt to re-establish the former colonial regime. Traditional rulers were swept away, private armed factions emerged alongside the nationalist army, and there were two attempts by the returning Dutch administration to defeat the Republican forces in North Sumatra by military action. Many nationalists were convinced that Christians supported the attempt to restore Dutch rule, and some Christians were martyred in Karoland, while others died supporting the revolutionary struggle.

It was at this time that the Protestant church was able to assert its post-missionary Indonesian identity. Karo church leaders openly supported the Revolution and congregations prayed for its success. But most significantly Karo Christians shared the armed struggle and the evacuation of large elements of the civil population from the Dutch occupied territories in Karoland. In evacuation settlements the small Christian communities were seen to be an authentic part of Indonesian life, sharing the suffering and the aspirations...
of a people seeking freedom to develop their own national identity. They had no choice at this time but to practise their faith in public. Their attitudes, values and way of relating to each other and to others were under constant critical observation.

The period of rapid church growth, and a growing diversity of religions in Karoland

After the Revolution Karo society enjoyed a period of confident optimism. Political movements were strong. Now people sought the education they had rejected when it seemed part of a colonial strategy for cultural domination. People travelled widely and Karo society became fully integrated into the life of the new Republic. It was during this period that conversions to Christianity began to grow, taking membership from 5,000 in 1950 to 35,000 in 1965 when, just prior to the attempted coup d'état, the church celebrated the 75th anniversary of the beginning of the Christian mission in Karoland. There is no evidence of a similar growth in Karo openness to Islam during this period.

Catholic Christianity had to make what was almost a new beginning in Karoland after 1950. During the colonial era Catholic work had been restricted under legislation that attempted to prevent the overlapping of different missions, and Catholic activity was just beginning on the borders of Karoland when the Japanese occupation forced the withdrawal of almost all the priests, most of whom, at that time, were Dutch.

In the 1960s and 1970s Protestant growth took on the nature of a mass movement, with 60,000 baptisms registered in the four-year period to 1970. Vigorous growth continued into the 1980s. The developing Catholic mission also prospered in the 1960s and 1970s, and the Karo Catholic community grew quickly although numbers are difficult to determine as Catholic parishes became territorial rather than ethnic in constitution during this period. While some openness to Islam was noted the preference for Karonese wishing (or being urged) to enter one of the government-recognised religions was at this time clearly and overwhelmingly for Christianity.

In 1950 the Government Department of Religion reported that there were about 5,000 Muslims in the Karo administration district, but most of these were not ethnic Karonese.139 There was a slow increase in conversions to Islam in the years before the attempted coup d'état in 1965, mainly as a result of dakwah activity from Medan, and a significant increase in the wake of that tumultuous event and its bloody aftermath.140 The total number of Muslims in

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140 Rita Smith Kipp 1996:221–222, notes a mass conversion, of 1,500, in Kabanjahe in 1968.
Karoland rose from 24,150 in 1966 to 31,775 in 1970 and from this period a significant and growing number of Karonese came to see Islam as a real, and attractive, religious option.

By this time also some reactions had set in against the growing Christian presence in Karoland. In the years since 1950 the Karo Batak Protestant Church (GBKP) had grown and developed to become the largest and most effective non-government organisation spanning the whole of Karo society. In sociological terms GBKP was something new for Karo society, and for GBKP itself, as neither the church nor the community had experience of operating Karo-wide voluntary institutions and found that the values of their adat rather than its precise provisions had to be explored and adapted to meet new challenges. This was not accomplished without some pain and puzzlement but under strong elected leadership GBKP, and its leaders came to hold a place of trust and respect in the wider society.

Reaction to this potential religious monopoly came in several forms. The development of the Catholic Church, and the quality of its institutions and programmes, gave disgruntled Karo Christians an alternative, as did the other Indonesian churches for Karo people who moved in great numbers to the cities of Sumatra and Java to take advantage of the new opportunities that came with independence. Outside the Karo homeland significant numbers of Karonese opted for Indonesian language, ethnically inclusive churches, such as GPIB, the western section of the old Church of the Indies.

Sectarian and fundamentalist fellowships provided yet another Christian alternative. Pentecostal Christianity had entered Karoland in 1935, represented by the *Gereja Pantekosta di Indonesia* (GPdI), which established its first Sumatran congregation in Kabanjahe in that year. The largest Pentecostal group in Karoland, GPdI had over 9,000 members in 1986 but has been joined by other Pentecostal Churches, each seeking converts between both traditional Karonese and members of other churches.

The Assembly of the Holy Spirit (*Gereja Sidang Rohul Kudus*) was established in Medan in July 1959 by separation from the Assemblies of God (*Sidang Jemaat Allah*) and saw its main mission among the Karonese. It grew from 8 members in 1959 to 6,914 members in North Sumatra by 1969. A break-away group, the Victory of Faith Church (*Gereja Kemenangan Iman Indonesia-GKII*) was operating among Batak villages in Langkat in the 1970s.

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141 Rita Smith Kipp 1996:221–222.
142 Originally *De Pinksterkerk in Nederlands-Indië*, registered as a legal body (rechtspersoon) in 1937, it was established by the Bethel Temple in Seattle, USA; Walter Lempp 1976: 290–293.
143 Rita Smith Kipp 1996:204: ‘Christianity, Ethnicity, and Class.’
145 Writer’s observations, Tanah Seribu, a Langkat village, 1976.
A small indigenous Karonese Pentecostal church, The Christian Pentecostal Peace Church (Gereja Masehi Pentakosta Damai, established as Pinkstervrede Kabanjahe), was established in the late 1930s by Johannes Purba, who had been an NCO on the warship De Zeven Provinciën and studied at the Bible School in Malang, Java, 1935–1936, after being released from naval prison. Isolated from other Pentecostal congregations this church has not grown greatly itself, but former members have been influential in other Pentecostal fellowships. At the time of the 1968–1972 church survey there were three village congregations in Karoland, with a total membership of 800.\textsuperscript{146}

Always a challenge to both the established churches and the adat systems of the Batak communities Pentecostalism emphasised a strict line of division between faith and worldly life and offered simple, practical responses to people’s problems. They imposed, also, on their adherents, a radical break with custom and tradition, not only in matters associated with the old religion but also on cultural issues such as the use of the traditional bridal adornments in which Karo people took particular pride. Their success ensured that GBPK and the Catholic Church would not be the sole representatives of Christianity in Karoland. In this respect they were joined by the Methodist Church, which in the late 1970s moved beyond what had been a mutually comfortable cooperation with GBKP in the Langkat region to begin direct evangelism in the Karo homeland.

In the 1960s and 1970s Protestant growth took on the nature of a mass movement, GBKP, substantially being the largest of the Christian churches. Vigorous growth continued into the 1980s. The developing Catholic mission also prospered in the 1960s and 1970s, and the Karo Catholic community grew quickly although numbers are difficult to determine as Catholic parishes became territorial rather than ethnic in constitution during this period. By 1986 the Catholic Church in Karoland had 32,577 registered members, and was the second largest Karo church, offering a wide range of service and educational ministries in the region.\textsuperscript{147}

While some openness to Islam was noted in the 1950s, the preference of Karonese wishing (or being urged) to enter one of the Government recognised religions, was at this time clearly and overwhelmingly still for Christianity.

Growing openness to Islam from the 1960s provided another faith alternative that linked adherents to the largest religious community in Indonesia and to a major world religion. Another form of reaction was the attempt in the 1960s and 1970s to revive the traditional Karo religion, either in its own name or assimilated to a Government-recognised religion. An example of

\textsuperscript{146} Lempp 1976:306.
\textsuperscript{147} Kipp 1996:211–212.
this is a movement called *Perodak-odak* that attempted to revive the primal religion in the face of quite wide-spread disillusionment at the seeming failure of the democratic political process to realise the aspirations of the Indonesian Revolution coupled with a sense of alienation from the new religions adopted by increasing numbers of Karonese. While it alarmed the church, the *Perodak-odak* movement quietly faded away and by the 1970s the church itself appeared to be taking up the role dissenting groups had played during the Dutch and Japanese periods. GBKP was now operating an enterprising and very effective community development programme having broken decisively with the pietist spirituality of the missionary era that encouraged inner spiritual growth and passive acceptance of adverse conditions. Faith and spirituality were no longer to be promoted, or lived out, in isolation from the struggles of daily life in the world.

A movement calling itself ‘Hindu’ was observed in the Karo highlands in the late 1970s, and has grown quietly since then. It appears to be a deliberate attempt to assimilate the Karo traditional religion to Hinduism, to form a Karo equivalent of the government-recognised Hindu-Bali religion. Rituals observed in this ‘Hindu-Karo’ cult at that time were clearly those of the traditional Karo religion, and followers questioned about what they were doing, and what they hoped would be the outcome, responded in terms of traditional Karo belief and practice.\(^{148}\)

Finally, in the 1980s, it was becoming clear that many Karonese were adopting a cheerfully secular style of life that in effect ignored religious claims and issues. This group, which is now a much greater challenge to the various religious communities than the small pockets of traditional or revived-traditional belief, is made up of two elements. One of these might be described as ‘secularised *perbegu*’, who have simply given up the traditional religion and its practices without seeking any religious alternative. The other element is made up of lapsed or secularised Christians and Muslims, often people disappointed when their expectations of the new faith were not realised.

Reports from the historic highland village of Batukarang in the 1980s indicated that people visiting from the towns and cities, who in the past would have urged relatives and friends to become Christian, were no longer even attending church, and in some cases chided local people for continuing to take the new religion so seriously. As a former minister of the Protestant congregation there said, at that time, “Now people visiting their home village pay their respects at the family graves but do not even come to church.”

The outcome, therefore, of a hundred years of religious change in Karoland, 1890–1990, has not been the total Christianisation so confidently expected when the mission began. Rather, a dynamic and tolerant religious pluralism has emerged, held together, ironically, by the traditional bonds of Karo custom and kinship which are, generally speaking, more significant to the modern Karonese than are questions of difference in religious faith.

It will be clear from what has been said that initial Karo responses to both Islam and Christianity were conditioned by political perceptions. Islam was seen as the religion of both the coastal Malay states (already intruding upon Karo territory, Karo communities and Karo enterprises on the East Coast) and of their powerful Acehnese neighbours, whose intentions toward the free Batak territories were never entirely clear. Karo people were also very well aware of the forced Islamisation of parts of the southern Batak territories during the Padri wars and, because of this, Islam until modern times was seen as an uncertain, even dangerous, influence to the north, east and south of the Batak territories.

The circumstance in which the Christian mission to the Karo people was initiated in 1890, and the fact that it was supported financially by European plantation enterprises, meant that it was compromised from the outset in Karo eyes. The fact that it was missionary penetration of the free Karo territories that seemed to provide opportunity for the Dutch military occupation of the highlands in 1904 further confirmed Karo perceptions that Christianity also was the tribal religion of an intrusive and threatening foreign community.

Of course conversions did take place. According to oral traditions some Karo people became Muslim on the coast, for a variety of personal reasons, high among them the quest for ilmu, the science that could unlock the secret of success in life. No doubt religious conviction was an important factor, once ethnic suspicions had been overcome, for many features of Islam, from its mysticism to its egalitarianism, have a strong inherent appeal to the Karonese. Also, alongside the stories from the south of the Padri wars the Karo kept alive stories of the Sufi teachers of Islam who visited Karoland in pre-colonial times, sometimes loosing their own lives rather than defending themselves. Graves associated with several of these teachers of a different kind of Islam are still maintained.

Conversions to Christian faith, such as there were, were also influenced by many individual factors, and often arose from prolonged close contact with individual missionaries, or from a quest for the secret to the ‘success’ of the Europeans. It must be clearly noted that the beginning of large-scale conversion of Karo people to Christianity came before the 1965 attempted coup d’état, which is often credited with frightening large numbers of Indonesians into one or other of the government-recognised religions, to avoid being denounced as communists. In fact it appears that experiences during the Revolution, when
people saw Christians sharing their hardships and struggle without any foreign backing, together with the clear and uncompromising support of the Karo church for the nationalist cause, and an increasingly open endorsement of Karo traditional culture (in particular music and dance) had begun to erode the image of Christianity as a ‘European religion’ by the mid-1950s.

The quality of early Karo church leaders, who came to play an important role in community leadership during the occupation and the revolution, quickly established the fact that Christianity now had a Karo face, and that the church was an organisation genuinely interested in the well being of the whole Karo community. Similarly, by the 1950s, Christians who had been trained in the GBKP youth programme began to take roles in local community leadership and government administration. The Karo Batak Protestant Church was in fact the first Karo-wide institution established in a society whose largest political unit had, up to this time, been the urung, or local confederation of villages. The presbyterial-synodal form of governance in GBKP encouraged lay participation and offered a practical training in democratic decision making on a larger scale than had been experienced before.

Over-stretched, the small church gave a wide-open opportunity for lay leadership and participation, which attracted and encouraged enterprising people to its programmes. The title of ‘elder,’ and later also of ‘deacon,’ came to confer social status on those elected to these offices of lay leadership. Also, as educational opportunities were more eagerly taken up in the 1950s, Christianity became associated more and more with modern, progressive ideas, and in time with western science and technology, giving rise to the promotional slogan, majun agama asang kiniteken sipemena—religion (meaning, in effect, a world religion) is more progressive than the traditional belief.

Perhaps most significant of all, the Karo church from the outset endorsed and supported the Karo adat, or customary law, backing it up where appropriate with church regulations and sanctions. This was particularly important with respect to marriage, divorce and inheritance, the proper administration of which lies at the heart of the Karo social system. Even traditional elopement was given a Christian framework that safeguarded the values of both religion and adat.

In time also the Protestant church shook off missionary restrictions on the use of traditional music and dance, which in the traditional community had religious as well as recreational and cultural functions. This recognition of traditional music and dance, and the quiet demise of the brass bands introduced as an alternative by the missionaries, further enabled people to recognise a Christian community with a Karo identity. There can be no doubt that these clear endorsements of the ‘Karo way,’ and its appropriateness, even as the community moved into a new and more progressive world, finally removed for many the last shadows of doubt as to the suitability of Christianity as a
religious option for Karo people. It is significant that the Karo traditional orchestra, banned in missionary days, was used for the first time in a church programme during the 75th anniversary celebrations in 1965. For many this event represented the opening of a long closed door, and was thus a major factor in the even more dramatic growth of GBKP in the period 1965–1970.

All that being said, it must also be recognised that the attempted coup in 1965 and the subsequent danger of being denounced as a communist (the Communist Party having had a very strong following in parts of Karoland in the early 1960s, when it was a legal entity, even among keen church members) encouraged many to embrace, at least outwardly, one of the government-recognised religions. It was probably the adat question, to which the Muslim community responded more rigidly, that determined the evident preference, at this time, for Christianity rather than Islam on the part of those choosing a new religion.

During the Revolution many Karonese people had their first chance to experience Islam in a positive context. Many of the evacuees from Karoland found temporary refuge and hospitality in the border territories of Aceh. Military service brought many others into close association with Muslim compatriots, and Islam came to be seen not simply as the religion of Malay and Acehnese neighbours, but as the religion of the leaders of the Revolution in Java, and indeed of the majority of Indonesia’s population. Karo people also came in time to distinguish between the role of the Malay ruling élites during the colonial era and the situation of the ordinary Malay people who were as much victims of the alliance between foreign capital and the local élites as the lowland Karonese themselves had been.

This, however, still did not lead to any significant movement toward Islam among the Karonese. Separatist movements in staunchly Muslim Aceh meant that the threat of a ‘holy war’ against the ‘pagan’ Karonese was still not entirely out of the question, and Karonese were aware of the repression of Christians in Aceh and elsewhere in Indonesia, where regional attempts were made to impose Islamic law. The sticking point, however, was clearly a perceived Muslim disregard for Karo adat. Conversion to Islam meant that the believer came under Muslim law in three areas of life vital to the Karonese: marriage, divorce and inheritance. The 1958 Congress on Karo Cultural History still warned of this, seeing it as a threat to Karo society’s freedom to organise its own life in the way it saw to be most appropriate.

After Independence, both Islam and Christianity came to be seen as world religions, linking their Indonesian members to worldwide faith communities. If the Karo preference for Christianity was conditioned more by the adat question than by any other single factor, Islam itself began to prosper among the Karonese, when it came to be presented more sympathetically by Karo people—either evangelists or family members. Then also a better understanding
of the cultural needs of the Karo Muslim communities was developed among Muslim strategists.

The international role, and growing prestige, of world Islam in the 1970s and 1980s, as a force able to resist both western capitalist exploitation and communist domination of the third world, gave the politically astute Karonese a better understanding of this great world religion. Competition between Islam and Christianity for the still uncommitted, or secularised, Karonese is a distinct feature of the religious pluralism of modern Karoland.

