CHAPTER FIVE

THE HIGHPOINT OF DEVELOPMENT: 1883-1914

The year 1883 brought a new chapter in the Batakmission's educational endeavour because in that year it began to take steps to fundamentally reform its system of education and at the same time to consolidate its view of education as an integral part of all its activities. We call the reforming of the educational system and the consolidating of its educational view a qualitative development stimulated by supporting factors both from within and beyond the RMG/Batakmission. This paralleled its quantitative development, i.e. the increase in numbers and kinds of schools. All of these brought the Batakmission's educational effort to its zenith.

In this chapter we shall not be discussing all the chronological details of the Batakmission's development of its educational efforts during this period; we shall only investigate the prominent themes or issues which characterized this period. But before we study those steps towards improvement begun in 1883, we shall relate several factors contributing to reform and offer descriptions of the quantitative development in numbers and kinds of schools. Only then shall we discuss the consolidation of the Batakmission's theological, missiological, pedagogical/methodological views. The consolidation of those views formed the basis for reforming the educational system and for educating the teachers; both actions will involve the reformation of the basic educational system.

The expansion of the Batakmission's working area, one of the factors contributing to reform, will be discussed later. This means that many places will show characteristics of the pioneering period discussed in Chapter IV. Therefore, many of the phenomena and general problems which appeared then will reappear during this second period of the Batakmission's ministry. However, we are not going to go into those details again. It will be sufficient for our purposes to make reference to them in just outline fashion as this seems advisable.

A. Factors Contributing to Reform

1. Expansion of the Working Area

Until 1880, the Batakmission was able to work only in the area of Sipirok-Angkola, Silindung, Sibolga and surroundings, plus the drier plateau
region around Humbang (between Silindung and Toba), because that was the limit of the permit given by the Dutch Indies government. Not until 1881 did the Batakmission receive official permission to work in the Toba area (Balige and surroundings), even though several missionaries had visited the shores of Lake Toba several years before and had begun pioneering ministries there. Entrance into the Toba area was very important politically because it meant that the missionaries had penetrated to the center of traditional Batak community’s political power symbolized by the authority of Si Singamangaraja XII. The Batakmission’s success in opening evangelistic stations and posts in this area facilitated the expansion of its working area in to regions to the west, east and north.

During the first half of the decade of the 1880s, the Toba area continued to be shaken by a series of battles between the forces of Si Singamangaraja and the Dutch colonial government so that the situation was far from being secure and quiet. Even so, during that same decade, a relatively short period of time, the Batakmission succeeded in winning the hearts of the local communities; this meant it was able to found its stations and branches in strategic locations having a denser population. Furthermore, Nommensen resided in the same area after being appointed as the Ephorus by the RMG the same year as the establishment of “the Church Order of 1881”.

In a similar pattern to the one evident in other RMG places of work and one also in harmony with the principle of the unity between congregation and school, the opening of each station and evangelistic post was accompanied by the opening of a school as well. Although here and there (especially among Si Singamangaraja’s supporters) suspicion remained that the Batakmission sided with the colonial government, nevertheless there was a considerable number of residents who gave an enthusiastic welcome to the opening of schools. In fact, most schools were begun at the people’s request. Even parents along with their children were among those who became students. Apparently, they had heard about the benefits which the missionary schools had brought to their brothers in Sipirok-Angkola and Silindung, and wished to participate in them as well. Interest from the Batak community for learning and knowledge continued to increase from year to year. This resulted in many problems for the Batakmission later because its motivation and objectives for schooling not only differed from those of the Bataks themselves, they were in actual conflict with them (see Chapter VI).

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1 At first Nommensen resided in Laguboti (1885-1888) and after that he remained in Sigumpar until his death in 1918; JB 1888, p. 42, and P. Sibarani, 100 Taon HKBP Laguboti [100 Years of the HKBP in Laguboti] (1984), pp. 75ff.
2 Commenting on this issue, Situmorang (Toba Na Sae, p. 28) concluded that “the twin swells of learning and knowledge continued in an unbroken line during the 1880-1930 period, which in retrospect may be called the “take-off decades” of the cultural moderniz-