CHAPTER TEN

HOW CHRISTIANITY OBTAINED A CENTRAL POSITION
IN MINAHASA CULTURE AND SOCIETY

In 2000 only four out of the (then) 32 provinces of Indonesia had a majority of Christians. These provinces were all located in the eastern regions of the vast archipelago. In number of total population they are somewhat comparable: the smallest being the Moluccas (1.1 million), middle ranking were North Sulawesi and Papua (2 and 2.2 million respectively) and the largest number was for East Nusa Tenggara (total population of 3.8 million). The highest percentage of Christians was in East Nusa Tenggara with 87.67%. It was followed by Papua with 75.51%. Third was North Sulawesi with 69.27%. Finally, a meagre majority was established for the Moluccas (not including the North Moluccas) with 50.19%. The province of North Sulawesi is the subject of this chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Christians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Nusa Tenggara</td>
<td>3,823,154</td>
<td>87.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papua</td>
<td>2,213,831</td>
<td>75.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Sulawesi</td>
<td>2,000,871</td>
<td>69.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maluku</td>
<td>1,163,122</td>
<td>50.19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four provinces of Indonesia with a majority of Christians

For many people Minahasa (the largest part of North Sulawesi) and Christianity are inseparable, similar to the Muslim identity of Aceh and Minangkabau. There is probably no other region in Indonesia where so many people emphasise the close relationship between local or ethnic identity and Christianity. This strong identity was not yet present in the first period of encounter with Christianity (1570s–1820s) when only a few coastal villages, partly inhabited by traders and former slaves from outside regions, fostered the new religion. The Christian character of Minahasa was the result of the drastic changes in social, economic and religious life during the period of the first inland missionary activities by the German NZG workers J.G. Schwarz and J.F. Riedel (1831 until the early 1860s). This was the period when the government introduced the compulsory cultivation of coffee (and some other products like cacao), starting in 1822 and

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1 Suryadinata 2003:3 and 115–117.
continuing longer than in other regions of the archipelago, until 1899. This chapter will describe the various and very different episodes of Christianity in Minahasa and adjacent islands after the period 1570–1820 that has been described in chapters three and five.

Minahasa is a volcanic region. Distances are about 30–50 km from the east to the west coast and 120 km from the southwest to the northeast. Most of its territory is fertile and provides a healthy climate. The region is at three sides surrounded by the sea while in the south the rough and sparsely populated highlands of Bolaang Mongondow constitute a natural boundary. Besides West Sumatra, it was the only region in the outer islands where the Cultuurstelsel was implemented in the nineteenth century. This system of compulsory agriculture functioned through the mediation of the 27 chiefs of the Minahasa who ruled over what the Dutch called districts. They were liable for the quality and quantity of the delivered goods, but they also earned themselves much money and prestige from this economic system. In the absence of any traditional central power, the visit of Governor General G. van der Capellen in 1824 had increased the sense of belonging to the colonial framework. “Minahasan chiefs had by then become properly aware of how much their fate had come to be dependent on the Dutch colonialism.”

This was strengthened by the participation of 1,400 soldiers from Minahasa (out of a total population of some 80,000 in the late 1820s) in the last phase of the Java War (1825–1830). The great reliability of the Minahasan population to the Dutch is also shown by the creation of the Kampung Jawa in Tondano, where Javanese Muslims, taken captive during the Java war, were sent in exile. Besides Muslim settlements in the border regions with Bolaang Mongondow, this settlement was one of the few Muslim centres of the region.

The effective rule carried out by the colonial power since the early 1820s expressed itself also in the extinction of headhunting (the last raid took place somewhere between the 1860s and the 1890s, depending on the written or oral sources used). Another drastic change in social life was the disappearance of the huge traditional long-houses where people could cherish the memory of founding ancestors, living together with many related families. The population was often, under compulsion, re-established in small houses for one nuclear family, under arguments of hygiene and safety. This also destroyed the religious-emotional relationship to the ancestors and discouraged the continuation of traditional rituals. Already in 1905 two German anthropologists, Paul and Fritz Sarasin, criticised the modern society:

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2 Schouten 1998:76.