 Attempts to revive the traditional religion reflect, among other things, the frustration and disillusionment that followed the collapse of the political parties on which the Karonese had put so much hope after Independence, and a general dissatisfaction with the outcome of a generation of struggle. Often the new way no longer held the attraction or promise it had once embodied. Where the rituals of a new religion had not taken root a spiritual vacuum developed and in some quarters it was felt that the old way might still offer a new or better hope. In other quarters dissatisfied Karo church members turned to more evangelical or sectarian forms of Christianity. Some, particularly in the cities where choice was available, transferred to more evangelical churches, or became aligned to sectarian and fundamentalist para-church organisations while remaining in GBKP. After following the latter course for several decades the Bandung congregation in West Java, which had played an important role during the rapid evangelisation of the decade following 1965 and had subsequently been deeply influenced by a revivalist (kebangunan rohani) spirituality, split with one part leaving to form the Gereja Injili Karo Indonesia (GIKI, Indonesian Karo Evangelical Church) and another group forming a new Indonesia-wide denomination, the Gereja Kristen Kudus Indonesia (Christian Holiness Church of Indonesia), led by a second-career pastor Pdt. Dr Kerani Ketaren SE until his death in 2006.

In the end Perodak-odak failed to make a lasting impact because Christianity had developed to a stage where it, and not a protest movement, offered, in the mind of a clear majority, the best hope for taking hold of the new situation and creating a better future. Of very great significance is the fact that, under Karo leadership, the church moved far from the pietist theology of an earlier time, and emphasised a faith that encouraged enterprise, self-help and responsibility. It encouraged people to become agents, and not victims, of social, economic and political change, to move from fatalism to enterprise. The Diakonia department of GBKP, developed and led by an enterprising businessman and lay theologian, also played an increasingly important support role for church members and communities, and the Development Department in the 1990s was establishing enterprises later taken up by the government, such as mini-hydro generation that had the capacity to supply 2–3 highland villages and water reticulation projects to provide for both irrigation and household
supply in highland villages. In these enterprises GBKP built on the traditional Karo ethic of mutual help, and models introduced by the Dutch mission, while taking advantage of overseas training programmes and assistance with funding and expert personnel from ecumenical partners.

What future the Karonese form of Hinduism might have is hard to judge. It is unlikely that the government will recognise it as an official religion. On the other hand it is the only religion in Karoland that is completely uncompromising by association with either colonialism or the failed experiment in party politics—there were official Catholic, Protestant and Islamic political parties until the social reorganisation that followed the failed coup in 1965.

Secularism is now a strong option in modern Karoland. Many have simply given up the old religion without embracing another, except for government registration purposes. Others have tried new religions and left them, for a wide variety of reasons including disappointment, a sense of their irrelevance, frustration with either rituals or administrations that are difficult to comprehend or—increasingly—a sense that one can enjoy the benefits of modern life, such as progressive education, scientific farming, modern health care, and the like, without following a religion.

The Karonese have always taken an acute interest in the outside world and many have come to see through the facade of western Christian civilisation, and indeed to feel cheated by the reality of ‘Christian’ life as it is seen in the crowds of tourists who visit Karoland or in the appalling films and other manifestations of ‘Christian culture’ that come their way. This secularism, cheerfully unconcerned about religions of any kind, presents a clear challenge to all the religious communities in modern Karoland.

The present state of Karo religion is dynamic, fluid and mercifully tolerant. It is a good example of a fairly relaxed religious pluralism, where convictions are firmly held, and supported with vigour, but where everyone recognises that the unity of families and communities is more important than the inappropriate or untimely advocacy of particular convictions and view-points.

Profiles of some other Protestant Churches: the Methodist Church

Besides HKBP—together with its nine derived churches—and GBKP, there are many other Protestant churches in Sumatra and its surrounding islands. In this section we will consider some of them, especially those mainline churches centred in Sumatra. The Sumatran churches with their centres located outside Sumatra, (such as GPIB, GMIST, GKI and the Evangelical, Pentecostal and Adventist churches) have already been, or will be, discussed in the other chapters.

The Methodist mission worked not only in Sumatra (including Bangka) but also in Java and Kalimantan (Borneo). Its work mainly bore fruit in Sumatra,
while its mission fields in Java and Kalimantan were temporarily terminated in 1928, and some current Methodist congregations in Java were the expansion of those in Sumatra. Nevertheless, we will also glance at its work outside Sumatra, since it comes from the same Methodist mission.\footnote{The following description is mainly contributed by Richard M. Daulay, a Methodist pastor who currently also serves as the General Secretary of PGI.}

The first man who intended to spread Methodism to Indonesia, especially to Java, was Thomas Coke at the time Indonesia was under the control of the British government. In 1813 a group of Methodist missionaries left London for India and Indonesia. Thomas Coke was not destined to reach Java, for on 13 May 1814 he was found dead in his cabin, on the way to Asia, and was buried at sea in the Indian Ocean. His vision and spirit were implemented by his companions in India but failed to reach fruition in Indonesia.

It was American Methodists who later brought Methodism to Indonesia. The Methodist mission from America, working in Singapore and Malaysia since 1885, wanted to expand Methodism to Indonesia. In 1888 W.F. Oldham (later bishop) visited Java to investigate the possibilities for opening new work there. Due to the lack of money and workers there was no Methodist activity in Java until 1905 although in 1892 Dr. Benjamin West, a Methodist missionary of Penang, who had previously visited Kalimantan in 1890, visited Sumatra and was well received by both Chinese and Batak.

From the beginning the work of Methodism in Indonesia was scattered in islands, cities and among many ethnic groups. Java, Kalimantan, Sumatra and Bangka (a small island near southern Sumatra) were four island fields of Methodist activities in Indonesia. Jakarta, Medan, Palembang and Pontianak were the main cities in Indonesia where the Methodist work was centered. The Chinese, Batak and Sundanese were some of the ethnic groups evangelised by the Methodist mission.

Rev. John Russell Denyes (1869–1936) was an American Methodist missionary appointed as a teacher in an Anglo-Chinese School in Singapore, from 1898. There were students from Java in the school who asked Denyes to start a Methodist school in Java. From that time on Denyes was interested to open the work of Methodism in Java and before going to America on furlough in 1903 he became greatly burdened for the salvation of the Muslims in Java. He was greatly impressed by the fact that at that time there were twenty-eight thousand Muslims who had converted to Christianity in Java. He was told that if the money could be found he could be sent to begin the work. While in America he was brought into contact with the young people of the Pittsburgh Conference. They agreed to raise $4,000 a year with the purpose of sending out missionaries to the foreign field. When they heard from Denyes of the needs in Java, they decided to place their money there.
On 20 February 1905, at the closing session of the Malaysia Annual Conference in Singapore, Bishop W.F. Oldham read the appointments of his pastors and workers, and J.R. Denyes was assigned to open a new work of Methodism in Java. On 12 March, accompanied by Rev. B.F. West, he departed from the harbour of Singapore heading for Batavia (Jakarta), Java. Both of them made a preliminary survey and asked for permission from the Dutch government in Jakarta. After spending three weeks in Java, they decided to start work among the Chinese in Jakarta. There were a number of reasons for this. Firstly, the Chinese there promised to be the way of least resistance. Many of them were married to Javanese or Sundanese women; these women had left their Muslim religion and yet the Chinese customs had not taken deep hold on them. Secondly, Jakarta was the nearest point of contact with the work Methodism already had in Malaysia and it was easily accessible. Thirdly, it was the seat of the government that had to be consulted at every turn. Fourthly, later, there would be stations opened in Sumatra, Bangka, and these could be cared for most conveniently from Jakarta. Fifthly, by beginning with the Chinese it was possible to begin at once, as Denyes already knew the Malay language the Chinese spoke. On 5 November 1905 Denyes established one congregation in Bogor. On 1 July 1906 Denyes started the first Methodist school in Bogor. In a short time the work was expanded to Batavia (now Jakarta) and into adjacent areas.

In May 1905 Solomon Pakianathan (a Tamil laypreacher) arrived in Medan, sent by G.F. Pykett from Penang to supervise a private school owned by Hong Teen, young Baba Chinese, who had been a student in the Methodist Anglo-Chinese School in Penang. About a year earlier G.F. Pykett had investigated Medan to examine the possibility of opening the work there. With the appointment of Pakianathan the door was open for the Methodist Mission to start its work within the school, and Pakianathan was the pioneer. He opened religious services in English and promptly organised a Sunday school class for young English speaking Chinese. He even dedicated half of his salary to support a Chinese preacher in 1906.\(^{150}\) This was the embryo of the congregation in Medan that later developed to become a number of multi-ethnic congregations.

On 2 February 1906 C.M. Worthington was appointed by Bishop Oldham to open Methodist work in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, especially among the Chinese people. There were 6,000 Chinese out of a population of 20,000. U Chim Seng, a medical doctor, was a potential lay worker in Pontianak. He evangelised people who came to see him in his clinic for medical treatment. His work was very fruitful. In 1909 there were 80 full members and 192 preparatory members.

From these three doors (Batavia, Medan, Pontianak) it was obvious that at the beginning the Methodist mission was attracted to work among the Chinese people who had established themselves in many Indonesian cities throughout the archipelago. From the very beginning the work was very promising. That was why, in 1907, the Methodist work in Indonesia was organised as a district of the Malaysia Annual Conference, and Denyes was appointed its District Superintendent. In 1908, Solomon Pakianathan was transferred from Medan to Palembang, South Sumatra, to start another Methodist work in that area. On 1 May 1908 a Methodist school was started. In 1909 the Methodist mission began working in Surabaya and in 1911 Mark Freeman, a Methodist missionary from America, began work in Bangka.

In 1919 all the scattered Methodist work in Indonesia was organised as a Mission Conference, named the Netherlands Indies Mission Conference. At that time, there were around 2,000 members, 30 congregations and 14 pastors (nine missionaries and five local workers). In the same year, a hospital was inaugurated in Cisarua surrounded by Sundanese villages.

In 1921 the work among the Batak people in the interior of Asahan, Sumatra, was commenced by appointing Lamsana Lumbantobing in response to a Macedonian call from Tuan Nagori Manurung, a raja (village chief) who had written a letter to Bishop Oldham in Singapore eleven years earlier (1909). This chief asked Bishop Oldham to send a missionary to his village. At that time there was a Batak pastor (an ex-pastor of the Batak Church initiated by the RMG), Rev. Lamsana Lumbantobing, who visited Singapore (1908) and joined the Methodist Church there. He was appointed by Bishop Oldham to teach at the Jean Hamilton Training School (now Trinity Theological College) in Singapore, for the Malay department. In answering the letter of the raja, in 1913 Bishop Oldham sent Lamsana to investigate the situation in Asahan. Even though the result of the investigation was good, the Methodist Mission could not fulfil the request of Tuan Nagori because there were not yet enough workers.

Besides evangelising the Toba Batak in the Pardembanan jungle, Lamsana also conducted Sunday services for the Christian Batak who migrated from Tapanuli to East Sumatra to work as clerks and plantation workers. Most of them were Christians because of the work of the RMG/Batak Mission. In 1920 the Methodist mission actually pledged not to work among the Batak for whom the RMG was doing a large and successful work. This promise became more and more difficult to keep as the Toba Batak began to migrate down from Tapanuli along the coast and requested admission into the Methodist churches. After some years of tension and misunderstanding, in 1931 the Methodist mission and RMG made an agreement to resolve the conflict and to build cooperation. This cooperation was also motivated by a competition with Muslims who had preceded the work of missions among the pagan Batak
in Asahan and the whole coastal area.\textsuperscript{151} In 1925 the work in North Sumatra became a Mission Conference named North Sumatra Mission Conference, separated from the Netherlands Indies Mission Conference.

In 1928 the Methodist Mission withdrew from Java and West Kalimantan and concentrated its work in Sumatra. A number of local congregations or posts with their physical facilities, including a hospital in Cisarua, were released to other missions or to the government, or were closed. The mission and church workers were moved to North Sumatra. The main reason for this decision was the lack of funds due to the economical depression in America in the 1920s. Both conferences (the Netherlands Indies Mission Conference and the North Sumatra Mission Conference) were then merged to become the Sumatra Mission Conference.

In the 1930s the condition of the Methodist activities in Sumatra was very uncertain. There were a number of missionaries who went home for leave and did not return. Contributions from American churches greatly decreased, and the exchange on the American dollar was very unfavourable. Fortunately, in that difficult time, two missionaries were added to continue the work in Sumatra, Ragnar Alm and Egon Ostrom (both from Sweden) who arrived in Sumatra in 1930. Ostrom worked among the Chinese people of North Sumatra and Alm between the Toba Batak.

In 1941, during World War II, all the American missionaries were evacuated. Fortunately both Ostrom and Alm were from a neutral country and were permitted to stay even though it was very dangerous for them. All white people were suspected of being enemies during that uncertain political situation and it is sad to record that Ostrom was killed in December 1945 in Tebing Tinggi, by a young extremist who suspected him of being an enemy spy. Alm had to flee for safety. During the war all the responsibilities of the Methodist mission in Sumatra were shouldered by the national ministers, like Luther and David Hutabarat (Batak), Yap Un Han (Chinese). Many of the church workers withdrew, because there were no longer sufficient salaries for pastors, causing a shortage of workers.

After the war and the ‘revolution era’ of 1945–1949 the congregations and schools were reactivated. Alm returned after three years on leave and new missionaries were added in 1950s, transferred from China after it became closed to foreign missionary work. At that time (1950s) there were great migrations of the Batak people from Tapanuli to East Sumatra. They were forced to leave by the poverty in their land and were attracted by plantation land abandoned by the Dutch. Many new congregations were organised but there were no workers available. In 1953 Alm opened a training school for Batak Pastors in

Kisaran, to train four supply pastors to be ordained. In 1956 Alm also opened a Pastor Training School for Bataks at the same place and the graduates (20 persons) of this school became the leaders of the Batak congregations. The mission activity among the Chinese also lacked workers so, in 1954, the Chinese District started a Bible School for Chinese in Medan.

Pedersen noted that during this time there was (once again) considerable disharmony in the relations between the Methodist Church and the HKBP. The Bataks from Tapanuli maintained that all Christian Bataks were originally from the HKBP and that the HKBP was the only Batak church in Sumatra. There had been an unwritten agreement that members of HKBP could become members of the Methodist Batak congregations and the reverse could also occur. The migration of the Toba Bataks to the Methodist territory along the coast had also increased the tension between the two churches. This tension, however, could be settled down by commissioning Rev. Alm to teach at Nommensen University.

In 1964 the Gereja Methodist Indonesia (GMI, the Methodist Church of Indonesia) became an autonomous Church. The political confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia was the main reason for this action as it was very difficult at that delicate time for the Methodist Church in Indonesia to be led by an American Bishop whose headquarters was in Singapore, considered as enemy by the Indonesian government. Rev. Wismar Panggabean was elected as the first leader (Chairperson) of the church. The statistics at that time were: 22,000 members, 21 pastors, 5 of whom were missionaries.

But a few months before the recognition of autonomy a group of pastors and members who were not content to ask for an Enabling Act from the General Conference, and were burning with the nationalistic fever of Indonesia’s confrontation with Malaysia and Western imperialism, stepped aside and formed a new church named Gereja Methodist Merdeka Indonesia (GMMI, the Indonesian Free Methodist Church). They considered that leadership had been in the hands of the westerners for too long and reflected a sort of spiritual imperialism. A split could not be avoided.

In 1964 the GMI expanded its work to Java again after being absent for 25 years. The initiators of this work were the Methodist people who migrated from Sumatra to Java. At this time the expansion of the GMI in Java and Bali appeared promising. In 1969, the first General Conference was held in Medan. The Conference decided that the GMI should have a bishop instead of a Chairman and Rev. Johannes Gultom was elected to lead the church as its first bishop. In 1973 he was re-elected for a second four-year term and during his leadership the organisation of the church was consolidated. The

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Book of Discipline was issued for the first time in 1973. During this period an ecumenical ministry developed between GMI and GBKP in the lowlands, particularly in rural development programmes, with some shared overseas staff.\footnote{Rae 1994:157.} In 1977 Rev. Hermanus Sitorus was elected to be the bishop. There were 33,000 members, 50 pastors and 101 supply pastors at the time.

In 1981 Sitorus was re-elected for a second term. During his period the GMI promoted its mission and evangelism, especially among the Karo Batak in North Sumatra. Mass baptisms were conducted several times. Congregations were also asked to be involved in mission activities. After this eight-year period the membership numbered around 60,000. Penetration into the highland homeland of the Karo people gave rise to the same tension as had earlier occurred with HKBP in Asahan. To GBKP it appeared that proselytism had taken the place of the earlier ecumenical cooperation.

The General Conference elected Johannes Gultom as the bishop for a third time in 1985 but unfortunately, after two years, he died. The special session of the General Conference held in January 1988 elected Rev. Hamonangan Panggabean was elected as bishop and re-elected in 1989. During his term the relationship between the Methodist Church in Indonesia and the Methodist Church in Korea was extended and many church buildings were financed by the Korean Methodist Church.

At the General Conference in Bogor in 1993, Hermanus Sitorus was elected as Bishop for the third time. Before he finished his term he died in 1995. Another special General Conference was held in April 1995 and Rev. Humala Doloksaribu was elected as bishop. In the General Conference of October 1997 he was re-elected for the period of 1997–2001, and then succeeded by Rusman Tambunan for the period 2001–2005.

There are now around 80,000 members, 180 pastors, 115 supply pastors, 300 congregations, and 155 mission posts. There are two Annual Conferences and ten Districts, within the GMI. Around 70% of the members are Batak, 20% are Chinese, and the rest are from various ethnic groups. Since 2003 this church has had two bishops, one for the North Sumatra Conference and one for the Java and South Sumatra Conference.

The Reformed Churches

There are two Reformed churches centred in Sumatra, both of them initiated by Gereja-gereja Kristen Jawa (GKJ; see chapter fourteen), and some other related churches in Java, in cooperation with Zending der Gereformeerde Kerken
in Nederland (ZGKN) or with certain already existing Gereformeerd congregations. These two churches became separate entities mainly due to geographical separation, one being in the northern and the other in the southern Sumatra. We will first concentrate on North Sumatra, the GKI Sumut.  

From the second half of the nineteenth century there were thousands of Javanese brought by the western (Dutch, British and American) planters to the east coast area of North Sumatra, mostly to be coolies. The Batak Mission/HKBP as well as the Karo Mission/GBK and the Methodist Mission/GMI did not pay any attention to those mostly abangan or nominal Muslims, although there were a few Christians among them. In order to give pastoral care to these Christians, and to evangelise the non-Christians, from around the 1930s ZGKN (especially endorsed by Prof. J.H. Bavinck who was formerly a missionary in Java) in cooperation with GKJ set up their missionary and pastoral work. Evangelism was mainly practised through personal approach because it was assumed to be an effective method for the Javanese.  

It was not difficult to build communication and friendship with the Javanese, but not many of them were attracted to the gospel; most of them kept to their Javanese mysticism and syncretism. As a result most of the congregations or evangelism posts consisted of very few members. There were only several large congregations, like in Medan, Pematangsiantar and Sibolga. This strategy was in line with one of the basic principles of the Gereformeerd or Reformed churches that is the autonomy and self-reliance of each local congregation, so that each congregation mainly focused on its affairs, although they gathered in a classis (presbytery).  

Realising that progress among the Javanese was slow, from 1950s this so-called Gereja Gereformeerd expanded its evangelism among the Batak who migrated in increasing numbers to the plantation areas. Later this church even expanded to non-plantation areas like in Parililitan and Bahalbatu (North Tapanuli) and Kolang (Central Tapanuli). In light of this development, in 1969 this church became an autonomous Synod, while keeping relations with the ZGKN in the Netherlands and GKJ in Java, and later it changed its name to become the Gereja Kristen Indonesia Sumatra Utara (GKI Sumut, Indonesian Christian Church in North Sumatra).  

But this expansion and development also brought problems, among them competition or even rivalry between the Javanese and the Batak groups, as for example seen in the internal conflict in the Medan congregation in 1969. Here the Javanese wanted to maintain their characteristics, such as using the Javanese language and other cultural elements, while the Batak also desired

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154 This sub-section is mainly excerpted from Lempp 1976:310–314 with some updating.
similar facilities and wanted a place in the leadership structure. Fortunately this conflict has already been resolved and this church continues to develop, although rather slowly and moving rather carefully to recruit pastors.\footnote{As a Reformed church this Gereformeerdd/GKI Sumut church would prefer to send their aspirants to STT (later Faculty of Theology of the Christian University) Duta Wacana at Yogyakarta rather than to Fakultas Theologia Universitas Nommensen (then STT HKBP) Pematangsiantar, although some of the aspirants were Bataks. For the last ten years this church supported an ecumenical theological school, STT Abdi Sabda in Medan, and sent its aspirants to study there as well as appointing ministers to become lecturers or members of the board of trustees.}

Currently there are about 17,000 members in 25 local congregations and 50 posts, ministered to by some 30 pastors.\footnote{Interview with Rev. Thomas Supardjo, the chairperson of the Synod of GKI Sumut, in January 2005.}

The Gereja Kristen Sumatra Bagian Selatan (GKSBS, the Christian Church of southern Sumatra) had a specific genesis because it came into being as a result of a huge social change, the inter-island migration in Indonesia, which brought several millions of people from the overcrowded island of Java to the underdeveloped island of Sumatra. During the nineteenth century the population of Java had increased so rapidly that at the turn of the century the over-population was an increasingly visible threat.

Just at that time Dutch colonial policy became more focused on the interests of the Indonesian people. In accordance with this so-called \textit{ethische politiek} (ethical policy) the government set up a programme for internal migration. The name of that programme, ‘Colonisation of the outer-islands,’ pointed out that a reduction of the population-pressure in Java was not the only objective. The programme should also develop Sumatra and subsequently the other large islands of the archipelago.

Southern Sumatra, where since 1905 the migrants from Java were settled, was not an unoccupied area. Several ethnic groups populated it with different cultures varying from the very primitive to the highly developed. The co-existence of the autochthonous Sumatran people and Javanese immigrants during the first decades did not raise much tension, because the latter were settled in homogenous Javanese villages. As the density of population increased the tensions grew, especially about land-ownership. The programmes for colonisation were slowed down by cuts in government expenditure, but were greatly increased just in the middle of the economic crisis during the 1930s.

After 1949 the Indonesian government wanted to intensify internal migration under the well-chosen name of \textit{Transmigrasi}. Due to bad economic development, many ambitious programmes for migration could not be carried out and until 1965 the migration programme could not be brought back on a large scale. As recently as the last few years the Indonesian government and
society began to realise the ecological consequences of migration, which has resulted in a vast deforestation.

Amidst the migrants in southern Sumatra a new Protestant church was born. About 95% of the members of that church came from Central and East Java, the others had their roots in West Java and Bali. Many of them were members of the Javanese churches in Central and East Java. Some came from the Christian Church in the northern part of Central Java, a church originating from the Salatiga mission and the German Neukirchenmission mission. Other members formerly in Java belonged to the Javanese Mennonite Church centred round Mount Muria in the northern part of Central Java. Members of the Balinese and Sundanese Churches also joined the GKSBS after their migration. Only the Mennonite Church in Central Java later withdrew its former members in Sumatra from the GKSBS and set up their own Mennonite communities. In fact the GKSBS is a five-fold united church. The differences in faith and order between the five churches in Java and Bali were not so great therefore members of those five churches did not meet difficulties in establishing together one new church in Sumatra.

The Christians among the Javanese colonists who settled in southern Sumatra during the 1930s felt spiritually lonely. Sometimes they reported their situation to their family or their pastor in Java. It was Rev. J. Darmohatmojo at Purworejo in Central Java who took their problems to his heart. Due to his initiatives, the Synod of the Gereja-gereja Kristen Jawa (GK), the Church of Central Java) decided in 1938 to accept the Lampung district in southern Sumatra as its mission field and to set up pastoral work among the Javanese migrants. That church was able to send a missionary, Rev. J.S. Harjowasito, to Lampung just before the Japanese army occupied Sumatra. The Rev. Harjowasito was able give guidance to the small groups of Christians during the difficult Japanese occupation.

From another side, too, attention was given to the fate of the colonists in Sumatra. The Dutch parish of the Gereformeerde Kerk van Palembang also gave support by appointing two evangelists for pastoral work among the Javanese. After World War II this congregation in Palembang again dedicated itself to the mission among the Javanese, and appointed a special missionary minister for that work.

The transmigration church could not expand until 1949. As a result of the new opportunities in June 1952 delegates of four (of the five) parishes assembled for the first session of the Klasis Sumatra Selatan (the presbytery of southern Sumatra). That meeting was the first step in the process of building a church organisation.

After 1952 the Javanese congregations in southern Sumatra developed. At first they increased gradually, by natural growth, with the arrival of new Christian migrants and because people from outside joined the church.
After 1965 this church, too, met accelerated growth due to political events in Indonesia. Many Javanese who had only been nominal Muslims wanted to become Christians. That increase lasted only some years. During the 1970s and 1980s the migration grew tremendously. As a result of this extension, new groups of Christians sprang up even in the provinces of Jambi and Bengkulu.

In the reception of the Christian migrants, the Javanese missionaries played an important role. They may be called the ‘church fathers’ of the GKSBS and the Rev. J.S. Harjowasito was the pioneer. After his departure to North Sumatra he was succeeded by the Rev. J. Siswodwidjo who during more than thirty years was of great importance for the church in Lampung. In 1966 and 1970 Rev. R.S. Poedjosoewito joined him for South Lampung and Rev. Abner Siswosoewito for North Lampung. They worked in good cooperation with the ministers of the local congregations. In 1962 Hardjowasitio came back to the south and became a local pastor in the town of Palembang.

Often missionary activities of members of the congregations were reported. Sometimes a group of Christians arose from the dedication of a teacher who was the only Christian in his village. The parish of Sumber Rejeki sprang up because a single woman started a Sunday school in her house. After 1970 the missionary activities were increasingly dependent on the method of the New Testament, the spontaneous witness of common believers. Evangelisation as a directed activity was not allowed from that time. The distribution of Christian reading material was also forbidden. However, in a Christian health-centre and in some Christian schools, the gospel was passed to many people.

The motives of people who wanted to become Christian between 1965 and 1968 often were very curious. Some were looking for an escape from the suspicion of being thought of as communists. Others became Christians because they disapproved of Muslims being involved in the massacres of communists. Mass conversions were not reported in southern Sumatra, but often some families opted together for Christianity. After 1968 people came over to Christianity individually or by families. Many of them had visited Christian schools in Java and had postponed their conversion until they had left their family and friends. Others were, in a quite new and strange environment, attracted by the fellowship they saw in a small group of Christians. Finally there were some people who for a long time had been in search of spiritual deepening and rest for their soul. Later the Javanese society became less tolerant and every conversion had to rest upon conscious choice.

After the genesis of groups of Christians, as a result of the settlement of Christian migrants and the communication of the gospel, action was set for a regular construction of the church. The missionary ministers supported the groups in becoming established and independent congregations. As part of their missionary role they tried to develop pastoral and diaconal care of the
parishes. These church building activities were seriously hampered by a lack of professional workers. With different means the migration church tried to recruit ministers from Java. Finally, in Metro—Central Lampung a once only course was set up for rural pastors. The in-service training of assistant ministers got a good response.

The supra-congregational organisation of the church, in regional assemblies, was extended in 1959 when Klasis Sumatra Selatan (as part of the Synod of GKJ since 1953) was divided into a Klasis Lampung and Klasis Palembang. In 1970 the Klasis Lampung had to be split up again into four new presbyteries. The earlier activities of the missionary ministers in lay training had to be increased because of the influx of new members from 1965 to 1968. At their special request, the Klasis Lampung and Palembang received in 1968 a Dutch minister for that work, the Rev. E. Hoogerwerf, who worked until December 1973. The Rev. R.S. Poedjosoewito, the missionary minister in South Lampung, was appointed as his colleague in this activity. In cooperation with the doctor of a Christian health-centre they set up courses for family planning and with an agronomist, a member of the church, they were active in community development.

In southern Sumatra the government formally acknowledged the church. That meant that the ordained ministers had the authority to register marriages and Christians joined and still join in all kinds of social activities. When they are invited by their neighbours to participate in a slametan, a ritual meal, they attend the ceremony without taking part in the Muslim prayers. Circumcision, which was rejected by Christians before World War II, is gradually being practised. Circumcision is often said not to be a matter of religion but of adat. Christian marriage and family life more and more stand out from that in Muslim circles and the emancipation of women has made more progress among Christians than among Muslims. But Christians are divided about wayang, the traditional Javanese puppet-show. Some reject it for its contents that oppose the gospel. Others just want to use it in the communication of the gospel and retell the stories with evangelical content.

From the beginning the transmigration church wanted to serve society. The first task the church took up was in the field of education. After 1950, the public provision for education was far behind that needed. In that situation some Christian congregations set up their own schools. During a long period the quality of Christian (including Catholic) school education was superior to that of the public schools. Since then the government has increased both the quantity and quality of its programmes and because of that the original need for Christian schools is no longer a priority, and their superior position has been lost. But the missionary motive for Christian education still endures. In secondary school many youngsters accept the Christian faith and many young autochthonous people acquire knowledge of the gospel. With lack of
government support the financial position of Christian schools is growing more difficult.

In the 1950s the church was confronted by a great lack of medical care. The small Christian clinic, which was opened in Metro in 1950, developed to be a well-equipped hospital. This centre for medical care was self-supporting from the very beginning, only seeking foreign aid for large projects.

In the social well being of its members, the church noticed weakness. The public agricultural information service was insufficient. That was the reason why the church in 1958 appointed the Javanese agronomist, Mr. Gunarto. In cooperation with local committees and some professional assistants, Gunarto has contributed much to community development in the villages. In providing people with information, seeds and plants he never limited his attention to Christians only. On the other hand, he continuously stimulated people to strengthen the financial position of their congregations. His department also worked together with a church-founded organisation for transmigration in Java and helped hundreds of poor Javanese farmers to settle in southern Sumatra.

A special contribution to service in society by the transmigration church was called the ’general diaconate.’ This supra-congregational work was, from 1970 onwards, focused primarily on political prisoners. Especially in Lampung this service was important and unique. People who were forgotten by everyone got affectionate attention and practical help. Often political prisoners were impressed by this dedication and wanted to become Christians. After some years this deaconate also campaigned for the right of farmers who were evicted from the land they had cultivated for a long time. Sometimes the reason was a state supported programme for reforestation. In other areas the authorities had granted the land to a private company. In the 1980s the church could offer to the affected farmers new land in Jambi or Bengkulu. They were settled in the neighbourhood of a parish that jointly supported the newcomers. Later on the church also gave legal aid. For this work the GKSBS now has an independent foundation that is able to operate more freely.

In 1987 the GKJ agreed to full independence of the transmigration church. At that time it had 62 congregations and 36 candidate congregations, served by 44 ministers and 23 evangelists with some 41,500 regular attenders. The financial support from the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN) was, however, still very important for the GKSBS. The appointment of its own Javanese missionaries and the ministers for lay training had been impossible without this aid. The social-economic work too, for the greater part, was financed by the GKN and without aid from the Netherlands almost all Christian

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schools would have disappeared in southern Sumatra. The personnel support from the Dutch partner church, however, was very limited. Only twice was a Dutch minister made available for the church’s use. The Rev. K.L.F. le Grand had, as a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church in Palembang during the 1950s, already done much for the Javanese parishes. In November 1959 he transferred to the missionary service and worked for the transmigration church until January 1962. The second Dutch minister was the Rev. E. Hoogerwerf, already mentioned. In comparison with other churches in Indonesia this was a small foreign personnel arrangement. In many respects the GKSBS searched for its own way.

The termination of the financial support from the Netherlands and the increase of its own efforts to bear the costs of the life of the church was a difficult process, the end of which is not yet in sight. The weak economic position of the migrants and the high rate of inflation over many years would partly account for this. Leaders of the GKSBS also pointed to an under-developed sense of responsibility among the members of the church. In the meantime almost all local and regional costs are borne by the parishes. The activities at the synod level are still strongly subsidised by the GKN.

In the belief of the GKSBS members, Christ and his work stand in the centre, which does not mean they have a ‘Jesus-religion.’ Although there is a clear awareness of sinfulness, through the salvation in Christ, life in the congregations is cheerful. The Kingdom of the Lord is the inspiring context the believers live in. In all aspects of life they try to live out the gospel, although the issues of society and politics are seldom taken into account.

The GKSBS has a presbyterial synodal structure, which was consolidated in the new church order that was accepted by the Synod in 1996. New elements in this order are central financial arrangements and the competency of the synod to play a role in the mutation of ministers. The fact that the church (until 2001) did not have any women ministers is caused more by practical reasons than by objections in principle.158

In its relation to the other religions the GKSBS is obviously tolerant. Many church members know Islam from the inside and all speak respectfully about it. Yet they have found their conversion to the Christian faith to be an enrichment of their relationship to Allah. For the GKSBS dialogue does not replace Christian witness but is the form of it. When a Christian becomes Muslim (again) he is said to be an apostate.

People who were asked if there is a special ‘theology of transmigration’ within the GKSBS preferred the notion of a ‘theology of renewal.’ They strongly felt that they were involved in the struggle for renewal of their total life in a new
land. The contextuality of the GKSBS is widely determined by the everlasting stream of new migrants. As a result of this migration the Javanese group now forms a majority in the four provinces of southern Sumatra. Moreover the church lives in an area of rapid economic development, which is often allied to a harsh exploitation of man and other kinds of injustice. The Rev. Yussar Yanto is one of the theologians in the GKSBS who since 1973 has gathered stones to build a contextual theology.

A concrete application of contextuality was given by the GKSBS in the repeatedly expressed intention to be a church not for one racial group only but for a region. It gave concrete form to this statement by choosing its name and its official language. Its service in society is also a shape of contextuality.

*The Nias Churches*¹⁵⁹

The story of the churches in the island of Nias and the surrounding islands, west of North Sumatra, is no less interesting and complicated than of those in the big island of Sumatra. Although the current population of Nias and the surroundings, the *Ono Niha*, is less than a million and the cultural variety (adat, language, traditional belief, etc.) is not very remarkable,¹⁶⁰ but at the moment there are at least six different church organisations centred in this island besides some other churches coming from outside.

Nias (3,980 km²), the biggest among many islands on the west side of Sumatra, recently became very well known all over the world due to a series of earthquakes and tsunami on 26 December 2004 and 28 March 2005. Although Nias and the surrounding islands are located in the Indian Ocean, almost none of the inhabitants work as sailors. They commonly live as traditional farmers and this makes them quite isolated, introverted, and less modern compared to the people in Sumatra. Before the arrival of the westerners, the only contact with the outside world was due to the slave trade. The Dutch colonial government settled only from 1840 and did not complete the annexation until 1902. When the colonial administration came the slave trade was stopped, but the traditional social and governmental system was maintained. In the colonial government system and later in the missionary work *Salawa* or *siulu* (village chief) and *tuhenöri* (district chief) as well as *fondrakö* (a gathering to set up *huku-föna*, adat law) continued to function.

¹⁵⁹ This section is mainly based on Van den End 2002:211–217, Lempp 1976:8–36, and Uwe Hummel & Tuhony Telaumbanua 2007.

¹⁶⁰ Indeed there are some cultural differences between the northern Niasan and the southern (such as in adat, dialect, clothes, house architecture, etc.) and these differences were also pointed out as reasons to establish a new church in the southern area in the 1990s, but generally speaking the Ono Niha are more or less homogeneous.
Sociologically and anthropologically the Ono Niha (Niasans) has a certain affinity to the Batak, but the differences are much more than the similarities. The Niasans, like the Batak, believed that the first Ono Niha descended from heaven in a village named Gomo. Therefore their huku-fona was also believed to have a divine quality and authority. This belief that created a feeling of superiority, was later to become a very strong factor that hampered the progress of evangelism. Although they believed that they were descendants of one ancestor who were later divided into some tribal groups, inter-tribal and inter-ōri (village) wars frequently occurred, even after the arrival of the colonial power and the Christian missions.

Besides the Niasans, Minangkabau Muslim and Chinese traders had already settled before the westerners came, especially in coastal areas, followed by some other ethnic groups. In the Dutch colonial administration Nias and the surrounding islands were until 1853 part of Padang residency, but since then part of Tapanuli residency and after independence they became one kabupaten (regency) until 2001, when it was divided into two regencies.  

*Preliminary missionary attempts in Nias (1832–1865)*

From 1669, the beginning of commercial cooperation between VOC and some Niasan chiefdoms around Gunungsitoli, the Niassans (Ono Niha) had occasional contacts with European Christians. However, the VOC had no interest in mission. Nor did the English, who conquered Nias from the Dutch company in 1756, engage in any missionary activities.

The priest Jean-Pierre Vallon and a Niasan couple (Francisco and Sophie) from Penang (Pulau Pinang) were the first missionaries to Nias. They were in the service of the Paris Foreign Missionary Society (Société des Missions Étrangères), which had, since 1662, worked on Penang amongst the Ono Niha who lived there either as slaves or as manumitted former slaves. In 1824, thirty Ono Niha had been baptised on Penang. Vallon, Francisco, Sophie and another priest, Jean-Laurent Béard, left Penang for Nias in December 1831 and arrived in March 1832. After visiting a few villages, they settled in the village of Lasara, near Gunungsitoli.

It has been supposed that Vallon learned the local Niasan vernacular and “baptised a few children.” Vallon died in June 1832, two to three months after his arrival. His colleague Béard, who had stayed behind ill on Sumatra,

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161 Precisely during the earthquake and tsunami season there was an attempt to establish another new regency, Kabupaten Nias Barat; cf. the reason that motivated the Christians there to establish ONKP in 1950.
162 This part is a summary of Uwe Hummel 2007—chap. 4:2–5.
came to Nias some time after Vallon’s death. He, too, died before he could begin any missionary work. After this, there were no more attempts by Roman Catholic missionaries to work on Nias and the Batu Islands until 1939. Unfortunately, there are no records about what happened to catechist Francisco and his wife Sophie. If they survived and remained on Nias, they, along with the hypothetically baptised children, could be considered to be the ‘stem-cell’ of the church on Nias.

In 1834 two Protestant missionaries from Boston, Massachusetts, USA, Samuel Munson and Henry Lyman, came to Nias. The Congregationalist Mission Society (ABCFM) sent them out. After investigating the eastern coast, travelling northward from the south, they returned to Sibolga because they could not get permission from the Dutch authorities to work on Nias. Subsequently, they entered the Batakland (see above).

It was not until almost thirty years later that another Protestant missionary, the German Ludwig Ernst Denninger (1815–1876) from the RMG had contacts with an Ono Niha community, albeit initially in Padang rather than on Nias. In this town on the western coast of Sumatra numerous Ono Niha were living in special settlements. Many of them had been brought over from Nias as slaves and were working as servants and unskilled labourers. Most were adherents of the primal religion of Nias, though some had come under the influence of Islam, especially those who had attended government schools.

Denninger is called the ‘Father of the Nias Mission.’ From 1848 to 1859, he had served among the Dayak in Kalimantan, but had then had to flee because of a revolt against all Europeans. After an interim period on Java, Denninger and his wife Sophie arrived in Padang on 21 November 1861. Because of Sophie’s poor health, Denninger settled temporarily in Padang. The longer he stayed there the more certain he became that a mission post there would be of strategic importance, both as a bridgehead for Sumatra in general and, specifically, for taking Christianity to Nias. A Nias Mission, however, would have to be centred on Nias itself, rather than being treated as a satellite of the Sumatra mission.

Beginning Period in Nias (1865–1890)

Denninger arrived on 27 September 1865 in Gunungsitoli, the capital and main harbour on the east coast of Nias. During the early period he and his colleagues who followed had to face a series of difficult beginnings. These

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164 According to W. Gulö 1983:6, there were about 3,000 Ono Niha in Padang at that time; other sources mention 5,000–6,000. The Ono Niha constituted the largest non-Malay community in Padang in the nineteenth century.
'difficult beginnings' were marked by immense hardships and painful setbacks in the attempt to plant Christianity on Niasan soil. Basic instruments of communication, such as the language, first had to be acquired, and common trust had to develop before any significant interaction could take place.

During these difficult beginnings, although the German missionaries had made no overall impact on Niasan culture, they, however, had managed to gain a foothold in Niasan communities that had already been subjugated by the Dutch. When they treated their listeners as guests, offering them small gifts, these would react with praise of the host; if the preacher used traditional means of communication and adjusted himself to the cultural setting, he was usually treated with great respect. But any disparaging attitude towards indigenous customs would result in missionary failure, especially outside the boundaries of the Government Protected Area (GPA, the so-called Rapatgebied).

The primary motive prompting chiefs to turn to Christianity was to gain an ally against rivals and against Islam, rather than necessarily being related to any faith conviction. After initial collaboration, chiefs such as Tööla of Ombolata and Oroisa of Dahana distanced themselves when they realised that they could not manipulate the missionaries to their own ends. Later, when Christianity had become an unavoidable factor in their society, they gave in and asked for baptism. Outside the GPA, especially in southern Nias, the missionaries could not stand their ground. They had proved irrelevant to the objectives of the sovereign chiefs and, in addition, threatened the chiefs’ authority by undermining the traditional customs.

A certain degree of meaningful interaction between the missionaries and the Ono Niha became possible only as the former became fluent in the vernacular and the latter submitted themselves as catechumens. Symbolically, the act of baptism and the subsequent banquet of pork signified a treaty of allegiance. After a while indigenous teacher-preachers, as well as Christian chiefs and elders, began to play a significant role in communicating the teachings and the policies of the mission to their fellow countrymen.

In planting Niasan Christianity, the missionaries and their indigenous protégés felt no need to make use of the ground provided by the Ono Niha’s spiritual context. While Denninger showed some respect for the ‘natural’ religious inclinations of the Ono Niha, his younger colleagues followed a more or less consistent practice of rooting out all elements of Niasan culture related to the primal religion. The question of the Ono Niha’s keeping or destroying their ancestral images (adu zatua, statue made of wood or stone as an image of the ancestor) acquired the importance of determining the status confessionis, i.e. of acting as a watershed between Christians and non-Christians. Submission to the missionaries’ demand to surrender the adu zatua for destruction opened the door to baptism, whereas secretly keeping them was a reason for excommunication, if they were later found out. In an a priori manner, all adu
were considered to be idols and thus an abomination to God. In their stead, a particular type of westernised Christianity was superimposed by the missionaries on those Ono Niha willing to become Christians. At this stage, the latter could hardly have fathomed the actual meaning and significance of the alien doctrines and strange ceremonies.

Facing such difficulties, in terms of quantity, during the first twenty-five years (1865–1890) the missionary effort in Nias could gather only a small harvest. On the Easter feast of 1874 the first baptism was administered in Nias for 25 Niasans. In 1890 that number had increased to 706. Notwithstanding the small quantity, in this pioneering period the RMG, that in Nias was also called Nias Mission, already set up some basic structures to make possible expansion in the coming period. Firstly, the Niasan Christians already learnt to participate in propagating the gospel. One of the Nias leaders who played an important role in the evangelisation was a village chief, Ama Mandranga. There were also a number of teachers and elders appointed by the missionaries. In 1882 a teacher-training institute was established and the missionaries always attempted to enhance the authority of the autochthonous ministers in the eyes of the Niasans. Secondly, there was an attempt to build a self-supporting church by putting certain responsibility on the shoulders of the Niasan Christian community. Thirdly, the Bible and some other books were translated into northern Nias language, by missionary H. Sundermann together with some indigenous helpers.  

During the second twenty-five years (1890–1915) the evangelism effort flourished more and the basic structures were enhanced. The expansion of missionary activities in this period was to some extent characterised by a two-fold shift in emphasis in the missionary strategy. On the one hand, there was a change of focus from individual to communal conversion; on the other hand, the missionaries began to differentiate more sharply between the various aspects of the local culture and gained an appreciation of some of these aspects.

The most prominent characteristic of this second period, however, is the expansion of the mission beyond the GPA. The year 1890 marks the beginning of a continuous process of successful penetration of missionary activities into areas beyond the direct control of, though under some degree of protection by, the colonial authorities. After 1908, when the Dutch subjugated the whole of Nias, RMG missionaries established themselves permanently in southern Nias. The support for the mission among the local population, as well as its strategic network of mission stations and its increasing emphasis on community

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165 Sundermann’s name is perpetuated in the name of a theological college established by BNKP in 1999.
development, strengthened its position vis-à-vis the colonial government. The Dutch ‘Ethical Policy’; implemented from 1901, enhanced cooperation between the mission and the state further.

Parallel to this geographical expansion there was a rapid numerical increase in membership. In 1915 the number of the Christians increased to around 20,000, while the teachers and elders were almost 500. The increase in the number of stations and branch congregations necessitated a further consolidation of the ecclesiastical structures, and an urgent need in the course of missionary expansion was the availability of more well trained Niasan assistants.

During the 1880s, Sundermann had trained nine teacher-preachers (guru) in his so-called seminary in Dahana. A few others had graduated from the seminary in Depok in Batavia. After Sundermann had moved to Lölöwu’a in 1895, Thomas started similar vocational training in Humene. After Thomas’ sudden death at the end of 1900, the ‘seminary’ moved to Ombölata in 1901, where Thomas’ son-in-law, Conrad Ufer, continued the task along with the gifted Niasan guru Andrea. In the course of time, the seminary grew and the standard of teaching improved.

Fries, the first truly academic theologian in the service of the RMG on Nias, was elected to the office of chairman of the Conference of Missionaries in 1913 and moved from his mission station in Sifaoro’asi to the seminary in Ombölata. In 1914, he initiated the first two-year course for up-grading guru to become Niasan ministers (Pandita Niha). The graduates of this course were to play an important role in the following period of the Great Awakening.

In the meantime the RMG/Nias Mission created a new office i.e. sinenge (apostle or evangelist) to serve the congregations that had no school. They were authorised to serve congregations except for administration of the sacraments, confirmation and consecration of marriage. In 1906 the first Nias pastor was ordained. The fortunate one, who was talented and experienced but had very little additional training, was guru Sitefanö from Humene. He had been a long-time assistant of the late missionary Thomas. Sitefanö was ordained on 25 March 1906 by the chairman of the Conference of Missionaries, Präses Kramer, while the past-chairman, Sundermann, delivered the sermon. Altogether, twelve missionaries attended the ceremony.

The missionaries’ were active in many fields in order to promote evangelisation through the increase of the economic potentiality of the Christian congregations and promotion of the welfare of the people: they opened schools, built roads, established a saving bank, opened coffee plantations. As a result of the health-related ministry the number of Christians increased by the natural growth as well as by the conversion of non-Christians, while the total population of Nias decreased due to epidemic diseases.

Last but not least, there was cooperation between the colonial government and the mission in the effort to establish a Christianised adat. In February
1914 a delegation of government officials met with the leadership of the Nias-Conference in Ombölata, in order to discuss a code of law for Christian Ono Niha. The suggestions of the missionaries were partially taken into account, so that the resident of Tapanuli could implement a special codex of adat-law for the Christians of the Nias district, with the exception of the sub-district of South Nias, in 1915. Though the government effectively strengthened the status of Christians by implementing this special adat-law, it did not solve the problem of a ‘dual system’ of values; the spirit of the traditional adat continued to determine many aspects of everyday life.

To conclude, the years 1890 to 1915 were vital for the expansion of Christianity amongst the Ono Niha. Whereas at the end of the previous period there had been merely three viable but struggling stations, all inside the GPA, in 1915 there were fourteen rapidly growing stations, encompassing 120 filial congregations, located throughout the island of Nias. Inspired by Warneck’s vision of the Christianisation of nations and Wegner’s application of the three-self formula, it had been possible to carry out the strategic idea of the triple axis, creating a network of missionary stations all over Nias. Missionaries had followed the rules of the adat in order to gain entrance to strongholds of the primal religion or to win the sympathy of some chiefs.

The expansion of Christianity on Nias went hand in hand with the expansion of colonial rule and with a new kind of collaboration between the two in Christian education, in medical services, and in the development of a Christianised adat. Missionaries openly supported forced labour (rodi) and called on the colonial authorities for the use of force in order to ‘pacify’ areas not yet under colonial rule. Despite this dubious synergy between mission and state, the hearts of the Ono Niha gradually but surely turned towards Christianity. In the year 1914, when the major powers of the world were sliding into a bloody war, Paramount Chief Barani Dakhí surrendered his adu and ancestral skulls to the missionary.

The more appreciative missionary view of the corporate identity of the Ono Niha brought about a greater differentiation between the ‘valuable’ and the ‘useless’ elements of Niasan culture. The vernacular was studied thoroughly and freed from its ‘heathen’ odour. Efforts were undertaken to ennable the adat. But traditional Niasan religiosity was fought more mercilessly than ever. Cleaning a house of all its adu, or felling a sacred fösí-tree, was celebrated as a victory of God over Satan.

There was no acknowledgement of the primal religion as a possible vital root for a Niasan theology. In accordance with the paradigm of the Enlightenment, it was thought that the primal religion could be eradicated and replaced by Christianity without destroying the rest of the cultural identity. This proved to be wrong and actually resulted in ‘cultural vandalism,’ which subsequently caused a deep spiritual vacuum in the communal psyche of the Ono Niha. In
the midst of this devastation, however, a new national identity, based on the new law of God (*huku Lowalangi*), was already beginning to take shape in some parts of the Niasan population.

*The Great Awakening in Nias, 1915–1930*

In the mean time the missionaries were not so content to see the spiritual condition of the congregations manifested in the misuse of liquor and drunkenness, marriage disorder, reluctance to give offerings, and most importantly the worshipping of the spirit of the ancestors through *adu zatua*. As a matter of fact the majority of the people still rejected the gospel, until a tremendous and unique revival, the Great Awakening, or mass movement of penance occurred.\(^{166}\) We will follow Hummel’s description, analysis and conclusion on this movement that spread over the whole island in several waves from 1915 until 1930.\(^{167}\)

This Great Awakening, or ‘the great penance’ (*fangesa dödö sebua*), was not only a revival inside Christianity, but also a campaign of a rapidly growing Christian minority, evangelising a vast majority of adherents of the primal religion. The symptoms were similar to awakenings elsewhere in the world. Unique phenomena can be explained largely by socio-political circumstances and cultural factors. One fundamental experience is existential community fear. It was a matter of the collective rather than the individual conscience, and therefore strongly affected the change of communal identity.

The actual movement of the *fangesa dödö sebua* started at the end of 1915 and continued in different ‘waves’ until 1930. Fries connects the outbreak to the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the mission in Gunungsitoli in September 1915. The missionaries and indigenous co-workers had used this massive celebration for intensive penitential preaching. In Helefanikha, a filial congregation of Humene, Otto Rudersdorf regretted a lack of awareness of sin among the members of his congregations, especially in preparation for the Lord’s Supper. Therefore, he held special services during seven weeks before Christmas in 1915, both in the church on Sunday afternoons, as well as in the filial congregations on weekdays. These meetings were frequented by a growing number of Niasan Christians. On one of these occasions, a Niasan assistant-teacher by the name of Filemo experienced an unusual awareness of sin and subsequently a strong conviction that his sins were forgiven by the crucified Christ. This changed his life convincingly, affecting others.

\(^{166}\) A study on this first revival movement in Th. Müller 1931; and Felix Meier-Hedde 2003.

In March and April of the same year there were numerous conversions in Humene. Through the preaching of born-again sinenge and some elders, the awakening rapidly spread to other villages in the vicinity. At the seminary in Ombölata, the atmosphere was sceptical. This changed after Niasan seminarions visited Humene and were, themselves, touched by the awakening. They henceforth joined in as its agents.

From Humene the awakening spread southwards to Sogae Adu and westwards to Sifaoro'asi and as far as the Hinako Islands. In the absence of the missionary, the awakening in Sogae Adu took on an eschatological character. The doomsday atmosphere caused some to destroy their property or to commit suicide. Some women stood up as charismatic leaders, one as a prophetess and another as the incarnation of the Holy Spirit.

Eventually, the enthusiasts of Sogae Adu carried the awakening westwards to the mission station Sifaoro'asi, wanting to convert the German missionary Skubinna there. In Holi, one of the filial congregations of Sifaoro'asi, the awakening took on tumultuous and violent dimensions. Skubinna managed to suppress the movement, putting a number of its leaders in hospital and sending the ‘pseudo-Christ’ to missionary Fries in Ombölata. On the following Sunday the enthusiasts had to appear in front of the congregation in the church of Sifaoro'asi, confessing their heresy and their spiritual arrogance. Henceforth, the Ono Niha of Sifaoro’asi shut themselves off from the awakening.

Missionary Ludwig Borutta took a similarly repressive attitude towards the enthusiasts in Lölöwua. A guru from the mission school, who followed a prophetess from Humene, evangelising together with a large group of young women in this area, was threatened by the missionary with expulsion from his teaching post and subsequent forced labour (rodi). This not only intimidated the guru, but also hampered the spread of the awakening in this area.

By 1917 the initial élan of the movement had calmed down somewhat, but it did not stop. It moved beyond Humene and Ombölata to Gunungsitoli where first signs were registered in 1918 and where it reached its peak a few months later, in several prayer groups (sekola wangandrö). Pandita Josefo, who served in Gunungsitoli at the time, at first received a big fright (ahölöhöli döödö), but then judged these outbursts of enthusiasm to be the work of the Holy Spirit. Around this time (1917–1918) the Great Awakening also reached Hilimaziaya in the north. Even in the south, in Niha Raya, there were numerous conversions.

In 1922 the Great Awakening flared up again in full power, this time starting in Gunungsitoli. It strengthened Christianity in Hilimaziaya and reached out as far north as Lahewa. Also Sifaoro'asi and Lölöwua succumbed to the strength of the awakening. Many, who were suspicious in 1916, were now touched by it. This time the constructive influence of the Pandita was felt, besides the continuing strong witness of the Sinenge and some women. In
1923 Niasan evangelists reached Börö Nadu Sifalagō Gomo, an ancient centre of the primal religion in southern Nias. In 1927 missionary Nol baptised the 145 ‘firstfruits’ and in 1929 the remaining 119 inhabitants of this place of descent of the ancestor Hija.

Unfortunately, 1922 was a troublesome year for the people of southern Nias, including the missionaries. An epidemic claimed many lives. But it was not this hardship that hampered the spread of the awakening in some areas, and caused a number of villages to return to the primal religion or fall into religious indifference. A serious obstacle to the spread of Christianity was also the uncompromising attitude of certain missionaries, who rejected the customary law (*hada or adat*). This was unacceptable to the proud rulers.

After 1925 the strength of the Great Awakening decreased continuously, and even faded away. By 1930, however, Christianity had become the strongest religion amongst the *Ono Niha* and the primal religion almost disappeared from public life. The number of Christians more than quadrupled during this period.\(^{(168)}\) A point of mature saturation was reached.

Besides the mainstream, however, the 1930s also brought some remarkable outbursts of religious enthusiasm, especially in Sogae Adu. These were incidental and limited in character. According to the Synod of the BNKP, these minor awakenings were different in nature to the Great Awakening, since they included a resurgence of pre-Christian magic (*ilmu sihir*) and resulted in schisms.\(^{(169)}\) Phenomena like trance, glossolalia (li böö) and healing, practiced by ‘Masters of Awakening’ (*tukang fangesa dödö*), were prominent in the minor awakenings, including the so-called ‘jumping awakenings’ (*fangesa dödö solaya*) in the 1950s.

Much has been written about the causes of the awakening. Although it has been stated time and time again that this awakening was the work of the Holy Spirit, it also needs to be said that a number of cultural, political and economic factors determined the condition in which this awakening broke out and developed. Three more general factors (psychological strain, change of social order and communal ties) and four more ecclesiastical ones (the jubilee mass rally in 1915, the religious vacuum, identification with Christianity and contextualisation of the message) have to be distinguished. Also concerning the lasting value of the Great Awakening, or the so-called ‘fruits of the Awakening’, we can see in at least eight points the significance of the Great Awakening for the transformation of Niasan culture and society at large: the

\(^{(168)}\) 1914: 17,795 baptised Christians, 9,000 catechumens, 120 congregations; 1922: ca. 52,000 baptised Christians (alternative counting: 49,877), 30,000 catechumens; 1926: 65,000 baptised Christians, 23,000 catechumens; 1929/30: ca. 84,000 baptised Christians, ca. 13,300 catechumens, 164 congregations. These statistics do not include the Batu Islands.

\(^{(169)}\) For example: the Community Movement or *Faawōsa* (see below).
decline of the primal religion, eschatological awareness, Christianity as a new identity, Christian law versus customary law, improvements of the rights of women and children, the dawn of literacy, music and ecclesiastical self-sufficiency. However, their main focus is on the spiritual life of the Ono Niha and the growth of Christianity, and not on society and culture.

To conclude: The Great Awakening was the time of victorious, conquering Christianity and the crucial moment (kairos) in the modern history of Nias. Overall, the lasting effects of the Great Awakening have been ambiguous. On the one hand it brought about a metamorphosis of Nisan society. The Ono Niha had found a new communal identity in becoming Christians. The vacuum left by the destruction of the primal religion was filled with a new spiritual reality, called Christianity. In the realms of family-life and worship there were important developments, like the acceptance of monogamy, greater freedom for women and children, and cultural developments like the songs of the awakening. But because it was limited and anxiously prevented from expressing itself politically, this new identity was not holistic and not fit to improve the material wellbeing and general cultural development of the Ono Niha.

Regarding the aftermath of the Great Awakening, Van den End\textsuperscript{170} summarised it as follows: After around ten years the revival movement calmed down and many old things reappeared; the church members became passive, willingness to offer faded away, church discipline needed to be strictly applied, huku-fôna became empowered above the so-called Christian law (formulated by the Nias Mission), especially concerning the large amount of the customary wedding-gift. In the coming decades some of the members even withdrew or were attracted by the Catholic mission. This might have been caused by the lack of missionaries and well-trained Nisan ministers that deprived most of the new converts of any intensive teaching in the Christian faith. When the flood of emotion ceased, apparently, there was no body of Christian knowledge and experience to become a standard or guide for the subsequent journey of life. The fangesa sebu’a, however, had produced a permanent fruit. As told by a Nisan to a missionary, “The gospel that previously only touched our skin now entered into our heart. Suppose you left us in 1914 (the first year of the World War I), Christianity might disappear from Nias. Now the gospel will definitely live in our island.”\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{170} Van den End 2002:214.
\textsuperscript{171} Quoted in Van den End 2002:214.
Struggle towards independence in Nias; new revivals and schism (1930–1965)

On 31 December 1929 the financial support by the Dutch government for the work of the RMG on Sumatra and Nias, granted during the years of heavy inflation in Germany after World War I, was terminated. The colonial government implemented a policy of austerity in subsidising mission schools. On top of this, the World Economic Crisis, as well as the strict foreign exchange restrictions enforced by the Nazis since 1933, caused the worst malaise ever in the history of the RMG (see above).

The financial malaise and the extinction of the fire of the Great Awakening moved the missionaries to take concrete steps towards ecclesiastical independence or self-reliance. In 1936 they finished drafting a church order. The ‘autonomy’ of the Niasan church was formally decided by the first synod of the Banua Niha Keriso Protestan (BNKP, the Nias Christian Protestant Church) in November 1936 and the draft of the church order was accepted. Gunungsitoli was also decided on as headquarters. But European missionaries still occupied the top positions in the leadership. The synod also accepted the desire of the board of RMG in Barmen, Germany, to appoint all European missionaries as full participants in the assembly. But on the other hand the missionaries refused the aspiration of the Niasan Christians that every church-district could send a social leader (a tribal chief) as a full member of the synod assembly.

In May 1940, the Dutch detained the German missionaries and the leadership was handed over to Niasan office bearers. But soon Dutch missionaries, working under the auspices of the Batak Nias Zending (BNZ), were transferred to Nias and, in practice, claimed the lead in certain areas of church work.

The Japanese occupation of Nias and the Batu Islands (1942–1945) was a serious test for the very existence of the BNKP. The Imperial Army of Nippon invaded Nias on 17 April 1942 from Sibolga, and the occupation lasted until 15 August 1945. Around Easter 1942 all Dutch men on Nias were interned and three weeks later all women and children were put into a number of camps on Sumatra. The office of ephorus was taken over by a Nias pastor, Atöföna Harefa.

At first, the Ono Niha received the Japanese as liberators, but this enthusiasm soon changed because of the suffering under the fascist regime, which reached right down to village level. Many Niasan young men were compelled to enter the Japanese army, the people were forced to dig trenches and supply food. Women were raped. There was horrible torture and hunger. Though religion was not prohibited, many churches were desecrated by using them as storehouses. The three-and-a-half years of Japanese occupation was ‘hell’ for most inhabitants of Nias. Only a few traders of Chinese origin used the opportunity for lucrative business with Singapore. It is remarkable that Niasan Christianity did not wither away under such extreme hardship.
Only during the struggle for National Independence (1945–1949), after the Japanese had left, did the BNKP start functioning as an independent church. By 1950, the BNKP had become an established, independent entity, though far from being self-reliant. Only in 1951 did German missionary-physicians, Thomsen and his wife, come again to serve in Nias, followed by two theologians, Schneider and Dörmann, and two deaconesses, Blindow and Jung in 1952. Their functions were different from those of missionaries before the war. In the post-colonial situation they no longer had a leadership position, but would serve as ‘advisors’ (penasehat) to the BNKP.

The year 1950 marked the beginning of a ‘New Era’ (1950–1965) for the church on Nias and to the period of 1950–1965 belonged the ‘coming-of-age’ experiences of a maturing church. Several new perspectives concerning ecumenical cooperation opened up, while at the same time a major schism occurred in the Western area (ONKP), the Roman Catholic counter mission, and enthusiastic movements challenged the BNKP. A very fortunate happening for the Christians on Nias and the Batu Islands was the merger of the BKP with the BNKP in 1960 (see below). This was followed by a number of important synods revising the church order and preparing for the 100th anniversary of the BNKP in 1965.

The reconstruction of the history of the Niasan church in this period ends with the ‘jubilee’ on 26–27 September 1965. This feast, the biggest ever so far celebrated on Nias, was immediately followed by the greatest national disaster in the history of the Republic of Indonesia: the so-called communist coup attempt on 30 September 1965. Here begins a new period in Indonesian history, and with it also of the churches, including the BNKP.

After a brief review of the development of the Nias churches up to 1965, we need to take into account special phenomena regarding the new revival and the schism. After the revival of 1916 onwards the revival movement calmed down, but a longing for repeating the tremendous experience never disappeared. In the 1930s and 1940s, a series of similar movements rose up again, especially during the period of great suffering during World War II. But now the focus of the movements, instead of forgiveness of sin, was Spirit blessings (charismata), including miracles. The glossolalia (speaking in tongues) came up and during the worship certain persons started to tremble or shout in ecstasy. Instead of strengthening the community of the church these movements tore it apart creating schism. While the first wave of the movement made the BNKP a Volkskirche (folk church), the following movements broke up the church’s unity in this island.

In 1933 the Faawòsa (fellowship) movement started to split from the Nias Mission church (later BNKP), because the adherents found that they had to obey the voice directed received from the Holy Spirit more than the church regulations. After releasing themselves from the mother church, the various
emerging disparities could not be balanced by the different opinions they held. Consequently in the Faaawosa group the Christian elements were more and more mixed with many other elements, including those from Islam and tribal religion and this phenomenon in turn broke this group into further schism. One of the separated groups was called Angowula Faawosa khu Yesu (AFY).\textsuperscript{172}

In 1946 another group split off in the district (ori) of Idanoi (south-east of Gunungsitoli) to become a new church, Angowula Masehi Idanoi Nias (AMIN; later Idanoi changed to Indonesia). The initial cause of this schism was the transfer of the pandita of Ombolata, Singambowö Zebua, to a much more remote congregation in Lahusa-Masio. This was meant as a kind of punishment, since he was accused of collaboration with the Japanese occupiers in the pdi bakti (rice planting) programme. Zebua refused, not agreeing with the viewpoint of the Synod Board of the BNKP. He believed that the Holy Spirit wanted him to stay in Ombolata, where he was subsequently dismissed. With the support of the paramount chief of the ori Idanoi, Tuhênöri Adolf Gea, Singamböwö founded his own church with about eleven congregations on 12 May 1946 in Helefanikha, a village in Idanoi. At first, the AMIN was a copy of the BNKP; less than 5% of BNKP membership moved to AMIN and they were largely restricted to Idanoi. Later the AMIN developed a more nationalist and Lutheran identity and made peace with the BNKP.

In 1950 another group in West Nias also split from BNKP and called itself Orahua Niha Keriso Protestan (ONKP, Association of Nisan Protestant Christians), centred at Sirombu.\textsuperscript{173} In April–May 1950, Ephorus Atöföna Harefa undertook an urgent visitation to western Nias, in order to avoid a disruption inside the BNKP in Tugala-Sirombu and the Hinako Islands. Unfortunately, he fell seriously ill during the journey, so that he could not do very much to regain the sympathy of the rebellious leaders. The reason why the leaders in the western region wanted to handle their own church affairs was that they felt neglected by the Synod Board and that this caused their region to be left behind. Since pre-Christian times the clan of the Marundruri had ruled this relatively affluent area.

On 22 May 1952 the ONKP split away from the BNKP and convened its own first Synod during the following two days. A visit of German missionaries in September of the same year could not change anything. On 26 February

\textsuperscript{172} In the late 1990s this church, with around 32,000 members, was accepted as a member of PGI.

\textsuperscript{173} The location of the tsunami in Nias on 26 December 2004 is Sirombu, Mandrehe and the surroundings. The people and the ONKP ministers felt that the international and domestic aid designated for them was not fully handed to them, some amount being withheld in Gunungsitoli.
1953, the Indonesian government officially acknowledged the ONKP. Its first President was Pandita Dalihuku Marundruri and the first general secretary was Dalimanö Hia. Besides the president, there were only three pastors for some fifty congregations in the ONKP. This schism resembled the AMIN split-off, since in both cases a resurgence of traditional structures (őri) took place.

In South Nias the regional sentiment, formerly also accommodated by the Catholic mission, had been active there since 1939 (see below), and was followed by ONKP. However in 1996 another split occurred in this area; a quite large number of the BNKP congregations in South Nias established their own church, Banua Keriso Protestan Nias (BKPN). The first ephorus, Sarōfanōtōna Harita, inaugurated by the tribal chief, Ama Siti Wau, at Bawōmataluō, a very beautiful and culturally-rich village on a high plateau.¹⁷⁴ The establishment of BKPN seems justified by the establishment of new regency in 2001, Kabupaten Nias Selatan, centred at Teluk Dalam. But—unlike AMIN, ONKP and AFY—BKPN’s application to become a member of PGI was not approved until 2005.

Even Gunungsitoli as headquarters of BNKP was shaken by a schism during the year of turmoil in the mid-1990s. Some of the congregations and ministers, led by Martinus Lase, were discontented with the policy of the synod leaders and started a new church called BNKP Independen. This church was not yet approved by the Department of Religious Affairs or by PGI. This series of conflicts and schisms—similar to what happened in the history of HKB, and precisely at a time when many churches in Indonesia were fostering the ecumenical movement—led to a fundamental question: can any other good things be done by the churches besides splitting? This question becomes more relevant for the churches in Nias considering many other issues that call for the contribution of the churches to develop Nias. Indeed, there were and are a lot of things already done by the churches from the time of mission, as already mentioned. But the people of Nias as well as a number of international communities that already tried to play their part wait for more significant evidence.

*Competition with Roman Catholicism in Nias*

We also need to give space to the competition and conflict between BNKP and the Roman Catholic Church. After the unsuccessful missionary attempts

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¹⁷⁴ One of the very famous traditional arts of Nias is stone jumping, to jump over a 2.3m high pile of stones. The location is Bawōmataluō and the picture of this action was reproduced on the Indonesian Rp. 1,000 banknote some years ago.
in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church did not send any missionaries to Nias until 1939. The initiative for a new start was taken by four Ono Niha from Lölöwua, who were not satisfied with the church discipline of the BNKP. Since 1936 they wrote letters to Roman Catholic leaders in Sumatra, inviting them to come to Nias. On 13 December 1937 the Sibolga based priest Chrysologus Timmermans paid a visit to Nias, contacting European and Chinese Roman Catholic families in Gunungsitoli. He also called on Lölöwua, staying for one hour, reportedly making quite an impression on the local population. The colonial authorities frowned on this visit to the interior for fear of ‘dual mission.’ However, for two reasons, Roman Catholic missionary activities were not prohibited: (1) There was no Islamic majority, which could cause a stir-up in the face of another Christian mission; (2) An influential Ono Niha collected signatures for obtaining the permission for the Roman Catholic Church to operate.

Subsequently a Dutch Capuchin, Burchardus van der Weijden, arrived on Nias in 1939. In 1940 Van der Weijden secured support from another Dutch Capuchin, Ildefonsus van Straalen. In the training-courses they offered to Ono Niha the instruction material was polarising, emphasising differences with Protestantism (the Protestants did likewise). The Catholics presented themselves as the one, true and undivided church, cleverly exploiting the fact that a number of divisions had occurred in the body of the BNKP.

The Japanese detained the Dutch Capuchins during World War II. At that time, about 300 Ono Niha had been baptised in the Catholic mission and another 1,500 to 2,000 were preparing for baptism as catechumen. During the following eight years, there was no Roman Catholic priest on Nias and the Batu Islands. But the catechists and lectors, supported by some chiefs and wealthy Chinese, formed a simple organisation and kept on spreading the Roman Catholic creed, influencing many of their compatriots. Even at this early stage, Roman Catholicism was a challenge to the BNKP. Three Dutch Capuchins returned in 1950/1951 and their ranks were strengthened in 1952/1953 by six German Capuchins from Tienshui (Kansu, China), who had fled from the communists. Among them was Bishop Gratian Grimm.

Since 1955, there had been increasing Roman Catholic activities on the Batu Islands. By now, the BNKP and the European Protestant missionaries saw the Roman Catholic mission on Nias and the Batu Islands as a major offensive or all-out attack. But whether this was indeed a ‘counter-mission’ has been much disputed. Father Silvester Braun argued that the Roman Catholic mission did not harm the work in the ‘Lord’s vineyard’ on Nias, since it led the BNKP to ‘self-contemplation.’ Most of the Christians who entered the Roman Catholic Church were said to have come from the Community Movement (faaawosa), but the reality was much less fraternal. There was tough competition between the two branches of Christianity. Since both the RMG and the
Roman Catholic mission relied heavily on German personnel this was quite confusing for many Ono Niha.

In the eyes of Ono Niha, Roman Catholicism seemed to be an easier religion (agama saoha) than Protestantism. The church contributions (amèèla) were much lower and there was no prohibition on images (adu). The much richer use of symbolism was impressive.

A major bone of contention was the issue of ‘rebaptism’ or ‘conditional baptism.’ Protestants were furious when they heard that the Roman Catholic Church re-baptised former members of the BNKP and the BKP. The BNKP countered by calling the baptism of the Roman Catholic Church invalid, against the advice of the missionaries. Both sides in fact practised ‘rebaptism,’ described as baptism ‘under the condition,’ without a strong theological basis. The Roman Catholic Church—in principle acknowledging the baptism of non-Roman Catholic Christians—argued that Protestant pastors use too little water, hardly moistening the forehead. This could not be regarded as ‘rite’ in a Roman Catholic sense.

While the question of the use of more or less water can never be an acceptable argument for Protestants to justify rebaptism, the actual use of very little water by many Protestant pastors until today is indeed an unnecessary nuisance. There is enough water on Nias and holy baptism looses some of its symbolic power if the congregation can hardly see the water. It seems likely that this praxis is a result of unintended enculturation. Baptism as administered by many Protestant pastors resembles the traditional blessing of a dying father, for which also only a few drops are spattered on the receiver.

Despite the disturbances brought about by Roman Catholic mission, its remarkable evangelising efforts may not be underestimated. Especially in the field of conserving the traditional culture of the Ono Niha and integrating it into liturgy, architecture and art, the Roman Catholic Church has been more progressive than her Protestant counterparts, even before the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). Lately, suspicions between the two Christian denominations have become less and good cooperation is increasing.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Protestant missionaries L.E. Denninger and H. Sundermann studied the language of Nias. It was a German Capuchin Friar, Johannes Hämmerle (b. 1941; since 1971 in Nias) who continued this work with publications in Indonesian and German. Different from his predecessors, Hämmerle’s informants were all Christians; many of them were even catechists or teachers. They sometimes brought texts to him that was typewritten by themselves. But these were ancient texts in the sacral style of the archipelago: in the tradition of ‘speaking in pairs’ that is also characteristic for the language of the Psalms and the Edda. As in the Edda, a work of the pre-Christian North-European culture, but written down in Christian times, also in the texts that were collected by Hämmerle we can
find some accommodation to modern times. In the texts of Ama Rozaman (b. 1918 and trained at the Protestant school for teachers) one can discern a harmony between traditional Nias cultural values and the modern Indonesian doctrine of Pancasila. Hämmerle concludes about this syncretism:

This author (Ama Rozaman) does not want to reconstruct the true meaning of pre-Christian Nias religion but he wants to give ancient roots and foundation to the modern Christian and Indonesian political existence. Some cosmetic alterations of the old tradition are inevitable in this operation.\(^{175}\)

Hämmerle also established in 1993 the Pusaka Nias Foundation, a museum and library for the conservation of Nias traditional lore and literature.

**Mission and church in Batu Islands\(^ {176}\)**

Fortunately the story of Christianity in Nias and the surrounding islands did not only consist of schism and conflict but also of unification, as we find regarding the story of the church in the Batu islands. This archipelago (totaling 662 km\(^2\)) is located between Nias and Mentawai and the biggest island is Tello. Formerly, during the colonial era, it was part of West Sumatra province, therefore many of the inhabitants were Minangkabau Muslims besides some Buddhist Chinese, but it later became part of Nias regency. The autochthonous people of this archipelago are part of the Nias cluster, and they also speak the Nias language, and practised the Niasan adat and ethnic religion.

In 1889 the *Luthers Genootschap*\(^ {177}\) or Dutch Lutheran Mission (DLM) started to work in the Batu islands in cooperation with the RMG. Gottlieb J. Kersten, formerly designated to Tanjung Sakti, Bengkulu, accompanied by a Batak teacher Johannes Lumbantobing, arrived at Pulau Tello on 25 February 1889. Due to serious illness Kersten and his family served in Batu archipelago only for fifteen months and were succeeded by some later missionaries, among others C.W. Frickenschmidt and August Landwehr. After more than fifty years of missionary work with many troubles and obstacles, but also supported by a number of indigenous leaders (e.g. Fidja Wanaetu, Siwa Famlai, Lai Hulando and the regent of Batu islands, Raja Alam Laut, a Minangkabau of Buginese descent) and ministers (among others Guru Mandia and elder Bu'a'ö Jamatawi), the church in the Batu Islands grew in number of congregations, schools, health centres and some other working units and facilities.

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\(^{175}\) Hämmerle 1999:48.

\(^{176}\) This part is mainly based on Uwe Hummel 2002 and Hummel & Telaumbanua 2007:132–153 and 172–179.

\(^{177}\) The complete name is *Het Nederlandsch Luthersch Genootschap voor In- en Uitwendige Zending*, founded at Amsterdam on 5 April 1852. Hummel 2002:13.
In some ways incongruous to the developments on Nias, there was also the gradual formation of an independent Batu church. The process started after the arrival of a new generation of missionaries in 1919, but did not lead to an autonomous church such as on Nias. The transfer of the only remaining missionary from Pulau Tello to Gunungsitoli in July 1940 cut down missionary work to a minimum and the Japanese occupation in August 1942 stopped it completely. An independent Batoeschte Synode or Batu church was only proclaimed in 1945. On 11 August 1945, one day after the Japanese troops left the Batu archipelago, an autonomous church was inaugurated and named Banua Keriso Protestan (BKP the Batu Christian Protestant Church). The chairperson (voorzitter) was an autochthonous pastor, Kana Wa’ambo, a graduate from Ombölata Seminary in Nias. In 1948 the ties with the DLM were finally cut.

After the termination of the work of the DLM on the Batu Islands, the responsibility had, supposedly, been handed over to the RMG, in October 1948. Since the capacities of the RMG were limited, and work on Nias had only recommenced in the 1950s, the devastating situation of the BKP drew the attention of some international ecumenical organisations.

On 2–10 August 1957, the Church World Mission (CWM) met at Staten Island, New York and a decision was reached that CWM would request a deputation, consisting of representatives from the HKBP, the LWF and the RMG, to pay an official visit to the BKP. The LWF was willing to help the BKP where it was really necessary. With the HKBP and the BNKP there was no official relationship, although delegates of the BKP had attended Synod meetings of the BNKP twice since World War II, and four sinenge of the BKP had been trained at the seminary in Ombölata. A problem was that the BKP was not legally recognised, so that there was a real danger that church properties might be confiscated by the state. Both HKBP and BNKP were willing to help their small neighbour.

Due to the political situation in Sumatra during the PRRI rebellion, it was impossible for the commission proposed by the CWM to visit the BKP before July 1959. The delegation that finally made the visit consisted of A.A. Sitompul (HKBP), Dana Telambanua (BNKP) and Gerhard O. Reitz (LWF). Upon arrival on Pulau Tello they were heartily welcomed by Pandita Kana Wa’ambo and other leaders of the BKP. Some BKP leaders desired to affiliate with any one of the larger churches already recognised by the government (i.e. BNKP or HKBP), but other elements did not want to be incorporated into a much bigger organisation. They feared that they might not be able to maintain a certain degree of self-determination.

The option to affiliate with the HKBP was kept open for some time. The advantage of joining this Batak church was that the BKP would automatically become a member of the LWF, which was in accordance with its confessional
(Lutheran) status. Alternately, joining the BNKP had clear cultural advantages. The Batu Islands had much greater similarities in language and customary law to Nias than to the Bataklands. Furthermore, the Batu Islands had become part of the regency (kabupaten) of Nias since Indonesian independence. These cultural and political considerations eventually tipped the scales in favour of the BNKP.

The prospect of unification between BKP and BNKP was favourably discussed during the twenty-fourth Synod of the BNKP on 14–18 May 1959 in Teluk Dalam. Subsequently the annual Synod of the BKP, held in August 1959 on Pulau Tello, decided to unite. At the following meeting between the Synod Board of the BNKP and a delegation of the BKP in Gunungsitoli, it was agreed that the church on the Batu Islands should become a special church circuit (ressort istimewa) of the BNKP. The merger of the BKP with the BNKP was decided by the twenty-fifth Synod of the BNKP, on 3 June 1960 in Ombölata. The Batu Islands thus became the thirteenth church circuit of the BNKP.

It is remarkable that in the merger of the BKP with the BNKP the choice for unification was made on cultural rather than denominational grounds. While the Batunese congregations show distinctly Lutheran traits, especially in liturgical matters, the sense of communion is determined by ethno-cultural relations. Similar language and customary law, and especially family links between Nias and the Batu Islands, by far outweigh ecclesiastical tradition.

_The Mentawai Church_178

Mentawai archipelago (totalling 3,135 km²), located off the west coast of West Sumatra or Minangkabau, consists of a number of large and small islands. Four of the largest are Siberut, Sipora, Sikakap (North Pagai) and South Pagai. Although divided into several tribes that are ethnically of Malay-Polynesian background, the people have sufficient similarity of language, adat, and ethnic religion to be recognised as an ethnic group, called Mentawai. Their primal religion was _Sabulungan_ and centred on a belief in evil spirits. In the government administration since the colonial era, up to the year 2000, this archipelago was part of the Padang-Pariaman regency, in West Sumatra province. Therefore in previous times we may find many Muslim traders and government officers. Since 2001 this archipelago has been a separate regency and the regent (bupati) is a pastor of _Gereja Kristen Protestan Mentawai_ (GKPM, Mentawai Christian Protestant Church), Rev. Edison Saleleubaja.

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178 This sub-section is mainly based on ENI 1918-II: 706–711, s.v. “Mentawai-Eilanden”, and Herman Sihombing 1979:94–124.
Western traders or colonists had already visited this archipelago since the seventeenth century, but only in 1825 did the Dutch-Indies government register it as part of the West Sumatra province. In 1893, the first colonial officer was nominated. The RMG began its work in this archipelago in 1901 with the arrival of the missionary August Lett, who formerly worked in Bataklan and Nias. He settled at Nemnemleleu, Sikakap that up to the present remains the headquarters of the Mentawai church. The trigger for missionary work there was quite unique. Slightly before 1900 the director of the RMG in Barman received a letter together with a spear from the Dutch harbour-master of Padang, saying, “With this spear the Mentawaians had killed a crew member of a trading ship. All inhabitants of the islands are still heathen and savage. How long will it take until they hear the gospel?”

Lett worked with full energy and dedication, honoured and loved by most of the people of Mentawai, and many times was asked by the colonial officers to mediate. He also succeeded in building cooperation with the tribal chiefs such as Djago Mandi Samaloisa, who was later baptised, and appointed as demang (district head) by the colonial government. Unfortunately Lett was killed on 20 August 1909 while mediating in an impending war between Dutch troops and certain Mentawaians.179 His work was continued by the missionaries who followed as well as by a number of Batak ministers (pastors and teachers) sent by the Batak Mission.

During World War II this embryonic church of Mentawai, like the other churches, suffered very much, especially in leadership and pastoral ministry. After the internment of the German missionaries in 1940, followed by the Dutch ministers sent by BNZ and some Batak evangelist-pastors in 1942, only since 1945 this church was led by Mentawai pastors, among others Ph. Saleleubaja and Agustinus Samaloisa.

On 23 August 1951 this church was officially established and named Paamian Kristen Protestan Mentawai (PKPM, after 1968 as GKPM), with a bestuur (executive committee) led by Rev. Ph. Saleleubaja. This date was decided upon as the birthday of the church. Three months later PKPM signed an agreement of cooperation with HKBP. This agreement was followed up, among other things by the establishment of HKBP Mission Representative in 1954, to help PKPM. Since then the RMG also renewed its presence and help by sending a number of missionaries, physicians, nurses and engineers, to construct a hospital, polyclinics, schools and some other facilities to enhance the quality

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179 According to Sihombing 1979:96–97, there was a miscommunication that triggered the anger of the people on an island of Talu' Pulai. Lett addressed them by saying tatogaku le kam, meaning: “you are my children,” a phrase properly used only by the biological parents. Besides that, Lett’s appeal also contained some threatening words, that the people and their village would be demolished if they conducted a war against the Dutch colonial government.
of life of the people. Among the meaningful works of the RMG and HKBP in Mentawai, that were later maintained by the PKPM/GKPM, were the establishing of a number of elementary, secondary, girls’ and teacher training schools, as well as ecclesiastical trainings to provide evangelists and bijbel-vrouw.

One of the challenges faced by PKPM was the primal religion Sabulungan and the aggressive activities of Islamic propagation (dakwah). The Muslim activities intensified in 1945–1950 when Elieser, one of the native pastors, together with his extended family, embraced Islam. They enthusiastically approached the Sabulungan as well as the Christian communities and succeeded in getting around 500 converts in Siberut, followed by some hundreds in the other islands. The regional government of West Sumatra, understandably, supported this effort. But some of the new converts later returned to Sabulungan or to Christianity, because they found it difficult to learn Arab, and because pork is a customary meal for the Mentawai people.

To minimise the conflict between Christian and Muslim communities, and according to the policy of the government to end the so-called ‘heathenism,’ in 1953–1954 several Rapat Tiga Agama (Religious Tripartite Meetings) of Christian, Muslim and Sabulungan adherents were held. The Sabulungan community was appealed to (some of them felt they were being forced to) leave their ancestral religion and to freely choose either Christianity or Islam. By this policy, in 1955 there was formally no longer a Sabulungan community and the number of Christians as well as Muslims significantly increased.

The second challenge came from the Roman Catholic mission that intensified its activities since 1954. The missionaries made southern Siberut, particularly the town of Muara Siberut, their centre. In this town, and later extended to some other places, they built churches, schools and polyclinics and according to Herman Sihombing the locations are close to those provided by RMG/PKPM, offering a better quality accompanied by various gifts. It is little wonder then that after about ten years they gained around 2,250 followers from among a population of around 25,000, many of them coming from the Protestant or PKPM community.

Concerning the presence of the Roman Catholic mission, Tonino Caisutti relates that the Catholic Church had already paid attention to Mentawai since the 1910s as can be seen in the Liber Status Animarum, at the cathedral of Padang. In 1917 Capuchin Friar Donatus visited Mentawai and in 1937 another priest was here for some time. In November 1953 missionary Aurelio Canniszaro started a mission to Mentawai and visited some big islands. In 1954 Canniszaro settled at Pokai, northern Siberut, where there was no Christian yet. Later he moved to southern Siberut, where there were also not yet many

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180 Herman Sihombing 1979:121.
Christians. “The Protestant centres like Nemnemleleu, Pagai islands and Sipora were by a priori put aside by the Catholic mission that came to Mentawai just to proclaim the gospel to people who were not counted in the four big religions. It was the southern islands Mentawinese that took the initiative to call Xaverian priests…. The missionaries did not have the courage to refuse the repeated and urgent call”\(^{181}\)

At Christmas 1954 the first Catholic church building was already finished. Afterwards came some other pastors and nuns, accompanied by native Mentawai, among them Hermanus Saleleubaja. The membership statistics of 1980 were as follows: northern Siberut 4,347; and southern Siberut 6,988; total 11,335. The Catholic mission—like anywhere—was also doing cultural evangelism that is also called indigenisation, after a sufficient research on many good elements in the Mentawai culture.

Another challenge was presented since 1955 by the Bahai religion, a syncretistic religion originating from Iran with Baha’ullah as its prophet. Bahai tried to combine Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and some other religions. This religion, formally registered and recognised by the Indonesian government as one of the branches of Islam, focused on the Sabulungan. The leader in Mentawai was Muhadji Rachmatullah, accompanied by Astani in Padang; both of them were government-appointed physicians. In Siberut the Bahai succeeded in getting around 2,500 followers. Since this religion was led by a rich dynasty, the workers were remunerated properly and they had ample funds to spend in Mentawai. On the one hand the Bahai did many good things for the Sabulungan community in the remote and backward areas, more effectively than could be done by the Christian churches. On the other hand its syncretistic character became a serious challenge for the churches that also strove to win the Sabulungan.

In 1968 the PKPM changed its name to Gereja Kristen Protestan Mentawai (GKPM), which was inaugurated as an autonomous and self-reliant church. Oppressed from the Muslim side and having rivalry with the Catholic mission and church, GKPM grew steadfastly and embraced around 75% of the population with around 25,000 members. Like the many other churches, GKPM also experienced an internal conflict and at a certain time was divided by two leaders: M. Tatubeket and A.P. Saleleubaja. Since 2002 the ephorus of GKPM has been Rev. P. Simanjuntak, a Batak (with a Mentawai mother) born in Mentawai as the son of a HKBP evangelist pastor.

Mentawai archipelago actually has very rich natural resources. The forest has a lot of precious woods such as aloe wood (Aquilaria malaccensis) that

produces expensive crystallised plant-sap. But many people—after getting much money—did not know how to use the money effectively. Later on certain government personnel and private companies conspired to take control on this area, leaving the indigenous people in poverty. There were a number of efforts attempted by some Christian organisations, like PGI and Universitas Kristen Indonesia (Indonesian Christian University) in Jakarta and some churches in North Sumatra as well as in other regions, to help the Mentawainese by providing training programmes in various fields and scholarship grants. The autonomous status of this new regency under the leadership of a pastor is expected to bring this region and GKPM to a better condition.

The Catholic diaspora of Sumatra

Sumatra is home to about 20% of the Indonesian population, but to only 15% of Indonesian Catholics. Like the island of Java, Sumatra is therefore under-represented in the Catholic community. Moreover, the Catholics in the island are geographically and ethnically very divided, as is clear from the statistics covering the six dioceses, for the year 2000.\(^\text{182}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diocese</th>
<th>Number of Catholics</th>
<th>% of total population</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medan</td>
<td>469,498</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>Batak, besides Chinese and some other settlers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibolga</td>
<td>187,801</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>Nias and Bataks, besides Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Padang</td>
<td>66,370</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>Chinese, migrants from other regions of Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palembang</td>
<td>74,233</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>Chinese, migrants from other regions of Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanjungkarang</td>
<td>82,695</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>Javanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pangkalpinang</td>
<td>28,034</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>Mostly Chinese, also migrants from other regions of Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>908,631</td>
<td>1.96% out of 46,184,313</td>
<td>Four ethnic groups: Batak, Chinese, Javanese, Niasans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These diverse groups have their own history, cultural and ecclesiastical identity. In the areas with the highest number of Catholics, the Protestant mission had harvested first. In the most populous province of Medan (North Sumatra)

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\(^{182}\) We follow the official figures from the Vatican in the website www.Catholic-hierarchy.org. See also Suryadinata 2003:115 for the census of 2000. The figures in Rosariyanto 2000:168 are slightly different, but there are no substantial changes there.
the census of 2000 counted 3.6 million Christians on a population of 11.6 million. This makes 20.1%. Of these more than 3.1 million were Protestant. Overall Catholics are only 10–15% of the Christians in this region (against one third for the whole of Indonesia). Below we can only give some highlights of a diverse history.

_Tsen On Njie (Zeng Aner) and his Chinese Catholic congregation in Bangka, 1830–1871_

In the mid-nineteenth century the island of Bangka counted about 30,000 inhabitants. 9,000 of them were Chinese coolies working on temporary contracts in the tin mines. These figures rose to 43,700 Chinese (of a total population of 115,000, the rest being Muslim Malays) in 1900. Not all Chinese worked in the mines. Some were traders, a few married Malay women after they finished the period of working in the mines and became farmers, often planting pepper. The 1849 statistics mentions 28 Muslims among the _per- anakan_ or Chinese born in the Indies from these mixed marriages. A quite exceptional figure among these Chinese of Bangka was a medical doctor, _Tsen On Njie_ (also written as Ngie; in the newer spelling Zeng Aner).\(^\text{183}\) He was born in mainland China, baptised in Penang, 1827, and settled in Sungaiselan, Bangka, in 1830. With statues, prayer books, rosaries and other religious items he installed a kind of a Catholic chapel in his house and gathered people to join for praying the rosary and similar devotions. He remained in contact with French priests of the _Missions Étrangères de Paris_. The priest J.M. Benzie wrote early 1846 from Singapore to the parish in Batavia that he had baptised some ten Catholics from Bangka:

Their leader was here during the last few days and is now back in Bangka, after receiving the sacrament of Confirmation, which I am entitled to celebrate. He beseeched me to come to Bangka and baptise his whole family and about fifteen other persons, who were instructed by him in the Christian faith, and to bless a small chapel, which he had built. He is pretty rich and very pious. I have placed one of his sons, whom I baptised here, at our ecclesiastical college in Penang. He is very promising.\(^\text{184}\)

In 1848, after the troublesome period of Grooff’s dismissal, a Catholic European who worked in Bangka sent a message about this chapel to the parish house of Batavia and in July–August 1849 the young priest Adamus Claessens (born

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\(^\text{183}\) Heidhues 1992:164.

\(^\text{184}\) Letter published by Kleijntjens 1932:6–7. Benzie has a reference to the problems of Bishop Jacobus Grooff and therefore we may suppose that this letter is from the period shortly after Grooff left Batavia on 3 February 1846.
1818, in the colony since 13 February 1848) visited Bangka. He was warmly welcomed by a small flock of Catholics, and baptised eleven people. One of his Chinese guides in the island, who suggested to other candidates that they should throw away all heathen images and inscriptions, was beaten and pushed into a ditch by Chinese who wanted to defend their cultural and religious tradition. The incident was reported to the Resident F. van Olden and entered the general report of the colony (Koloniaal Verslag) of that year. This false start in Bangka was another setback for the leaders of the Catholic mission who had a vivid memory of the problems in the mid-1840s when Bishop J. Grooff and three priests were sent back to Europe and finally no priest was left in the whole colony, due to a conflict with the colonial government. Therefore a second visit of Claessens only took place in 1851. From 1853–1867 there was a resident priest in Sungaiselan, Jan Langenhoff who had learned some Chinese in Penang before starting work in Bangka. It was the first Catholic mission post for non-European Catholics in the new missionary initiative of the nineteenth century. Tsen On Njie gladly received the priest, was later formally appointed a member of the parish council, and with new fervour continued to seek new converts.

The flock remained small. Statistics for 1867 mention 379 baptised, of which 268 were men. This also indicated the status of the congregation: the majority were men who stayed only for a few years and then returned to China. It was a company of poor people with low status, both in their country of origin and in the Indies. Langenhoff returned in 1867 to Europe. In 1871, shortly before his successor arrived (the Jesuit J. de Vries), Tsen On Njie had died. No new charismatic and spirited leader for the Chinese flock of Bangka emerged and the station became, until 1876, the centre for pastoral visits in the region between West Kalimantan and East Sumatra. There had been some dreams around 1860 of Bangka becoming the centre of the Catholic mission in Western Indonesia, as Larantuka was for Eastern Indonesia, but this was never fulfilled. The number of baptised Chinese remained small and always unstable because of people going back to China.

In 1911 the station was included in the Capuchin mission of Sumatra. In 1924 it was entrusted to a new religious order, the Sacred Hearts Fathers (SSCC) who came accompanied by extensive personnel, making it the most clerical mission in the 1930s. In 1939 there were 484 European and 853 Chinese Catholics in the Prefecture of Pangkalpinang (among them about 200 ex-miners who stayed in a home for the aged). These 1,337 Catholics were served by 21 priests (i.e. one priest for 64 faithful), 17 lay brothers and 23 sisters. The Catholic schools had to compete with the THHK schools of the Confucian Chinese movement that had much support among the Chinese community. Among the priests was the first Chinese diocesan priest for the whole of Indonesia. Jan Boen Thiam Kiat (born in 1908, in the 1960s renamed Mario John Bunyanto). He
had attended the mission school where he converted. He was baptised at the age of 14 and received private Latin classes between 1927 and 1929. Thereafter he went for the study of theology to Penang and later to Hongkong. He was ordained a priest in 1935 in Pangkalpinang. He was a modest and liberal priest, known for his generosity to the poor. He served the diocese until his death 31 May 1982.185

*From a Chinese mission to an Indonesian Catholic diaspora in Bangka, Belitung, Riau Islands*

In the 1950s and later the Catholic mission in Bangka and related islands became more and more Indonesian. Migrants from Java and Batakland became teachers at the schools; many Catholics from Flores sought a better future in the relatively prosperous province with its mining projects, and from the 1970s on in Batam, the booming industrial territory just south of Singapore. The first indigenous bishop was the Sumbanese SVD priest Hilarius Moa Nurak (1987). In 1987 the Dutch Sacred Hearts Fathers worked with ten members in the diocese that had 17,000 baptised. Most of the SSCC priests were already over 60 years old. At that time the SSCC had only one Indonesian member. Since 1987 the process of *Indonesianisasi* or transfer of responsibility to Indonesian personnel took place. But it was mostly people from other regions who filled the gaps. In 2000, out of 30 diocesan priests that had at some time been active in the diocese of Pangkalpinang only three had been born in the region. The SSCC had by that time 31 members, most of them born in the island of Flores and still in education for the priesthood. The process of *Indonesianisasi* had a tragic start in October 1966 when a first group of four Indonesian Budia Mulia brothers drowned at sea on their way from Java to Bangka, ready to begin with their first assignments.

The *Indonesianisasi* was not always a joyful undertaking. The Apostolic Vicar of Pangkalpinang since 1951, Gabriel van der Westen (bishop from 1961 until his retirement in 1979), had in his diocese two orders of sisters: one Dutch group, arriving from Amsterdam in 1925, and one Indonesian group established in 1937 as KKS, *Kongregasi Suster-suster Dina Keluarga Suci* or Humble Sisters of the Holy Family. Van der Westen, a quite stubborn, silent man, lacking diplomacy and tact, nicknamed William the Silent, provided ample facilities to the Indonesian sisters (they could work in the best schools, received money for houses and education) and neglected the Dutch group, some 21 in 1970. The Dutch group became quite frustrated and one after the other returned to Europe until the last had left in 1980.186

A quite peculiar group of Catholics here are the refugees from Vietnam (many of Chinese descent) who arrived in boats from the 1970s. These people needed first of all assistance with food, health care, communication with families, and housing. Two of the nine priests of the MEP, Missions Étrangères de Paris, who had to leave Vietnam in 1975 and sought new work in Indonesia, are working in the island of Bangka or in the Anambas and Natuna Islands, where most of the 50,000 refugees were relocated.

There were two European missionaries in this region with special gifts. Lay brother and carpenter Jan Heuts developed as a healer, mostly for Chinese people, and changed his name in Yanuar Husada, because he was born on 17 January 1938 in the Netherlands, but also because the word *husada* means medicine in Sanskrit and Old-Javanese. The priest Rolf Reichenbach (1930–2003) was quite famous among Chinese Catholic charismatic circles, because of his combination of fervent preaching with an enthusiastic practice of healing.

**Chinese Catholics in Sumatra**

With the exception of some large and quite spectacular Christian communities in Sumatra (especially in Batakland and Nias), it is a fragmented picture that we have to draw about Christianity in this island of great variations. This must be said even more about the Catholic minorities who also were late arrivals in these Christian majority regions.

From the early twentieth century on there were somewhat more prominent Catholic Chinese expressions in various parts of the island. These were not always highly appreciated by the clergy. The true missionaries who arrived here in 1911, the Capuchin Friars, hoped first of all for a breakthrough in Batak mission, the great prize. That was impossible until the later 1930s and even then they only received the crumbs that fell from the table. In the 1910s Dutch language schools were opened. The missionaries hoped to work among indigenous people, but it turned out that they had some Europeans and even more Chinese in their schools until the mid-1930s.

Padang was until the late 1930s the most important city of Sumatra. It was the centre for the army and the bureaucracy, quite different from Medan, the town of the planters. In 1834–1835 there was for some time a French priest in Padang, J. Candahl who received no permit to stay longer.\(^{187}\) From 1837 on there was a continuing succession of resident priests who later also served the army in Aceh. They paid much attention to the established Chinese community of the town. Different from the Bangka and Deli-Medan Chinese, most of

them were *Peranakan*, offspring of Chinese men and Indonesian women, for several generations living in this town. Because of the impossibility of making converts among the native population of Minangkabau, the Catholics built in Padang a great compound with a church, many schools and dormitories, convents for sisters and brothers. It was sometimes nicknamed the ‘Vatican of the Indies.’ In Padang alone there were, in the mid-1930s, 40 Dutch sisters, most of them working in the schools, serving some 2,400 pupils. Besides, there were 18 lay brothers in several schools and three priests for a community of 1,629 European and 1,799 mostly Chinese Catholics in Padang.\(^{188}\) There was some growth in the number of converts, but certainly nothing spectacular. The Chinese gave priority to good education. Only in the 1960s was there a somewhat stronger increase in the converts for Christianity among them.

Besides education as the major instrument of contact with candidates for Catholicism, in two major towns hospitals were founded. *Karitas* in Palembang and *Elisabeth* in Medan are still among the large institutions of these towns, established in the 1920s but enlarged again and again since then. Smaller clinics, houses for lepers, and orphanages were established in many other places, many in the 1970s when funds for development aid started. In Medan and Palembang modest Catholic Universities were opened somewhat later: in 1987 in Medan the *Universitas Santo Thomas Sumatra Utara*, and in 1992 the technical college *Sekolah Tinggi Teknik Katolik Musi* in Palembang. Padang, that was the most prominent town of Sumatra until the 1920s, did not develop as a Catholic centre after the seat of the bishop was moved to Medan in 1939. Although these medical and educational facilities were not first of all for the Chinese, it developed in the cities of Palembang and Medan more or less in that direction.

The Chinese of the plantation area of Deli and of the town of Medan were recent arrivals. In the plantations evangelisation was impossible. The great harbour town of Bagan Siapi-api had in the later 1930s a Catholic Chinese community of some 550. They were served by one of the Dutch missionaries who had studied Chinese in Ipoh (Malacca) and later in China itself.

*Planned versus spontaneous Catholic beginnings in the highlands of Sumatra: 1860–1940*

A small-scale race between Islam and Christianity, as well as between Catholics and Protestants, took place in the Pasemah highlands between Bengkulu and Palembang. In the early 1880s the resident of Bengkulu, Du Cloux, confirmed

\(^{188}\) *Koloniaal Missie Tijdschrift* 1935:171–174 in an article by Andreas (Jucundus) Hoogerhoud. Further data from *Jaarboek 1940.*
to several Jesuit priests that this region was nearly totally Muslim, but that still some nomad tribes had resisted the attraction of a world religion. Thereupon Bishop Claessens asked permission for missionary action. However, at that time a Protestant missionary, A. Festersen had settled in the town of Bengkulu and applied for a permit to work in these same regions. This was rejected with the argument that the last pagans recently had converted to Islam. Festersen made a journey to the inland area of Pasemah and concluded that at least some 37,000 pagans were to be converted, both in the region close to Bengkulu and in the Pasemah highlands. Festersen himself was infected with tuberculosis and died on 31 January 1886 in Bengkulu. Thereupon Bishop Claessens again asked for a permit to start a Catholic missionary action. The experienced Jesuit priest, J. van Meurs, made a first visit to the region in early 1887. On 11 April 1887 Governor General Otto van Rees decided that no permit for proper missionary work could be given, but only for socio-linguistic explorations. In September 1887, on his way to his new destination of Tanjung Sakti in the foothills of the Pasemah Highlands, Van Meurs met, in Bengkulu, the new Protestant missionary J.C. Kersten, also on his way to Tanjung Sakti! The case ended with a gentlemen's agreement between the missionaries. Kersten returned in April 1888 to the town of Bengkulu and later to the Batu islands (see above the section on Batu islands). He sold his belongings to the Catholic missionary.

The selection of Tanjung Sakti as a missionary post was a failure. There were some nomads roaming around in the region, but they were not inclined to stay for a longer time in one place. But after so many deliberations, up to the highest level, the prestige of the mission required that the effort be continued. As usual a school was opened, but the sedentary population were all Muslims and the nomad Kubu tribe was very difficult to be reached. A few hundred people converted, but the missionaries were realistic enough to know that it was for the sake of food and clothes.189 A quite curious debate about this Kubu tribe took place among government officials and anthropologists after Controleur C.J. van Dongen had published an article in a learned journal about the Kubu, stating that they were the exception: a people without any religion, ritual or myth. In fact the article was only written after a five-day visit, without a proper knowledge of the language and the missionaries, convinced of the Urmonotheismus theory of Wilhelm Schmidt, took up a good opportunity to fight these ideas.190

Around 1900 there were 340 baptised in the station of Tanjung Sakti. The number rose several times but shrunk also. In the period 1912–1914 the

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189 Vriens no date:411–422.
190 References in Steenbrink 2007:352.
nationalist movement of Sarekat Islam gained quite strong membership in this region of coffee planters who had good relations with the financial and political world outside. The Malay Muslim chiefs protested against the mission, because Catholics wanted to be exempt from the authority of village chiefs and their levies. There was, on 26 August 1913, a first case of desecration of the host, including the theft of a precious ciborium. In mid-1914 hundreds of Catholics told the priest that they had converted to Islam. The government of Batavia sent a scholar to make an inquiry. The result was that the 450 remaining Catholics would have a village of their own, under a Catholic chief.

Catholic mission made heavy investment in this isolated region. A secondary school was established, as well as a small hospital. This attracted some more people. The better educated, however, left the region after they finished school and the place remained an odd pocket of a few Catholics in a prosperous region of Muslim mountain dwellers. The parish of Tanjung Sakti counted in 2001 not more than 437 Catholics, about the same number as a century earlier.

Between 1889 and 1891 the Italian adventurer and explorer Elias Modigliani travelled through Batakland. As a guide he took the traditional healer and ritualist Datu Somalaing. The latter felt discarded by the success of the Protestant mission and eagerly learned from the Catholic Modigliani. He constructed a new syncretic religion, later called Parmalim, where Jesus and the Virgin Mary were very important, but also Raja Rum, here not to be understood as the Ruler of Istanbul as in Malay-Muslim discourse, but as the Pope of Rome. Somalaing developed Parmalim into a full religion with hymns, rituals, including “a cult of Mary with trade in articles of devotion, processions and prayers.”

Also a number of Islamic elements crept into this ‘reinvented tradition’ that gave much honour to the heroic Batak priest-king Si Singamangaradja XII. In 1896 Somalaing was arrested and sent into exile in Kalimantan because of the anti-colonial elements in his cult. When in 1935 a first Capuchin Friar, Sybrandus van Rossum, settled in Balige, he was approached by an old man, Ompu ni Hobul Tambunan, village head of nearby Lumbun Pea. Tambunan still cherished the memory of the instruction of Datu Somalaing that they should not accept Protestantism but wait for a messenger from the Raja Rum. The priest visited the village of Lumbun Pea and all thirty families decided to accept Catholicism. This was the only case were on a larger scale Parmalim adherents accepted Catholicism. On the whole they were a community of traditional people who rejected colonialism, modernisation and most of all the symbols of renewal, including the school, modern clothes and the paying of taxes.

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There was another bottom-up start of Catholicism in Batakland. Carolus Wenneker was in 1878–1884 the parish priest of Medan. He served mainly Europeans and some Tamil converts from the plantation of the family De Guigné (who sought their coolies in the French colony of Pondicherry in India). Wenneker had much interest in Batak culture and language and studied some Toba Batak. While serving the parish of Batavia (1894–1916) Wenneker sought contact with Batak people. One Protestant from Lumban Soit, Elias Pandiangan, was a close contact for him. His two sons attended the Catholic school and had embraced Catholicism. In 1912, returning to Batakland, they paid a first visit to the Apostolic Prefect of Padang. From that time on, Pandiangan and others started to ask the Catholics to enter Batakland as well. Mission leader Liberatus Cluts in Padang was very suspicious and took it only as request for money. When the German Protestant mission was in financial trouble after World War I, more requests were sent to the new Apostolic Prefect in Padang, Leonardus Brans. Some of these requests of the mid-1920s were signed by 40 or even 50 heads of families. They were probably more or less orchestrated by the missionaries to annihilate the effect of the ban on double mission. Only in 1930 was permission given by the colonial government for a permanent post in Sibolga, at the western fringe of the Batak area. In 1933 this was extended to the whole residency of Tapanuli, while in 1939 permission was given to start Catholic missionary work in Nias. This was the end of the ban on double mission that no longer was valid in independent Indonesia.

For the Catholics the actual work among the Batak did not start in the highlands, where the Protestant mission had been so successful since the 1860s. It began in the city of Medan with Batak students at the prestigious HIS, the Dutch-language school for native people. For this small flock of Batak converts a separate Batak parish was founded in the late 1920s, apart from the existing parishes for Europeans, for Chinese and for Tamils. In fact, Catholicism in Medan had the character of 

apartheid, due to the ethnic and linguistic differences of the four communities. In 1929 a priest could settle permanently in Pematangsiantar, the eastern entrance to Batakland proper, and only from the mid 1930s on did Catholics open posts in the Batak highlands, taking the reverse road of the Protestants who had worked very long in the highlands before moving towards the lowlands and the coast.

The expansion of Catholicism was not a clerical affair, like the work for Europeans and Chinese. In 1939 there were 201 sisters and 32 lay brothers in the Apostolic Vicariate of Padang. One of the sisters was Chinese; all the others were Dutch who worked in Dutch-language schools or in hospitals and smaller clinics. Lay catechists and teachers extended the Catholic Batak mission. Besides taking profit from conflicts among the Batak, the Catholics also could make progress through their lenient attitude towards traditional culture and religion. Capuchin Friar Benjamin Dijkstra arrived in 1939 in

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Samosir. He is still remembered as the one who consented to dancing for the dead. He suggested that this dancing at funerals was not to appease the spirit of the deceased who could hurt the living. Instead, dancing could be performed in order to glorify the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit and to thank God for the departed. In 1939 the Capuchin Friars already counted nine major stations in the Batak highlands, with 172 outer stations, half of them with basic elementary schools. In 2001 there were 677,373 Catholics in the dioceses of Medan and Sibolga (including Nias). This is only about 10–15% of the membership of the great Lutheran HKBP and other Protestant churches in the region: as in so many regions of Indonesia, the Catholics came late, under protest of the Protestants, remained the smaller church, but managed to consolidate and grow, becoming one of the various churches of a fragmented Christianity. Only on the island of Samosir (in the centre of the great Lake Toba), Catholics could finally become a majority. But also in this region there were a variety of Protestant churches that gave the area a varied character.

From the 1930s on, the Catholic presence in Batakland was structured through a rather small number of parishes that served about 10–25 outer stations. Only in the main parish was a priest permanently settled. The outer stations were served by teachers with a priest travelling around and visiting outer stations once every two, three weeks or even only once a month. This system continued until the last decades of the twentieth century. In the overview of the developments in Batakland during the second half of the twentieth century, the 7,000 teachers (more than half working in non-Catholic schools) are mentioned in detail and with prominence besides the 141 priests serving the 43 parishes of the archdiocese of Medan. During the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and later, Indonesian Catholic bishops have repeatedly asked the Vatican for permission to ordain married and experienced men to the priesthood, because of the shortage of priests for not so densely populated regions. This was not only relevant for Papua, Flores and Kalimantan, but also for Batakland. The bishops argued that in these regions Catholicism looked like Protestantism, because on most Sundays no Eucharist could be celebrated, but only a service with hymns, sermon, and prayers. Sacraments are only sparsely administered in these regions. The effort of the bishops was not successful.

Not much can be said about ecumenical relations in this region. In the first half of the twentieth century it was still the pre-Vatican theological exclusion (seeing only Catholics as true Christians) and strong competition that made positive relations non-existent. In the second half of the century not much has

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194 Steenbrink 1984.
improved. Relations were more or less frozen, with the common celebration of Christmas as a good exception. The several schisms within Protestant churches have strengthened the image of the Catholic Church as a rather solid, stable and reliable religious community. This has on a small scale led to a modest increase of members and, again, the accusation of sheep stealing.

Within the Catholic community there was never the strong debate on secularisation and preparation for a modern society that we have seen in the HKBP, with Soritua Nababan as the great stimulator. Instead, it is striking to see in the Catholic discourse a constant attention for Batakness. Already in 1939 an altar was constructed in gorga-Batak architectural style by an artist from Porsea, as part of the Indonesian contribution to an international missionary exhibition in Rome (it is now in the church of Balige. See chapter twenty). Catholics have continued to use the Batak architectural style for religious buildings and to use Batak symbols in liturgy. Also in liturgical clothes the ulos of Batak traditional ritual is used with reverence as a kind of pallium, worn by the priest over the chasuble on festive occasions. The sacred mantra of horas is also used as some kind of Amen or Alleluia to evoke the spirit of a joyful, truly Batak revered atmosphere.

One of the strong exponents of this Catholic Batakness is Bishop Dr. Anicetus Bongsu Antonius Sinaga. Born on 25 September 1941 in the Silbolga region as son of a Batak ritual specialist or datu, the 17 years old high school student Bongsu Sinaga became a Catholic and received the name Antonius. He continued his studies for priesthood as a member of the Capuchin Order (where he uses the name of Anicetus) and wrote a dissertation in Louvain on the idea of the High God in Toba-Batak traditional thinking.\(^{195}\) On 6 January 1981 he was ordained as Bishop of Sibolga and in 2004 Sinaga moved to the seat of Medan, as coadjutor, apparently to become the Archbishop of this most important Catholic diocese of Sumatra.

**A Catholic Javanese mission in South Sumatra**

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the colonial government had started a programme of migration of landless Javanese to the under-populated southern region of Sumatra, Lampung. As was the case with the Protestant Javanese, so there was also a small number of Catholics among the migrants. In the case of the Protestants there was some direct connection between the church in Central Java and the migrants in South Sumatra. In the Catholic mission, it was not the Jesuits of Central Java, but the SCJ order (Sacred Heart

\(^{195}\) A. Sinaga 1981.
of Jesus), serving in Palembang and the vast region of South Sumatra, (including Bengkulu and Lampung), who took responsibility for the migrants. Is it by pure chance of history that the first initiatives on both sides were taken in the early 1930s, the period of the deepest economic recession of the period? In 1932 the Central Javanese congregation of Purworejo selected an evangelist (guru injil) who would start work among the Sumatran Protestants. He actually arrived only in June 1936. At that moment already some Javanese Protestants had turned towards the Catholics who had started work among the migrants in 1932 from the central town of Pringsewu in Lampung.\(^{196}\)

Besides the landless Javanese who migrated to Lampung, there was another quite exceptional project for Catholic Eurasians who were struck by the economic recession of World War I. In 1918 the religiously neutral organisation for Eurasians, IEV (Indo-Europese Veneening) had started a settlement close to Tanjung Karang, called De Giesting (now Gisting). About half of its 300 people were Catholics. In 1936 the SCJ missionaries opened a post there for a permanent priest. But the whole undertaking was a failure. Most Eurasians came from urban areas and had no idea about agriculture. They could not earn even the income of the native farmers. An SCJ brother started a boarding school that concentrated on agricultural skills, but by that time the project was already considered a failure.

From the mid-1930s on the parish priest of Pringsewu tried to be present at the harbour of Telukbetung for the arrival of new Javanese settlers. Once he saw a large group of 12 families out of one village, preceded by their village head who came off the boat in procession style, following a boy of nine years old bearing a cross. They addressed the priest, identified from his cassock. This man asked rather optimistically, “Shall we conquer Sumatra through the Javanese?”\(^{197}\) This did not occur and among the Javanese settlers themselves there was only very limited success. As was the case with the Javanese Protestants, there was a strong ethnic separation in Lampung, where Javanese soon became an important language and where the Javanese migrants formed a separate group. The new settlers in South Sumatra remained orientated towards their region of origin. In this way the Javanese Catholics of the Lampung region had closer relations to the Catholics of Central Java than to the Chinese Catholics of Metro, Palembang, or other cities of Sumatra. The same can be said of the Catholic Batak, many of whom migrated to Java where they formed their own Batak networks. Therefore priests had to learn Chinese for Bagan Siapi-api, Nias and Batak in these regions, while the priests

\(^{197}\) Hermelink 1939:25.
in Lampung had to learn Javanese until standard Indonesian became more common in the 1960s.

The increase from 1,500 Lampung Catholics in the 1930s to the more than 82,000 in 2000 runs more or less parallel to the rise of Catholicism, or rather Christianity in general, in Central Java. Here also the most spectacular growth took place in the second half of the 1960s: from 13,000 in 1965 to 42,100 in 1971. The figure for the Protestant Javanese Church GKSBS in Lampung is rather similar to these Catholic figures: 41,500 in 1987.\(^{198}\)

This was an area of poor farmers who often were attracted to the Communist Party that was forbidden in 1966.\(^{199}\) It was, however, not only farmers who came to this under-populated area. Quite a few Catholic teachers also arrived and their schools became the cradle of new Catholic communities.\(^{200}\) As in Central Java, so also in Lampung two miraculous places of devotion grew out of caves, designed after the model of the Lourdes cave: the Goa Maria Padang Bulan (near Pringsewu) and the Goa Maria Fajar Mataram, near Bandar Lampung have become national centres of pilgrimage for Catholics.

A quite interesting, more or less historical, novel is the book Saman by the Catholic author Ayu Utami. This is, besides some books by Y.B. Mangunwijaya, the only novel about the life of a modern Catholic priest in Indonesia. It depicts the struggle of an Indonesian priest in South Sumatra, fighting against the power of the military and corrupt government officials who cooperate with landowners, the rulers of the big plantations. The priest, Wisanggeni, decides to leave parish work in support of the united action of workers in the plantation that are threatened with dismissal:

I can go back to the parish where the ladies will take care of me with much attention, as long as I preach for them and administer the sacraments. I can give retreats and recollections for the Catholic schools in the big city, where the pupils like me very much and send me letters full of poetry. But, this plantation is the life of the farmers. Whatever I do, I will never be able the carry the same burden as they do.\(^{201}\)

This short quotation reflects the post-Vatican II dynamics, debates and conflicts that were also part of the Catholic community in Sumatra, although it was, in this minority and diaspora situation, much less acute than in Flores (see chapter seven). The fictitious priest Wisanggeni became one of the fighters for the rights of petty farmers against the large-scale business of the great plantations. He left the priesthood and had to flee his country. In this process priests who stayed within the traditional structure, supported him. The 1970s

\(^{198}\) Hoogerwerf 1996:179.

\(^{199}\) Muskens 1974-IIIA:220.


and 1980s were the period of the extra flow of money for development aid, but also the period of intensified political choices against or in favour of the military government of Soeharto's New Order. The small Catholic community, consisting of a quite diverse population, did not make one choice only, but within the overall structure various streams could live together. This can be considered as on of the stronger points of this religious community.

Simon Rae (Batakland until 1900 and Karoland); Karel Steenbrink (Catholics); Jan S. Aritonang (Batakland 1900–2005, and some other parts with contributions from Richard Daulay, E. Hoogerwerf and Uwe Hummel)

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